



1.4.06.

From the Library of
Professor Samuel Miller
in Memory of
Judge Samuel Miller Breckinridge
Presented by
Samuel Miller Breckinridge Long
to the Library of
Princeton Theological Seminary

SCC
1053
v. 3







S E R M O N S

Sam: Mills

ON VARIOUS

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By JOHN YOUNG, D. D.
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN HAWICK.

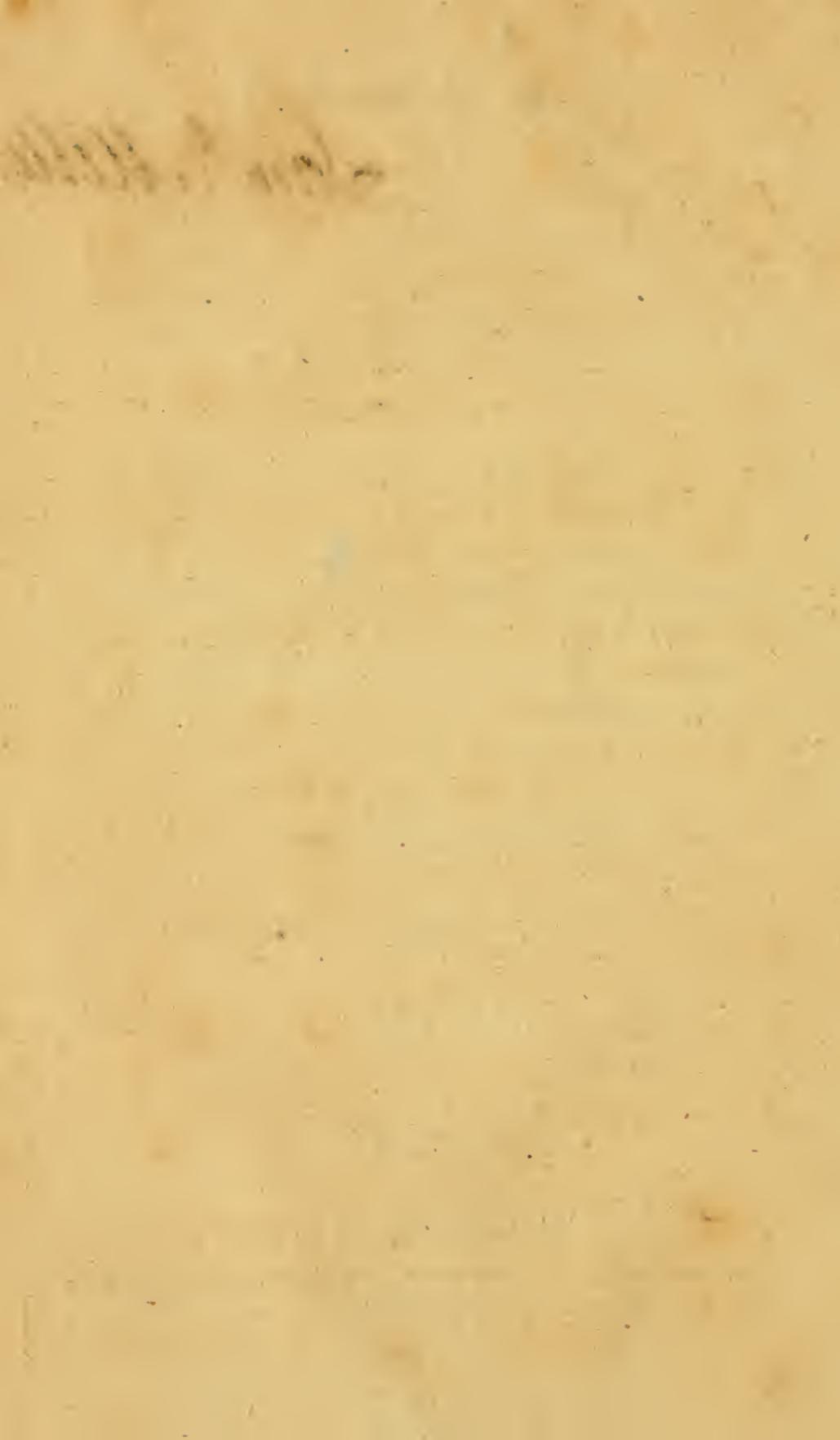
THE SECOND EDITION.

V O L. III.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY GEORGE CAW; AND SOLD BY
BELL & BRADFUTE, J. FAIRBAIRN, AND J. WATSON & CO. EDINBURGH;
D. NIVEN, AND BRASH & REID, GLASGOW; AND
VERNOR & HOOD, LONDON.

M.DCC.XCVII.



CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

The duty and advantage of maintaining unanimity and peace in the church. A Synod Sermon. - Page 1

2 Cor. xiii. 11. *Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

SERMON II.

The character and work of gospel ministers. An Ordination Sermon. - 57

2 Cor. v. 20. *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God.*

SERMON III.

Stedfastness in the cause of Christ recommended. A Synod Sermon. - 107

Rev. iii. 11. *Behold I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, let no man take thy crown.*

SERMON IV.

The Saving Arm of God a sure defence to the Church of Christ, against all her enemies. - 153

Isa. xxvi. 1. *We have a strong city: Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.*

SERMON V.

An abundant blessing promised to the church upon her spiritual provision. An Admission Sermon. - 191

Psal. cxxxii. 15. *I will abundantly bless her provision.*

SERMON VI.

The foundation of the Christian's hope. - 223

Rom. viii. 32. *He that spared not his own Son; but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?*

S E R M O N VII.

The blast of the gospel trumpet, the leading mean of gathering sinners to Christ. - page 261

Isa. xxvii. 13. In that day the great trumpet shall be blown; and they shall come that were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt; and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

S E R M O N VIII.

The mourners in Zion characterized. - 296

Isa. lxi. 3. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

S E R M O N IX.

The mourners in Zion comforted. - 324

From the same text.

S E R M O N X.

God's great design in mens salvation. - 351

Eph. ii. 7. That in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.

S E R M O N XI.

The manner in which Christians are saved. - 382

Eph. ii. 8. By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

S E R M O N XII.

The influence of faith upon the Christian's walk. 415

2 Cor. v. 7. We walk by faith, not by sight.

S E R M O N XIII.

Holiness inculcated on gospel principles. - 459

2 Cor. vii. 1. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

S E R M O N I.

The Duty and Advantage of Maintaining Unanimity and Peace in the Church.

Preached at the opening of the GENERAL ASSOCIATE SYNOD,
at EDINBURGH, the third day of May 1791.

2 COR. XIII. II.

—BE OF ONE MIND, LIVE IN PEACE; AND THE GOD
OF LOVE AND PEACE SHALL BE WITH YOU.

IT is just five and twenty years since a Sermon was delivered in this place on an occasion similar to this, by a servant of Christ, who, I trust, is now entered into the joy of his Lord, tending to recommend peace and harmony in the Church, from that text, Eph. iv. 3. *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.* The situation of matters in this Congregation, as well as some other things then depending before the Synod, made such a discourse, at that time, seasonable. And it is known to all who wish well to the Secession Testimony,—alas! it is too well known to those who wish for its burial, that there are circumstances among us at present, which loudly call

our attention to the same subject. Indulge me, therefore with a candid hearing, while I endeavour to point out the duty incumbent on us all in this respect; and the encouragement that we have to the diligent performance of that duty, as set before us by the Spirit of God, in these words, *Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

In the beginning of this chapter, the Apostle threatens, that as he expected soon to be at Corinth, he would exercise his apostolic authority, in correcting, with all due severity, such members of that church as continued obstinate in their adherence to those corruptions that had been introduced among them soon after he left that place. He points out to them their most proper course to prevent the disagreeable necessity of such severity; and then concludes the epistle, in his usual manner, with proper salutations.

This verse is the first of those in which the conclusion of the epistle is contained: And in it we find three things deserving notice.

I. A parting valediction: *Finally, brethren, farewell.* He addresses them as brethren, to intimate, that though he bore the authority of an apostle of Christ, yet, in the exercise of it, he was still influenced by a tender love to them, as members of the same spiritual family, and heirs of the same everlasting inheritance with himself. They who are honoured to bear office in the church, are not *lords over God's heritage, but should be ensamples to the flock.* And in all their administrations they ought not only to be influenced by a principle of love and faithfulness to Christ, their Master, but also by a principle of fraternal affection to the souls committed to their charge.

The word which we render *farewell*, signifies properly to rejoice; and therefore some have considered it as expressive of an exhortation to the habitual exercise of that spiritual gladness, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which is, at the same time, the duty and the privilege of all that are partakers of the heavenly calling. But, as in this sense it coincides with another exhortation, in a following part of the verse, and as the word is used, both by sacred and profane writers, as a form of salutation, it appears that our translators have given its true meaning. “To conclude, my brethren, “it is my sincere desire and prayer to God, that you “may still enjoy all spiritual and temporal prosperity, “that every ground of sanctified joy and gladness may “remain and abound with you, and that you, being “duly sensible of the kindness of God towards you, “may continually rejoice and be glad in him.”

II. A parting advice, and it consists of four parts.

1. He advises them to *be perfect*. Every careful observer of the present state of human nature, may readily see, as the Psalmist David did, *an end of all perfection* here. But, though absolute perfection cannot be attained in this life, godly sincerity, which is evangelical perfection, may. And in the continual exercise of it, every genuine Christian shall, in a little, be made absolutely *perfect in every good work, to do God's will*. Some observe that the original word here used, properly signifies the reduction of a dislocated bone. One of the leading abuses that had prevailed in the Corinthian church was, that there had been animosities and divisions among them*. By reason of these, the mystical body of Christ, in that place, was

A 2

become

* 1 Cor. xi. 18.

become like the natural body of a man whose bones are out of joint. Such a man must not only feel much pain, but must also be incapable to move himself, or perform his ordinary functions. In like manner, when factions and divisions prevail in a church, it occasions much uneasiness and sorrow to every genuine member; and it renders it impossible for that church, or for those of her members who take part in such divisions, to be duly active in promoting the work of God, or to make progress, as they ought, in pressing *towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. To remedy this in the Church at Corinth, the Apostle here exhorts them to *be replaced*; to return to their due subordination to, and connection with one another; that each in his own place, and the whole body together, might be active and lively in promoting the work of God among them. Or, as himself elsewhere expresseth it, that “the whole body fitly joined together in Christ the Head, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, might make increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love †.”

2. He exhorts to *be of good comfort*. All Christians, as we have been often warned, may expect to be subject to various trials, afflictions, and sufferings, in the present world: “through manifold tribulations *must we enter into the kingdom*.” Of these trials and afflictions, the Corinthians, doubtless, had their share. But under them all the apostle exhorts them to *be of good comfort*. Such an exhortation would have been unreasonable and absurd, if Paul had not previously set before these Corinthians, in common with other Christians,

* Eph. iv, 16.

tians, such grounds of comfort as were sufficient to balance all their afflictions, and to fill their souls with holy joy and consolation under them all.—Christianity teaches to renounce the pleasures of sin: it exposes to the hatred of the world, to persecutions for righteousness' sake, and to a variety of hardships, that strangers to Christ find a way to escape. But, on the other hand, the scriptures lay open to us an inexhaustible source of joy and consolation, in the love of God, in the merits of Christ, in that infinite fulness which the Father has made to dwell in him. We may find such comfort in the light of God's countenance here, and in the happy prospect of the full and immediate enjoyment of him hereafter, as may not only support us under our heaviest sufferings, but even enable us to *rejoice* under them "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." The Christian, therefore, who gives himself up to discouragement or down-casting on any account, dishonours his Christian profession, belies the hope that is in him, and brings up an evil report upon the land of promise.

Of the particulars above mentioned we mean to say nothing further; intending only to discourse a little on those that follow, to the end of the verse.

3. He exhorts to unanimity; *be of one mind*. While the minds of men are influenced with different and opposite views, there must be a corresponding difference and opposition in their practices. But the word of God, which is the sole and unerring rule, both of faith and practice, is one: and every thing that is agreeable to it must also be agreeable to every other thing that is so. No two things that are opposite to one another, can both be agreeable to that rule. And

therefore, however difficult it may be, in this estate of imperfection, for all Christians to have the same views, it must be a duty ; unless Christians have a liberty to think, and consequently to act in opposition to the word of God.

4. To a peaceable disposition and demeanor ; *live in peace*. In all society, peace is one of the most valuable blessings ; and the want of it is a source of the greatest misery. Where it is wanting, the nearest relatives, and they who are most intimately connected, become mutual plagues to one another. Of such value is peace in the church of Christ, that all her members are called to pray for it ; and Christ himself, when about to leave our world bequeaths it, as a most valuable legacy to his disciples. Surely then, all who would not be found despising his bequest, or striving to deprive themselves and their brethren of what their dying Lord has disposed to them, will be careful and assiduous to cultivate and maintain it. Not only does Paul here exhort the Corinthians to be at peace among themselves, but in general, to live in peace with all men, carefully avoiding every thing that tended to mar the peace of society, or to engender strife or contention of any kind.

III. We have a powerful motive to compliance with these exhortations,—suggested in the end of the verse ; where, more particularly, we may observe, 1. The character here given of that God with whom Christians have to do, he is called *the God of love* ; and the God of peace. 2. What these Corinthians might expect from this God of love and peace, in the way of complying with these exhortations ; his gracious presence with them : He *will be with you*. Some read
this

this part of the verse as a prayer or an expression of the apostle's desire; "may the God of love and peace be with you." But the greatest part of interpreters, more agreeably to the original, understand it as a promise. As the apostle wrote by divine inspiration, it is to be viewed not as promise of Paul, but of God himself. And in it the faithfulness of the God of truth, as well as of love and peace, is engaged to the Corinthians, that in this way he would be with them.

This epistle was not written solely for the use of the church in Corinth, in the days of the apostles; but for the use of all churches, and of all Christians, in all places of the world, to the end of time. These words, therefore, as well as all the rest that was written by divine inspiration of old time, were written for our learning; and serve to inform all into whose hands they come, that

As it is the indispensable duty of all who profess the Christian name to be of one mind, and live in peace; so in the performance of this duty, we may be animated by a firm assurance, that, in this way, the God of love and peace will be with us.

ALL that is further proposed on the subject at present, is only some brief explication of the several particulars observed in the division of the words; and then some short application.

The first thing taken notice of in the words, was the exhortation to be of one mind. Now this unanimity seems to include the two things following.

1. An unity in the judgments of professed Christians, concerning those truths tht are revealed in the word

of God, and exhibited to us as the objects of a divine faith. Many are the exhortations in scripture, to “stand fast in the faith, *to* be established in the faith, *and even to* contend earnestly for it.” But it is the same faith, in which all Christians should stand fast, and for which they should all contend. It cannot be required, nor allowed, that one person contend for one thing, and another for the opposite, as matter of faith. But in order to that joint contending for the faith which is incumbent upon all Christians, it is necessary that there be first a joint receiving and acknowledgement of the truth: And we must all be of one judgement concerning it.

By the solemn vows entered into in the days of our fathers, we are bound to promote and maintain ‘the nearest conjunction and uniformity, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of God,’ in the churches of Britain and Ireland: And upon the footing of a testimony for that uniformity is this Synod constituted.—But to many in this generation, this covenanted uniformity, and our testimony for it, are matter of ridicule. They tell us that such an uniformity is a thing impossible in this state of imperfection. While men have different interests, passions, prejudices, and modes of thinking, they must have different and opposite views. They even tell us that such an uniformity, if practicable, would be hurtful; and that we ‘may contemplate the hand of Providence in the different ways of thinking among men. These,’ say they ‘call forth the exercise of reason, and lead to the discovery of truth.’

It must be allowed, that a perfect uniformity, or oneness of judgment among Christians, is very difficult

to be attained, or preserv'd. Yea, we may further allow, that in a sinning and imperfect state, it is impossible. But the same thing may be said of every thing that is our duty. Every true Christian is sensible that there is imperfection and sin in every piece of service to God that he endeavours to perform: Yet he knows that the law of God requires the utmost perfection of every duty, and forbids the least degree of every sin. Shall we then give up with the service of God altogether, and desist from all attempts to do any duty, because we find it impossible to do it perfectly? Nay, the promise of God secures that his grace shall be sufficient for us now, to enable us to do every duty acceptably, and that he will gradually "make us perfect in every good work, to do his will." Let us, therefore, like Paul, "forgetting those things that are behind, reach forth towards the things that are before, and press towards the mark," even the mark of absolute perfection, "for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus:" assured, that in this way we shall at length "be perfect, as our Father who is in heaven is perfect." Thus should the church in general conduct herself, as well as every particular Christian; and that in respect of this uniformity as well as in every other respect. In this and various other texts in scripture, such an uniformity is required. In other passages of scripture, the same thing is promised of God to the church: See to this purpose the words of the Spirit of God by the prophet Jeremiah*, "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them." And by Zephaniah †, "Then will I
" turn

* Jer. xxxii. 39.

† Zeph. iii. 9.

“ turn to the people a pure language, that they may
 “ all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him
 “ with one consent.” Depending upon these, and such
 like promises, it is the duty of the whole church, and
 of every individual member according to his place in
 the body, jointly to strive, that the whole catholic
 church, and every particular church, and every one
 who is a member of any church, may be brought for-
 ward to a perfect uniformity, in believing and professing
 all revealed truth, and consequently in a regular obser-
 vation of all things, whatsoever Christ hath command-
 ed.

It will also be readily granted, that the over-ruling
 providence of God may so manage, and often has so
 managed the differences of opinion that take place a-
 mong Christians;—yea, and all the different sects and
 parties, into which the Christian church is divided, as
 that they may issue in the discovery of truth. We
 know that some of the greatest injuries that ever were
 done to the doctrine of free grace, which is the cardi-
 nal doctrine of the Christian religion, have issued, even
 in our own day, in as clear a display of that doctrine
 as ever any church enjoyed since the days of the apos-
 tles: For it is the glory of God to beat down the bul-
 warks of Satan’s kingdom, by those very weapons
 which are wielded in their defence; and to promote
 the kingdom of his dear Son by means of those ef-
 forts which enemies use to overturn it. Thus the pro-
 pagation of errors in the church, hath often issued in
 the further discovery and establishment of the truth,
 and the grossest sins into which Christians are permit-
 ted to fall, are made, at least, the occasion of their fur-
 ther progress and establishment in holiness. But will
 any

any person venture to say, that sin ought to be tolerated in the church, as a mean of promoting holiness; or that error should be propagated, in order to the discovery of truth? Just as absurd it is to say that differences in opinion about divine things are to be allowed for such a purpose. Indeed it is saying the same thing; for every opinion about matters of faith, that is different from the truth, is error; and to allow such opinions is to tolerate error in the church.

We would not be mistaken, as if we meant that those differences of judgment, or even the grossest errors in divinity, were to be suppressed by the force of penal laws, or of corporal punishments. Nay, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds*." The suppression of heresy belongs not to the civil magistrate, unless it be such heresy as is prejudicial to civil society; but to the judicatories of the church. And it is to be accomplished only by a regular exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which Christ hath committed into their hands. Exhibiting the truth with clearness and precision to all, admonishing and reproofing those that are in danger of falling from their own steadfastness, and casting out of her communion those who are obstinate; these are the means, and the only means, by which this unanimity or uniformity in the church is to be maintained.

Neither can it be expected that all the members of every church should be perfectly of one mind, on every subject.—Christians are not prohibited the cultivation of natural knowledge; and on all subjects of that kind each may have his own judgment, without disturbing

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

disturbing the peace of the church. Besides the things which Christ himself has commanded, and which all members of the church should observe with all strictness, there are matters of expedience and common order, which he has left to be regulated according to the rules of prudence and decency, and the usage of other societies. A difference in judgment in relation to these things is no transgression of this exhortation. Nor is it transgressed when different persons have different views of the sense of a particular passage of scripture, while both are agreeable to the analogy of faith. In these, and perhaps in various other respects, Christians may be of different minds, without prejudice to the communion of saints; but with regard to all matters of faith and duty, as fixed and determined by the word of divine revelation, it is of absolute necessity to the peace and edification of the church, that we all be of one mind.

2. This unanimity includes an uniform and constant attention, in all the members of the church, to one and the same thing, as the end of all their endeavours. This, some critics observe, is the most proper meaning of the original word here used. Literally it may be rendered, "mind the same thing." As the spectators at a public show have all their eyes intent upon the same object; or, as an attentive audience, during the delivery of a public discourse, have all their minds attentive to the same thing, each following the speaker as he goes along; so all Christians, being members of one body, partakers of one hope, and endued with one Spirit, should have their minds habitually intent upon one and the same object. The men of the world, like Martha, are "cumbered about many things; but

“but one thing is needful:” That one thing every genuine Christian has *chosen*, as the “good portion, that shall not be taken from *him*.” God himself is the portion, Christian, whom your soul has chosen. On him your meditations are sweet; to him your thoughts return, as to the only rest of your soul, as soon as you find yourself at liberty to follow the habitual bent of your inclination. And his glory you have in your eye, as the ultimate end of all your actions. This, at least, ought to be your manner; and as far as it is not so, you act inconsistently with your own character, as well as with the exhortation in the text.

There is a generation in these *perilous times*, who deny that the glory of God is the ultimate end of his own actions, or should be the ultimate end of ours. ‘It is unworthy,’ they say, ‘of a Being of infinite perfection, and of infinite beneficence, to take so much pains to make a vain display of his own perfections to his creatures, while he can derive no advantage from the opinion they have of him. It is therefore much more consonant to his nature, and gives a much more noble idea of him, to consider the happiness of his creatures as the ultimate end of what he does.’ But how long will vain men pretend to be wiser, in the matters of God, than God himself; or to be better judges than he is of what corresponds to his nature? The scriptures every where assure us, that his own glory is the ultimate end of all his works. It was his end in the work of creation; for “he made all things for himself:” It was not the happiness of his creatures absolutely considered, for he made “even the wicked for the day of evil*.” It is the end of the works of Providence

* Prov. xvi. 4.

Providence, and to that end they are nobly adapted; for “the heavens declare the glory of the Lord, and “the firmament sheweth his handy-work*.” It is the great end of the work of redemption; for this is the end for which “we have obtained an inheritance,” as well as for which we were “predestinated according to “his purpose,—that we should be to the praise of his “glory †.” To say that this end is unworthy of God, after God himself has assured us that this is his end, is to say that God acts inconsistently with himself; which is the same thing as to say that God is not.

As this is God’s great end in all that he does; so it should be our ultimate end in all that we do, whether of a religious or of a secular nature. “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to “the glory of God ‡.” We can add nothing to his essential glory: himself can add nothing to it; for he cannot be more glorious than he is, and was from all eternity. But our continual aim should be, above all things, to maintain in ourselves, and, to the utmost of our power, to promote in others, a sense of his infinite glory. This is to glorify him declaratively. And in this sense, not being “our own, but bought with a price,” we lie under indispensable obligations to “glorify God “in our bodies and in our spirits which are his.”

Subordinate to the glory of God, there are various ends, which we ought to keep always in view: And among these we may lawfully attend to our own happiness. Though God has not made the happiness of his creatures his ultimate end, in preference to his own glory; yet he has an eye to the happiness of rational creatures in his dealings with them; and has made such

* Psal. xix. 1. † Eph. i. 11, 12. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 31.

such provision for it, that a happiness adapted to its nature is secured to every individual that has not forfeited it by sinning against him. Even for sinners of mankind he has made such provision, that every one of them is restored to happiness as soon as they are restored to a capacity of being active in promoting his glory. And so intimately has he connected his own glory and his people's happiness, that every thing which promotes the one of these ends, and in proportion as it does so, promotes the other also: and every thing that is prejudicial to the one must be proportionably hurtful to the other. In attending, therefore, to the glory of God, we may and ought to mind also our own happiness. And not only our eternal happiness, but even our temporal interest, as far as it is consistent with the other. But we sadly mistake, if our own interest, spiritual or temporal, is preferred to the glory of God; or if we think to promote our own happiness by any thing that tends to his dishonour.

Neither ought any Christian to consider his own interest as the highest of those ends that he should have in view, in subordination to the glory of God. We are all but *members in particular*, of that mystical body, whereof the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head: And surely the interest of no particular member should be preferred to that of the whole body. Hence David resolved to "set Jerusalem above his chiefest joy." And every real friend of Christ will be of the same disposition. The public interests of the church are those of her King and Head: and the man who prefers himself to the public body, is guilty of minding "his own things," to the neglect of the "things that are Jesus Christ's." Though it is little that persons in a private

vate station can do for the public interests of Christ and the church, every one has something in his power; and that little should not be wanting. Two mites from one that has no more to contribute, are more acceptable than the large contributions of those who have abundance. And they who can do little for the public interest, may have it in their power to do much against it; so that in guarding against all that may be hurtful to it, lies a great part of what most Christians can do for it. And surely he is no Christian who willingly allows himself in hurting it.

Nor is it enough that every Christian keep those ends in view, and that in their proper subordination; it is further necessary, that there should be an uniting of the endeavours of all to promote them. Not only is every individual to strive, but each must strive in his own place, and all must *strive together* for promoting them. A regular army, when every one keeps his rank, and all press upon the enemy with united force, can do much more than a confused rabble, consisting of the same number of men, fighting without order or subordination. It is therefore of importance, that “they that fear the Lord *should* speak often one to another,” consulting how they may most effectually exert themselves for the common interest. Every one should be helpful to his neighbour, in what is incumbent upon him, without neglecting what is required of himself. And as all Christians are partakers of one and the same Spirit, the whole church, like a body animated by one soul, ought to concur in the most strenuous and unremitting endeavours to promote the same end.

While we all keep the same end in view, it is likewise

wife of importance, that we all pay due attention to the means by which it may be most effectually promoted; and that we all employ the same means, or means corresponding with one another, for that purpose. As the word of God has pointed out the end to which all our joint endeavours should be directed; so by it we must also be regulated in the choice of the means we make use of. It is vain to expect that God's glory will be promoted, or the good of his church, or of any individual member,—by any thing which the law of God has prohibited. And even in the use of lawful means, unless there is a proper concert among those who use them, and a proper connection between the means themselves, that every one employs, one may easily destroy what another builds up; instead of furthering, we may mutually impede one another; and the work of God in the church may be managed with as much confusion,—and therefore with as little success, as the building of Babel. So necessary is it that we all mind the same thing.

THE other exhortation in the text is, to *live in peace*. The word, in the original, is one. Some render it *be peaceable*, others, with more emphasis, *be peaceful*. Peace is one of those things of which every man has some knowledge, but which no man can easily define. It is a blessing so valuable, that, in scripture, it is often put for all happiness. *Go in peace*, is go and be happy: And when our Lord salutes his disciples in these words, *Peace be unto you*; he thereby expresses a wish that all happiness of every kind might attend them. When the value of this blessing is considered, and the misery arising from the want of it, one would think, no rational mind would need any other incitement to

cultivate it. Yet, alas! how little of it is enjoyed in this world; and, how few are really disposed to seek after it! Sin having marred our peace with God, and put the weapons of rebellion against him into our hands,—has likewise set every man at variance with his neighbour,—and the character of Ishmael is justly applicable to every man in a natural estate; “his hand “is against every man, and every man’s hand against “him.” Ever since nations and kingdoms had a being, nation has been “rising up against nation, and “kingdom against kingdom.” For the veriest trifles are streams of human blood every day shed; and perhaps there never was a time, since the days of Nimrod, when all the world was at peace.

The Jews, at the time of Christ’s appearance among them, were looking for a Messiah that should subdue all their enemies, free them from the yoke of the Romans, and at length give them victory and peace on every side. Even his disciples were never perfectly weaned from this vain hope, till the down-pouring of the Spirit after his ascension; though himself had warned them in these remarkable words, “Think not “that I am come to send peace on the earth, I came “not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to “set a man at variance against his father, and the “daughter against the mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man’s foes “shall be they of his own household*.” He surely does not mean that this was the direct end, or effect of his coming; but it was a consequence that, through the corruption of men, natively followed upon it. No sooner is a person made a genuine disciple of Christ, than the world begins to hate him. Even the ties of natural relation are not sufficient to restrain them from shewing

* Mat. x. 34,—36.

shewing their enmity, to the marring of his peace. And most of the followers of Christ have reason to complain, as David, “ My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace; but when I speak they are for war *.”

This is not our heaviest complaint. With the hatred of the world Christians may lay their account. To have war with the seed of the serpent is no disappointment. But, alas! how seldom are they at peace among themselves? The church had not been five years planted at Corinth, when there began to be contentions, factions, and divisions among them. There were wars and fightings among the Christians of the dispersion when the Apostle James wrote his epistle to them. And in every place where the gospel of peace is published, Satan, taking advantage of the remainders of corruption in the members of the church, endeavours to sow the seeds of animosity and strife. He has too much success often, even with the most eminent servants of Christ. Between Paul and Barnabas the contention rose once so high, and that about a very frivolous matter, that they were obliged to part. And among ourselves, in the Secession Church, what fatal instances have there been, what fatal instances are still subsisting, of the mournful prevalence of a contentious and divisive spirit? In many cases Christians have acted as if the sending of a sword on the earth had been the real end and design of Christ's coming; and as if the followers of Christ were to be distinguished from all others, by the keenness of their resentments, and the peculiar degree of bitterness with which they manage their opposition to one another.

Yet the Master whom we profess to serve is really

“ the Prince of Peace.” His God and Father is the *God of peace*. His covenant is a *covenant of peace*. His gospel is *the gospel of peace*. By his blood he has laid the foundation of our peace with God. He has “ abolished the enmity” that was between Jews and Gentiles, “ for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.” His peace he bequeathed to his followers, when about to leave them, as was hinted above. By his own mouth he commanded them to “ be at peace among themselves.” His Spirit, by the mouth of an inspired apostle, enjoins us to “ follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*.” Peace, or a disposition to cultivate peace is enumerated among the fruits of the Spirit; as “ hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, and murders,” which are all opposite to this disposition, are among the “ works of the flesh †.” A blessing is pronounced upon the peace-makers ‡. For the peace of Jerusalem we are called to pray ¶, and if we are real members of the church, we will readily obey that call; but surely we mock God by such a prayer, if we allow ourselves in any thing that tends to disturb her peace. If all this is true, and who can deny any part of it; whence comes it that wars and fightings, animosities, factions, and divisions are so frequent in the church? Surely “ these things come not of him that hath called us.” They are the sad and mournful effects of those “ lusts that war in our members.” Many, alas! obtain membership in the visible church, who are strangers to the Spirit of peace; and Satan, the spirit that still worketh in them, employs them as firebrands, to kindle the flames of discord in the church.

The

* Heb. xii. 14. † Gal. v. 20,—22. ‡ Mat. v. 9. ¶ Pf. cxxii. 6.

The best of Christians have still much corruption remaining in them; and, under its baneful influence, even they may act the part of incendiaries, and rob both themselves and their brethren of the valuable blessing of peace. And the same passions which instigate us to break the peace, prevent our knowing or believing that we do so. When contentions arise, each one lays the blame upon another, and pretends to be for peace, while his neighbour is for war; though every unconcerned spectator is convinced that both are to blame.

It is true that peace, even the peace of the church, may be bought too dear. We are commanded to "buy the truth and not to sell it*;" and if we sell it even for peace, we make a foolish bargain. But how often do we find truth in mens mouths,—when there is nothing in their hearts, as the ground of their contendings, but their own pride and rancour? How often do they pretend to plead only for truth, while it is plain to every impartial on-looker, that truth has nothing to do in the cause?—In following peace, we are also called to follow holiness; and if both cannot be attained, we may cheerfully give up with peace, that holiness may be preserved. The man who strives to maintain peace at the expence of holiness, acts in a very preposterous manner. He sets himself at war with God, that he may enjoy peace with men; and even that peace which is so obtained, being without any solid foundation, must needs be short-lived. Thus both truth and holiness should be maintained, even at the expence of peace; and when we are deprived of peace on account of our adherence to these, the breach of peace cannot be imputed to us, but to those that

* Prov. xxiii. 23.

endeavour to draw us aside from these. But, excepting these two, I know of nothing that we ought not to give up with, in order to maintain peace. The gratification of pride and humour should never be mentioned in comparison with it. I know how ready mens humours are to get into their conscience, or rather how ready men are to mistake humour for conscience. But when the book of conscience comes to be finally opened, as many things will be found written in that book, that we little dream of now; so, I am persuaded, it will be found that many things were never written there, which we now consider as occupying much room in it.—Our own personal interest should never be laid in the balance with the peace of the church. What the apostle says about going to law, may be applied to every other mode of contention or litigation, “Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded*?” Had Christ no meaning at all in that part of his memorable sermon upon the mount, “I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man sue thee at law to take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also †?” Whatever you lose, or give up, for the sake of peace, you may satisfy yourself with the answer that the prophet gave to the king of Judah in another case: “The Lord thy God is able to give thee much more than this ‡.” Our reputation, dear as it is to every generous mind, must not come in competition with the peace of the church. When Shemei loaded David with the bitterest reproaches, and even with horrid curses, he would not suffer justice to be executed up-

* 1 Cor. vi. 7. † Mat. v. 39, 40. ‡ 2 Chron. xxv. 9.

on the the traitor, left by that means fuel should be administered to the flames of discord already kindled in Israel; but cheerfully committed the vindication of his character to God, and said, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." Our personal safety, or even our life should not be esteemed too precious to be hazarded for the public peace. It is a common maxim, that the end of all war is peace. Upon this maxim, how many thousands are every day hazarding their lives, and losing them, to procure an honourable peace for their country? Is not the city of our God the Christian's country? And is there any reason why it should be less dear to us, than the particular spot of the earth where we were born, or the civil society there subsisting? How inexcusable then must they be who will not give up with their own opinion in matters of indifference or of mere expediency,—who will not yield to their brethren in the smallest matter, nor acquiesce in any measures of which themselves are not the authors, to preserve the peace of the church? Can the peace of God dwell in their hearts, who seem to take pleasure to dwell in a fire of contention, and in blowing up every spark, till they be in danger of raising a general conflagration in the kingdom of the Prince of peace?

' Since peace in the church of God is a matter of
' so much importance, by what means is it to be main-
' tained? Or what shall we do that we may comply
' with the exhortation in the text, and live in peace?'
—The question is of importance, and deserves a serious
answer. The foundation must be laid in peace with
God through Jesus Christ. Without this we can have
no solid peace with any creature; and least of all with
those who bear God's image. The enemies of God,
whatever

whatever their pretensions or appearances may be, will still be "hateful and hating one another." As a happy fruit of this, we must cultivate inward peace in our consciences. The man who is not at peace with himself, will easily find occasions of quarrelling with others, and of venting upon them that chagrin, of which himself is the proper object. We must study resignation to the will of God; the man who indulges himself in discontentment with his lot, often pours out upon those around him, that rancour which he dare not, in a direct manner, express against the providence of God. We must cultivate in our own minds, that love to one another, by which the disciples of Christ ought to be distinguished. The proverb is as true now as it was in Solomon's days, "Hatred stirreth up strife; but love covereth all sins*." Did we so love one another as to fulfil the law of Christ, Satan himself would find it beyond his power so mournfully to disturb our peace. We should carefully guard against all that may tend to mar the peace, or to sow the seeds of discord. Whatever step we have a mind to take, we should previously ask ourselves, not only whether it be lawful or not, but whether it be expedient: Whether it is like to give offence to any of our brethren, or be a bar to that concord which ought to subsist between them and us; and let us avoid giving offence, as we would escape the wo denounced against those by whom offences come. If we find, upon reflection, that we have given offence, let us never be ashamed to acknowledge it, and so to remove the stumbling-block that we had laid in our brother's way. "Confess your faults one to another," says the Spirit of God †, "and pray one for another, that ye
" may

* Prov. x. 12.

† James v. 16.

“ may be healed.” If we have been offended by any of our brethren, or if they have done any thing to mar the peace, let us cheerfully and readily forgive them; “ knowing that ourselves also are in the body.” I know how often it is pleaded, that we are only called to forgive an offending brother, when he returns and says, I repent. But, though his doing so should be an additional incitement to forgive him; yet I know no place of scripture that prohibits us to forgive him unless upon that condition. On the contrary, there are many, where forgiveness is absolutely inculcated, without any such limitation. We have known many instances, where peoples insisting upon such a condition has effectually prevented the restoration of peace. We have known other instances, where the not insisting upon that condition has afforded much inward peace upon reflection, as well as contributed much to outward peace. And I am very much mistaken, if such a thing is not warranted by an example that no Christian will dare to reject. When Peter had offended his Master in the most atrocious manner, by denying him, with oaths and curses, to his very face; did he wait for an acknowledgment from Peter, before he granted him forgiveness, or restored him to his former place in his love? Did he not, on the contrary, take the first opportunity, before he saw Peter’s face, to send him an intimation of peace and forgiveness, by the women who came to the sepulchre, “ Go tell his disciples and “ Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there “ shall ye see him, as he said unto you*.”—When, by any means, the seeds of contention have been sown, we ought to *leave it off, even before it be meddled with.* It will never be so easy to leave it off afterwards.

* Mark xvi. 7.

wards. Every difference is made wider by every step that is taken in the prosecution of it. And the restoration of peace, the longer it is delayed, becomes every day the more difficult. Yet neither this nor any other difficulty in the way ought to deter us from attempting it. However long dissensions have continued, or however high they have risen, every one, whether himself has been concerned in them or not, should account it his glory, as well as his duty, to contribute to their being taken up. "Blessed," says our Lord, "are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God *."

WE come now to the second part of the text, containing the motive by which the apostle would prevail with his Corinthians, and with us, to comply with the exhortations above explained: And,

Here it is proper, that we first say a few words concerning the character here given of God, as "the God of love, *and* the God of peace."

I. He is *the God of love*. We cannot now take time to speak of the nature of love in general, nor of the several species into which it is distinguished. Neither can we speak at large concerning the love of God. It shall suffice, at present, to observe, that

Love is a perfection so essential to the nature of God, that he cannot subsist without it. It is so essential to him, that though no other perfection were so, or tho', if we may so express it, the divine essence were wholly made up of love, he could not be more loving than he is. Hence the scriptures inform us, that "God is love †." Yet love in God is altogether different from what it is in us; so that it is but a very faint
idea

* Mat. v. 9.

† 1 John iv. 8.

idea that we can have of the love of God from what we feel in ourselves. Love in us is a passion, or affection of the mind: We are in some respect passive, as well as active, in the exercise of it; and we feel a kind of pain, as well as much pleasure in it. It cannot be so with God. He is infinitely above all passion. He can be subject to no painful feelings. His love, therefore, is nothing but himself loving, and enjoying an infinite delight in the outgoings of that perfection towards the objects of it.

The first and supreme object of the love of God is God himself. It necessarily must be so; for surely a Being of infinite wisdom, as well as infinite love, must love that most which is most worthy to be loved. And none can be so worthy as himself. All creatures, that are capable of love, love that most in the enjoyment of which they look for the greatest degree of happiness. All the happiness of the Divine nature is in himself; for as he is the fountain of all blessedness to the creatures, so is he infinitely blessed in himself, from eternity to eternity; and therefore he must be the supreme object of his own love. And among the creatures, that must always be most an object of his love, that is most like himself.

Though he is a God of love, he is likewise a God of justice and holiness. In proportion, therefore, as he loves his own likeness, he must hate what is contrary thereto. Hence we are told, that "his soul hates the wicked man, and the man of violence*." This being the case, all mankind are naturally the objects of his hatred: and none of us ever could have shared in his love but through Jesus Christ. He "being the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image

* Psalm xi. 5.

“mage of his person,” is also the natural object of his Father’s love. Hence he is introduced as saying concerning himself, “I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men*.” The wisdom of God has found out a method of viewing sinners of mankind in Christ, and so of extending his love on Christ’s account, to those who in themselves are the just objects of his hatred and abhorrence. I say on Christ’s account; for though the love of God was not, nor could be purchased by Christ for his people; yet it was equally impossible that ever it could terminate upon them otherwise than through him. Thus it was that even electing love fixed upon us from eternity; “according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world †.”

And now the love of God to the church, and to her particular members, bears a proportion, not to their degree of conformity to his image, nor to any excellency about them—but only to what Christ is, to the worthiness of him through whom it comes to terminate upon them. Were it only proportioned to what we are, it would always be changing as we change; and we would often be in danger of being wholly cut off from any share in it. But this can never be; because Christ can never cease to be worthy of his love. And therefore, though he may, and certainly will “visit our iniquities with rods, and our sins with chastisements;” yet we have no reason to be afraid of ever falling under his hatred; for he “will not take his love from him, nor suffer *his* faithfulness to fail.” Thus, with the greatest propriety, is God said to be,
not

* Prov. viii. 30, 31. † Eph. i. 9.

not only in himself, but also to the church and her members, in Christ, "the God of love."

2. He is *the God of peace*. The word Peace is used to signify a quiet and peaceable disposition of mind, as well as the fruit of this disposition appearing in the tranquillity and quietness of society. In this sense it may be attributed to God, with the same propriety as love.—Men, when at peace with those around them, are often strangers to peace within themselves. In Christians there is, as it were, the company of two armies; grace warring against corruption, and corruption against grace. A more dreadful war is often to be found in the minds of strangers to Christ; jarring and opposite lusts fighting against one another; the conscience maintaining an unsuccessful struggle against sin; and the whole man rising in arms against every motion towards that which is good. No such war can ever take place with God. Possessed of unchangeable blessedness in himself, he enjoys an eternal rest that nothing can disturb. With divine pleasure he contemplates every perfection of his own nature; and "the Lord Jehovah *continually* rejoiceth in all his works together." Equally disposed is he, (for we must speak of God in the language of men, however inadequate the ideas it conveys;) equally, I say, is he disposed to maintain peace with all his creatures. No war was ever begun on his part. Neither devils nor men had ever felt the weapons of his displeasure, if they had not first risen up in rebellion against him.

Such is his love to peace, that after mankind had revolted from him, and when it was easy for him to have crushed the whole family, he laid a plan for the restoration of peace, that is the great master-piece of infinite wisdom. So intent was he upon it, that though
nothing

nothing could purchase it but the blood of his own Son, even that infinite expence did not discourage him. "He spared not his own Son, but *freely* delivered him up for us all;" that through him we might have "peace with God, and access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." The eternal Son of God had the same love of peace as God the Father. With cheerfulness, therefore, he embraced the Father's proposal; and, when the fulness of the appointed time was come, actually "made peace by the blood of his cross." On this illustrious footing, he that "creates the fruit of the lips" comes, in a gospel dispensation, proclaiming "peace, peace to him that is afar off, and to them that are near." The great design of all divine revelation, and of most of those ordinances by which it is dispensed, is to prevail with sinners to accept, and take the benefit of that method of peace and reconciliation, which God has, in such a wonderful manner, provided: "And we" have the honour to be "ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God."

God is likewise the author of all the peace that subsists among men, between nation and nation, and between man and man.—Wars and rumours of wars come from hell, to perplex and destroy mankind; but it is God who turns "wars into peace to the ends of the earth, breaking the bow, cutting the spear, and burning the chariot in the fire."—We say not that the terms of peace, upon which the leaders of nations, or of contending parties agree, are all dictated by God; far from it. They often "take counsel, but not by *him*; and cover with a covering but not of his spirit, adding sin to sin." But even when the terms

of peace are dictated by the corruptions of men, the blessing of peace is conferred by the bountiful hand of God. As such we should receive, and be thankful for it. And would to God that the powers of this world would be careful how they throw away that which the hand of God has bestowed. As it is he that gives peace to nations, and other political societies; so, in a special manner, is he the Author of all the peace that the church at any time enjoys.—Our wars and fightings come of our own lusts; but he alone it is that can “bless his people with peace.” He has promised to do it: we are warranted to promise upon his head, and say, “Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us.” Let us earnestly and confidently ask it of him, even when our own endeavours, and those of our brethren, to obtain it are ineffectual: and let us ever beware of ascribing to him any of the mournful interruptions of it, or charging them upon him; “for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace in all the churches.”

As he is the God of peace, he is also, in a sense, the God of war; “the Lord of hosts is his name.” The armies of heaven and earth are subject to his will. When wars and confusions take place in the world, he over-rules them all to his own glory, and the good of his church. Even the armies of those heathen princes that have been the scourges of mankind, were always under his control; and he has often employed them, though they knew it not, both as the instruments of his just displeasure against a rebellious people, and as the instruments of his mercy and goodness to the church. “The Assyrian,” on the one hand, was “the rod of *his* anger: and the staff in their hand “was his indignation. He sent him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of *his* wrath
“ did

“ did he give him a charge *.” On the other hand, he “ held the right hand of Cyrus to subdue nations before him: he girded *him, though he* had not known him; that *he* might build *his city* and let *his captives* go free †.” The people of God are engaged in a constant warfare, “ against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, “ against spiritual wickednesses in high places.” In this warfare we may depend upon his assistance; and, though he may suffer us to be foiled on some occasions, he will be sure to make us “ conquerors, and “ more than conquerors” at the last.

But, though in this spiritual warfare we may depend upon him as the Lord of hosts; yet in our conduct towards one another, we ought still to have respect to his authority, as the God of love and peace. As these are essential perfections of his own nature, he stamps an image of these perfections upon every person whom he brings among the number of his people. He takes pleasure in these fruits of his Spirit about them. As he strictly commands us to love one another, and to live in peace; he graciously accepts, and takes pleasure in our endeavours to obey that command. He is justly provoked to anger by our animosities and contentions. But he graciously dwells with us, when our conduct towards one another proves us to be the genuine children of the God of love and peace. This leads us to

THE last thing observed in the text; namely, What Christians may expect from this God of love and peace, in the way of complying with these exhortations; he will be with them.

The

* Isa. x. 6.

† Isa. xiv. 1, 5, 15.

The essential presence of God is not,—cannot be limited to any place, nor restricted to any creature, or any particular rank of creatures. Though the divine essence cannot be extended, so as one part of it should exist in one place, and another in another; yet the infinite and indivisible God is present in every place. His omnipresence fills heaven and earth, and every part of the wide extended universe. Yea, his immensity fills all space; and if it were possible for a person to go as far beyond the bounds of creation, as the whole extent of it from one extremity to the other, he would still find himself in the bosom of his Creator. Neither is he more present in one place than in another. In this respect he is equally present with the inhabitants of the highest heaven, and with those of the lowest hell.—Of this speaks the royal psalmist, with as much truth as elegance*, “Whither shall I go from
“thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
“If I ascend unto heaven, thou art there: if I make
“my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take
“the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utter-
“most parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead
“me; thy right hand shall uphold me.”

But the presence of God in any place, or with any person, is usually denominated from his manner of operation, or the way in which he manifests himself in that place. Thus he is present in heaven as the God of glory; because there his divine glory is displayed, with all the lustre that finite and created natures can sustain. And, on a similar account, his gracious presence is said to be in the church on earth, and with all her genuine members, because in her, and to them, he manifests the riches, freeness, and sovereignty of his grace, in

a manner superior to what obtains in any other part of the world. And this is it which is here promised to us. Indeed there never was a church on earth, where he was not graciously present in some degree: Nor was there ever a gracious soul that was not made “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” But his presence in the church is much more conspicuous at one time than at another; according as the happy fruits of his presence are more or less copious or visible. And though his holy and sanctifying Spirit dwells always in every true believer, yet the communications of his love and grace are much more liberal, or more perceptible at one time than at another. Hence his people can sometimes say, like David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, and thy rod and thy staff comfort me*.” And the same person may find reason, at another time, to say, as Job, “Oh! that I knew where I might find him.—Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work; but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him †.” Now the promise here is, not only that he will be so with us as he is with all that are his people, at all times; but that we shall, in the way of complying with those exhortations, enjoy such a copious measure of the communications of his grace and love, as may at once testify his gracious acceptance of our endeavours; and encourage us to persevere in them to the end.

As there is, in the mind of every mortal man, a proud and vain bias towards the method of recommending ourselves to God by creature-merit; we had need

* Psa. xxiii. 4. † Job xxiii. 2, 8, 9.

need to be on our guard against such an interpretation of this, or similar promises, as may favour that perverse bias. Neither our living in peace, nor any other duty that we can perform, even though it is done under the influence of the Spirit of all grace, has any merit in it, to procure the presence of the God of peace, or to warrant us to claim it as a debt. But, on the other hand, there is demerit enough in our sin, to forfeit this and every other promised blessing. When we indulge wars and fightings, and those lusts from which they proceed, the Lord is justly provoked to withdraw his presence; and it is only in the way of hearkening to these exhortations that we can expect him to be with us. When the "peace of God dwells in our hearts; when, by Divine assistance, we follow peace with all men;" and are especially concerned to cultivate unanimity and love and peace among ourselves; God is so well pleased with those fruits of his Spirit in us, that he testifies it, by being present with us in such a sensible manner, and communicating so liberally to us, the fruits of his love and grace, as may fill us with a joy and consolation that strangers intermeddle not with.

When we are enabled thus to live, we may not only expect that he will be present with us, but that he will be present as the God of love and peace. He will shew himself present with us, by granting us such intimations of peace and reconciliation, as may satisfy our consciences that he is pacified to us for all that we have done; and may secure us against all fears of condemnation: by infusing into our souls such an inward tranquillity, as may be a happy pledge of that everlasting rest which remains for the people of God. He will be so present with us as to give us fresh intimations of his

unchangeable love ; such as may open us a prospect into his very heart, and enable us to look back as far as the beginningless day of the eternal decree, and see him loving us even then, with that everlasting love which is the unfading source of all that drawing grace which we now feel. So liberally will he communicate to us the fruits of his love, that no spiritual blessing, which we ask of him, and of which our present mortal and imperfect state admits, shall be wanting ; the graces of his Spirit in us shall be drawn forth into a lively exercise ; and the fruits of holiness shall appear in a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. We shall not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but be strong in the faith giving glory to God. The discoveries which he will make of his love to us will kindle in our hearts a corresponding love to him, which no waters shall ever quench, which no floods shall be able to drown. This will also strengthen our love to one another, and dispose us to give such evidence of it, as corresponds to that which God has given of his love to us ; and we shall all go on our way rejoicing, mutually comforting, and comforted by one another.

He will likewise be so with us, as effectually to strengthen us for the performance of the duties here required. These, like all other Christian duties, are wholly beyond our power to perform ; and therefore must be set about only in the strength of promised grace. The assistance of that grace is always ready, and in our offer ; but it cannot be actually bestowed, when we are not assaying the performance of the duty. As no man can be assisted in building, while he is employed in pulling down the house that he ought to build ; so neither can any person have the assistance

of Divine grace in the cultivation of peace, when himself is actually engaged in sowing discord, and promoting dissention. If God gives peace to his church in such a case, it must be over the belly of such a man's endeavours; and as far as God has success, that man must be unsuccessful. But the moment that we, in obedience to God's command, set ourselves to be co-workers with him; and so are employed in that wherein he has promised to assist us, the promised assistance shall be really forthcoming to us; and we shall find that work easy, which was difficult and impossible before. In this way alone it is that every duty is acceptably performed; and in this way, we need not despair of finding the peace of the church restored, and the whole body of Christians of one mind, and living in peace, if the whole body of Christians were but determined seriously and disinterestedly to set about it. And however distant the time may be, we are sure such a time will come: I hope it is not so distant as the external appearance of things would seem to say; when, in this way, the God of love and peace will manifest himself in his own true character, by restoring the happy exercise of love and peace in all the churches. For, in due time, the Lord will certainly "give strength to his people; and the Lord will bless his people with peace*."

Yea, if we are but enabled to comply with the exhortations in this text, we may confidently expect that the God of love and peace will be so with us, and on our side, that all attempts to disturb our peace by enemies from without, shall be rendered abortive; and our peace maintained, though at the expence of their utter destruction. The church of God has always

been, and always will be, under his protection. And no enemy shall ever have it in his power to hurt her; unless, by her sin, she provoke God to give him permission. No other sin can provoke him more effectually than internal dissentions and civil broils among her members. While these are so frequent as they are in our day,—no wonder that the God of peace forsake us, and our Rock shut us up; that the enemy be permitted to enter God's heritage, to defile his house, and to lay Jerusalem on heaps.—But so soon as we shall be enabled to return to our duty, and shew a disposition to love one another, as disciples of Christ ought, and to be at peace among ourselves,—the Lord will again appear to be “a wall of fire about us, as well as the glory in the midst of us:” For, as long as a church continues on earth, her members will always have reason to sing, “The Lord of hosts is on our side, the God of Jacob is our refuge*.”

WE are now to conclude with some improvement of what has been said. And here we shall not long detain you. The following reflections will readily occur to any one.

I. The subject informs us how great a sin it is to make, cause, foment, or maintain divisions or animosities in the church of God. It is to transgress the law of Christ, to banish the God of peace from his own house, and rob his people of his comfortable presence, as well as of all the more obvious advantages arising from the enjoyment of peace. An incendiary in the church of Christ, is a firebrand, cast by the grand enemy of God and man, into the temple of the living God. And every one, who wishes well either to the

glory

* Psalm xlvi. 7, 11.

glory of God or to the souls of men, should exert himself to have it extinguished, or cast out.—With good reason, therefore, does this apostle exhort his Romans and us, and even beseech us, to “mark them who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which *we* have received, and avoid them;” adding as a reason for it, “for they are such as serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and, by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple*.” Such a man is an enemy to himself, as well as to fellow professors; for he brings upon himself a curse, denounced by him who was “made a curse for us. It is impossible but that offences will come; but wo to him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea †.”

I am aware how ready many will be to say that this observation comes with a bad grace from a Seceder. ‘What, were not you almost the first that made a division in the church of Scotland? Have you not persisted in your schism for almost sixty years? Is it not well known that you refuse to have communion with any that go not the same lengths with yourselves; and that of all the sectaries that these dregs of time have produced, you are the most rigidly tenacious of your own peculiar opinions, the most uncharitable to all who differ from you, and the greatest enemies to all peace, unless yourselves may be allowed to dictate the terms?’ If, indeed, these things be so, we are a society to be abhorred of all Christians; but we flatly deny the charge. It is true, we have separated from the established church, and are constituted upon the footing of a Testimony against many things

* Rom. xvi. 17, 18. † Luke xvii. 1, 2

things, that we consider as corruptions in her administration, and even in her constitution. But did she not give just ground for such a separation,—by condemning the doctrines of free grace, as Antinomian, and establishing that same legal doctrine which the apostle calls another gospel,—by screening the erroneous at the bar of her highest judicatories,—by oppressing the people of God, thrusting ministers into congregations without their consent; and obliging them, against their consciences, to countenance and submit to the ministry of such persons, on pain of being deprived of their Christian privileges,—by refusing to allow ministers, either doctrinally or judicially, to bear a competent testimony against these and similar evils,—and by turning the edge of discipline against those who attempted to do so? Did we not continue in her communion, even after all this, till by her own deed she thrust us out? It is true, we were invited in again; but without any reformation of those abuses of which we complained,—without any acknowledgement of the evil of thrusting us out; and without any allowance to exoner our consciences, by a proper testimony against her corruptions in time coming. After all this, could the cause of the division be with us? Or were not they who obliged us to take that course, or else to defile our hands with their sin, the persons who made the schism in the church of Christ?

It is true, we refuse to unite in communion with those who are not of one mind with us, in relation to what we think is clearly taught in the word of God: And will make peace with none, upon such terms as they dictate, to the prejudice of truth and holiness. In this resolution we hope always to be *stedfast and unmovable*. But we wish to dictate no terms of peace, tho'

tho' we resolve, through grace, to adhere to those that the Spirit of God has dictated.—We desire to have charity for real Christians of all denominations. We pray for them; we desire them all that happiness that we wish for our own souls. We rejoice in all that is agreeable to the word of God, in their profession or in their practice; we even hold communion with them in it. Yea, we *rejoice*, and *will rejoice* in all the good that is done to souls among them, by means of the preaching of Christ crucified, or by any other ordinance of God, that is retained by them respectively. But all this we must do, in a way of avoiding communion with them in any of their erroneous principles, or of their evil ways; and in a way of bearing a competent testimony against them. As for that scheme of uniting in one communion all that have communion with Christ, as they speak, however much they differ in their views of divine things; we hold it in abomination, as a device of Satan to turn the church of Christ into a mass of confusion. We wish for peace and union among all Christians, but we know, that in order to our living in peace, and in one communion, it is necessary that we be of one mind. While this is not the case, we are incapable of having proper communion with one another; for what one builds, another must destroy. Therefore, however desirous we are of the closest union with all our brethren, we are under a mournful necessity of waiting for it, till God be pleased to give them and us *one heart and one way*.

2. We here see one mournful cause, of that sad restraint of the influences of the Spirit of God, of which his people, at this day, with so much reason, complain. Divine ordinances are still continued among us, and that in some measure of purity; but where are those days

days of power, that sometime have accompanied them? The gospel is preached among us, with as much purity, and with as much clearness, as, perhaps, in any period since inspiration ceased: But where is the people, yea, where is the minister, who feels its wonted efficacy? There are some few yet alive, who have seen better days, and can bear witness to the mournful reverse. The Lord, in his just judgment, has not only forsaken those who have forsaken him, and are carried headlong by the prevailing torrent of corruption and backsliding; even they who profess to maintain a testimony for truth and duty, and would still desire to keep the word of Christ's patience, are also much deserted, and left to "go mourning without the sun." And what is the cause of all this? The church, the Spouse of Christ, his *love*, his *undefiled is but one*. Her genuine members, being all influenced by one Spirit, and kept together by an invincible band of love, ought always strenuously to endeavour, "to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace." Were this the case with us; were we "of one mind, living in peace, the God of love and peace *would be with us;*" and the communications of his love and grace would at once adorn and comfort us.—But, alas! it is not so with us. A spirit of contention and division has gone forth among us. The body of Christ is all out of joint; his church is rent into a thousand pieces. Even among those of the same communion, how little of that love which distinguishes the disciples of Christ, and that unity which should adorn them, is to be seen? Congregations, once harmonious and flourishing, are broken into parties, and torn in pieces by contending factions. That furious and blind zeal with which every one maintains his own cause, super-

sedes

sedes any due concern for the cause of Christ. That time which should be consecrated to the most important duties of religion, is employed in wrangling about trifles: and the power of godliness is denied, while we contend about empty forms.—Instead of loving, we hate one another. Instead of strengthening one another's hands in the way of duty, we lay snares one for another. Instead of forgiving offences, we burn for revenge. Instead of bearing with one another's infirmities, and covering them in love; we "make a man an offender for a word," we aggravate the smallest faults, and take pleasure in publishing them. Whereas the whole body should have but one heart, every individual has two. And where the *melody of joy and salvation* ought to be heard, we hear nothing but the *sound of the trumpet, and alarms of war*. After all this, is it any wonder that the God of love and peace has withdrawn himself and is gone?

PASSING all other inferences that might be drawn from the subject, we hasten to conclude with a short Address, first to the members of this very Reverend Synod, and then to the Christian people in this audience.—As to you, my

REVEREND FATHERS AND BRETHREN,

I have not the presumption to think that I can instruct you in your duty. I trust, what I am going to say has already occurred to yourselves, as the language of the Spirit of God in the text: and your conduct hitherto has proved, that this exhortation had influence upon you long before I attempted to explain it. But, by appointing me to this place, you have invested me with your own authority to address you in this manner;

manner; and I cannot, consistently with that faithfulness we all owe to our common Master, allow this opportunity to slip, without putting you and myself in mind of what is incumbent upon us, in virtue of our place and office, towards maintaining in the church that unanimity and peace, which the Holy Ghost here recommends.

Unto us, though, some of us, “less than the least of all saints, is this grace given,” that we should be ambassadors of the God of love and peace; sent to proclaim to sinners, what was and still is the theme of the song of angels, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace: good will towards men.” Let this, then, be the principal object of our attention on all occasions. In our public administrations, and in our private walk,—in our sermons, and in our judicative capacity, let it still be our main scope, to promote the treaty of peace and reconciliation between God and man. In vain will we inculcate the duties of morality, or even those of the Christian system, unless we first lay the foundation of all acceptable obedience, in the doctrine of peace with God, through the blood of the cross of Christ. In vain will we insist upon truths natural or revealed, if every truth is not exhibited in its proper subserviency to this treaty, and as a branch of the ministry of reconciliation. In vain will we strive with our people to bring them to be of one mind, and live at peace among themselves, unless we labour first to bring them into a state of peace with God. But if, through the Divine blessing, we are diligent and successful in promoting peace with God, we shall not fail to have proportionable success, in maintaining uniformity and peace in the church.

We ought ourselves to be Christians, as well as ministers

nisters of the gospel ; and there is no duty incumbent upon those in a private station, that is not doubly obligatory upon us. While, therefore, we exhort others to live in peace, let us be careful to set them an example worthy of their imitation, in that respect ; being influenced, in our whole deportment, by that wisdom, which is “ first pure, and then peaceable, ready “ to be reconciled, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” We may expect, as much as any other set of men, to meet with personal offences, with abuse and maltreatment, not only from those who are enemies to the cause we espouse, or from such as are contemners of all religion ; such abuse, I hope, we shall easily despise ; but even from those under our charge, and from those with whom we have been most intimate. Our Master was betrayed into the hands of sinners, by one of his distinguished twelve. But in all such cases, let us shew a readiness, and even a forwardness to forgive and be reconciled. Such offences, while they are merely personal, we should never mention, to the disturbing of the peace of the church ; but rather overlook them altogether, and leave it to God to do us justice, in his own time and way,—than suffer our personal cause to become a subject of public discussion.

It has long and often been a charge against the faithful servants of Christ, that, instead of blowing the gospel trumpet, as became the heralds of the Prince of Peace, they sounded the trumpet of sedition, and shewed themselves enemies to the peace of civil society. And we know there want not some, who would gladly fix that charge upon us. Hitherto our conduct has given the lie to such an accusation ; and I hope it will always do so. With matters merely political, we have nothing to do in our public administrations :

strations; and, in private life, as little as any other class of men. Let us leave the kingdoms of this world, and their affairs, to be managed by those whom society, and the providence of God, has entrusted with them. And if ever we find it necessary to stand up for the crown-rights of Christ, the privileges of his people, or the purity of his ordinances, against any encroachments of the powers of this world,—let us do it in the manner that tends least to irritate, and is most calculated to shew that we are connected with no political party, and are influenced by nothing but a sincere concern for the interests of Christ, and of his spiritual kingdom.

While the members of the church are in an imperfect state, and have lusts continuing to war in their members, there will always be danger of animosities and factions arising to the disturbance of the peace of the church. It will always be a principal part of our duty, to watch against the appearance of such things among the people under our inspection,—to labour to have them crushed in the bud, and even to destroy or remove the seeds of them before they begin to sprout; knowing how small a spark is sufficient to set on fire the whole house of God.—If such things cannot be prevented, let us never take a side in them,—nor espouse the cause of one party against another; unless our silence is manifestly injurious to the interests of Christ. Above all, let us beware of going to the pulpit under the influence of a party spirit; and filling our public discourses with such reflections against a part of our hearers, as must tend to prejudice them, not only against us, but against the gospel, and so effectually mar the success of our ministry among them.

As it is the duty of every Christian, it is ours in a
peculiar

peculiar manner, to “ contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.”—It will therefore be impossible, in an age when errors and sectaries do so much abound, wholly to avoid matters of controversy in our public discourses.—But it can answer no good purpose to dwell too much upon them. To haul them in on every occasion, upon pretence of bearing testimony against public evils, is to turn a testimony into a bye-word, or to make it a public nuisance. Our principles are now pretty well known to the world; and we but strengthen the world’s prejudices against them by harping continually upon them. Let us never introduce matters of controversy without a call. And when the subject natively before us, or any particular occurrence in providence, make it necessary that we touch upon them, let it be with that meekness, calmness, and moderation, which become the messengers of peace. No cause is profited, and least of all the cause of truth, by scurrilous or abusive language. While we shew our zeal for the truth, let us also shew that we are influenced by love to the souls even of those that oppose it.

Let us strive to be of one mind among ourselves, as far as unanimity, in a state of imperfection, is attainable. I trust, there are no differences among us, about matters of revealed truth, or of Christian duty. If ever such differences should take place; as what has been may be again; let them be managed with candour, and under the influence of brotherly love; “ for the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be “ gentle unto all men;—in meekness instructing them “ that oppose themselves; if God, peradventure, will “ give them repentance to the acknowledging of the “ truth: and that they may recover themselves out

“of the snare of the devil, who are led captive by him “at his will *.” With regard to lesser matters, concerning which we may have different views, without prejudice to truth or holiness,—it would be a shame even to suppose that any of us would so far give way to our own spirits, as to endanger the peace of the church on such an account.

When we meet together in a judicative capacity, it is impossible that we should all, at first hand, be of one mind, with regard to every cause that comes before us. Even in the first synod at Jerusalem, there were reasonings, about a matter of the greatest importance to all the churches; and these reasonings were the means of bringing about that decision, which *seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to them.*—Let us reason and deliberate, by all means; but let us do it with calmness and moderation, avoiding all passionate expressions, all personal reflections, all provoking words. Let us even carefully avoid all appearance of such things. There are always persons attending our meetings, and even some elders from country places, who have not been used to such attendance, and cannot well distinguish between strong, and passionate speeches. When these hear one member declaiming, with vehemence, against what another has said, they take it for granted that we are all going by the ears; and their hearts are grieved for the want of harmony among the Lord’s servants, when perhaps they were never more harmonious. Surely strength of argument does not consist in vehemence of expression. Nor is the truth less forcible for being softly expressed. We may surely take a good advice from an author whom few of us, I hope, will be disposed to fol-
low

* 2 Tim. xi. 24,—26.

low in other things. You will pardon me for expressing it in his own words,—*you* understand them; *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re**.

In one word, It is peculiarly incumbent upon us to labour with all possible diligence, in a dependence upon his assistance, who alone can “blefs his people with “peace,” to have peace and unanimity restored, where, by any means, they have been interrupted or disturbed. This is a part of our work always difficult, and often disagreeable; but in this, as well as all the rest, we must draw our encouragement from the promise of divine assistance, and divine approbation. When differences happen, they often come before us, in our judicative capacity. I trust we shall always consider that we judge for God: and conscientiously endeavour always to give such a decision as may be for the honour of the God of peace; and such as has the most evident tendency to restore peace and unity among contending parties. In so doing, we need not be disappointed, though our decisions be found fault with, and ourselves charged with partiality and injustice, by both sides. But easy may we bear this, or any other injurious treatment from men, if we are approved of God. And if our endeavours are single and successful, we need not doubt of enjoying the blessing that is pronounced by the Prince of Peace himself, upon the peace-makers. If they are even unsuccessful, God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love. If the obstinacy of others prevent their reaping the benefit intended by our endeavours, we have reason to rejoice in the hope that they shall be returned with interest, into our own bosoms.

* In manner courteous, in matter firm.

WE shall just add a word or two to the Christian people, especially to those of this congregation.

I beseech you, my dear brethren, *suffer the word of exhortation*. Thus saith the Holy Ghost,—“ Be of “ one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and “ peace shall be with you.” Your own lusts may excite you to war and contention, Satan will take a malicious pleasure in blowing up the coal. If you confer with flesh and blood, they may offer many plausible arguments on the same side. But are all these to be laid in the balance with the express command of God ? Or do you seriously hope that any of these will be sustained at the tribunal of God, as an excuse for your neglect of it ? And you surely know, that “ for all this God will bring you into judgment.”— You pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and charity obliges us to believe that you are in earnest in such prayers. But how can you have the confidence to offer such a prayer to an all-seeing God, if you allow yourself, by your own conduct, to mar and disturb her peace ? Your prayers will undoubtedly be answered in due time ; for the Lord will bless his people with peace ; but are you not afraid lest God answer them, by punishing your dissimulation in praying, with *terrible things in righteousness* ?

Consider “ how good and how pleasant *a thing it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity.*” It favours in the nostrils of God, and of all God’s genuine children, *like the precious ointment that is poured upon the head of Aaron’s antitype, and goes down to the skirts of his garments*: You cannot give a better proof that you are sharers of this blessed unction, than by the cultivation of unity and peace ; nor can you give

a surer evidence that you are strangers to it, than by “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”—Consider the dishonour that is done to God, the grief with which all the friends of a testimony for truth are affected, and the advantage which you give to the enemies of that cause by your dissensions. Your situation is a very great aggravation of all these evils. If such things take place in a small congregation, in some remote part of the country, few know any thing about them, and themselves are almost the only sufferers. But it is not so with you—“A city set on an hill cannot be hid.” Your situation is known, and has influence, as far as the Secession Testimony is heard of.—One thing in behalf of which we bear testimony, is the people’s right to choose their own office-bearers. The principal argument that our enemies have against it, is taken from the confusion and dissention accompanying popular elections: And the Congregation of Edinburgh is thrown in our teeth, as an example for enforcing their argument. By profession you are friends to this testimony: I believe many of you are so in your hearts. Wherefore then should you be enemies to it in your practice? Or why should you give such an advantage over it? If this part of our testimony is any branch of the word of Christ’s patience, may we not say to you, as this apostle says in an apostrophe to his countrymen,—“the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you?”

You profess to be Christians, and I trust there are many real Christians among you. Is there any thing that you more ardently desire, than the gracious and comfortable presence of God among you? Is there

any thing sufficient to compensate for the loss of it?— Do you believe that this text is a part of the word of God? Is not this inestimable blessing here expressly connected with an endeavour on our part, to cultivate unanimity and peace? And can you hope to break that connection, or to separate what God has thus intimately joined? Are you really willing to banish the God of peace; and even the symbols of his presence from among you? For you must plainly see, that while your present dissensions continue, you cannot hope for a fixed administration of those ordinances, which are the ordinary symbols of his presence. If you could have it, what would it avail? Ordinances without the presence of God in them may serve to amuse your fancy, to gratify your pride, and, in the issue, to aggravate your condemnation; but they will never edify your souls, nor be of any real advantage to you. You apprehend that you are contending for your rights on either side, but can these rights, if gained, be of as much value to you as what you lose in contending for them? Can a lifetime of the possession of these rights, or of any advantage that can arise from the most complete victory over your opponents, over your brethren I should have said, deserve to be laid in the balance with your enjoyment of God's presence during the time that is spent in wrangling for them?—I say not that ever any real Christian shall be totally or finally deprived of God's presence; for he hateth putting away: but even his own children, while engaged in such unchristian wranglings, cannot enjoy his presence in the manner here promised. Perhaps some of you, while keenest in managing the contention, may dream, that you enjoy a good measure

of the comfortable presence of God in the mean time; but I dare assure you that it is only a dream—a delusion: And Satan knows well how to encourage you in his service, by means of such delusions. For, if there is any sense in language, this text warrants me to assure you, that unless you are disposed, and seriously endeavouring, to *be of one mind, and to live in peace; the God of love and peace will not be with you.*

Consult your own experience, and I have no doubt but you will there find a confirmation of what I say. You have had your times of harmony and peace; and, before now, you have also had seasons of contention and strife. Say which of them were most comfortable; or which affords most satisfaction upon reflection?—A dissention arose among you, about the erection of a congregation in your neighbourhood, some thirty years ago. Many present can tell what confusion prevailed among you while it continued; how ordinances were deserted by many, how the courts of the Lord's house were harassed, and the life of religion eaten out, for a number of years together. And when, at last, a decision was come to that was a mean of restoring peace; was it not at the expence of the congregation's being deserted by, perhaps, a third part of its members; many of whom made shipwreck of their profession, and never returned? Is there one person among you that would wish to have such a scene renewed? I am loth to think that any of you would wish to drive your brethren from their principles, and from the communion of the Secession Church, to another society where they might expect more peace, though with less purity; but much I fear, that

if matters continue long in their present situation, this will be the issue. Reflect, on the other hand, on the time, not very distant, when those who now will scarce speak to one another, when meeting accidentally in the streets,—joined sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in companies; when you beheld your teacher; when public ordinances were frequented with profit, and social duties comfortably maintained. Did not *the candle of the Lord* then *shine upon your beads*; and *in his light* did you not *walk through darkness*? Are you able to look back to such a situation, without saying, “Oh! that it were with us as “in months past!” And what should hinder it to be so? Your own unchristian wranglings are the sole, or at least the principal cause why it is not.

Think not to excuse every one himself, by casting the blame upon another. It is an all-seeing God that you have to do with. You all wish for peace; but each would have it upon his own terms. You think you contend for nothing but what is just and right, and wonder that any man should think otherwise. But so thinks your opponent, and is equally confident as you are; and who shall judge between you? The judgment of impartial men you will not submit to; but we must all submit, in a little, to the judgment of God.—Every man is easily prejudiced in his own favour: he easily overlooks what has been amiss in his own conduct, or finds an excuse for it; while he sees all the faults of an opponent as through a magnifying glass: One easily believes that what he has been contending for is right, and what he has been contending against is wrong; and the longer one contends, his prejudices become the stronger. Things the most trivial,

vial, when the mind has long brooded over them, appear of the greatest importance: and truth, and duty, and conscience, all seem concerned, where indeed there is nothing at the bottom but pride and humour. It will be a considerable point gained, if you can be brought seriously to think, that you are but a mere man in these respects, like others about you, and that possibly you may be wrong. Retire then, each within himself: look to God that he may subdue your passions and prejudices, and ask your own conscience, as in the sight of God, *What have I done?* If you find, as I am persuaded most of you will find, that you have done something amiss; though your brother may have been first, and in your apprehension deepest in the offence; count it your glory to be first in making an acknowledgement, and in granting to your brother that forgiveness which you reciprocally need at his hand. How can you expect that the great Master should forgive your ten thousand talents, if you cannot forgive your fellow-servant his hundred pence?

To conclude, If ever you wish that the Lord should “ settle you after your old estate, and do better to you than at your beginning,” as I still hope he will, in his own time and way,—you must “ follow the things that make for peace, and the things by which you may edify one another.” I speak not of pride, or resentment, or a desire of prebeminence; I trust there is none among you that would willingly lay any of these, or any thing such as these, in the balance. Let not your own humour, your own interest, your reputation, your edification, nor any thing that is your own, stand in the way of the peace of the Church of Christ among you. Let all your past differences be buried; the

the offences that you have received, or think you have received, in the prosecution of these differences, mutually forgiven and forgotten,—and all the remainders of animosity and disaffection towards one another extinguished in your minds. Drop all your frivolous charges, accusations, and complaints against one another. Desist from the prosecution of all schemes that cannot be prosecuted with general concurrence. And, in the exercise of brotherly love, and with mutual confidence in one another, let all parties concur in deliberating about, and pursuing such methods, in agreeableness to the word of God, and your received principles, as that, in the prosecution of them, you may “be of one mind, and live in peace: And *may* “the God of love and peace be with you.”

SER-

S E R M O N II.

The Character and Work of Gospel Ministers,

AN ORDINATION SERMON;

WITH A

C H A R G E*.

2 COR. V, 20.

NOW THEN WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST; AS
THOUGH GOD DID BESEECH YOU BY US: WE PRAY
YOU, IN CHRIST'S STEAD, BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD.

IN consequence of Christ's Exaltation above all heavens, "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, "and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of "the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists, being extraordinary officers, suited to the infant state of the Christian church, have long ago ceased: and the work of the ministry is now carried on, by the sole instrumentality of ordinary pastors and teachers. But, abstracting from those miraculous gifts, which were proper to complete the evidence of the Christian religion, and what was done in the exercise

* Preached at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr ROBERT LAING, as Colleague to the late Rev. Mr JOHN WHYTE, at Dunse, Aug. 23. 1785.

ercise of them,—the qualifications, and the work of ordinary pastors, are the same with those of apostles and evangelists: And whatever is said in scripture concerning these, is applicable, with this reservation, to those. Hence every faithful minister of the gospel, in every age, and in every place, is warranted to adopt the language of the Apostle of the Gentiles in the text now read.

Some having objected against Paul, as using a degree of confidence, in some parts of his former epistle to these Corinthians, that did not appear consistent with that humility which became a servant of Christ,—nor scarcely with the sober use of reason,—he takes occasion, in some preceding verses, to vindicate himself, by setting forth the motives by which he was influenced in that matter: Among these he mentions the vast importance of the work, in which he had the honour to be engaged; being no less than the *ministry of reconciliation*, committed to him by God himself: In the exercise of which, he accounted himself bound to use every possible method for fixing the attention of mankind upon this great truth: “To wit, “That God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

For the illustration of this motive of his conduct, he shews, in this text, what was the character that he and his brethren sustained, and the work in which they were employed; a work of so much importance, that neither the slanders of false accusers, nor any other earthly consideration, should ever prevail with him to neglect the most proper and habile means of accomplishing it.

In the words, the following particulars deserve our attention.

1. The function that Paul, and his fellow-labourers in the work of the gospel, sustained; they were *Ambassadors*. The original word is more expressive; *We execute the office of Ambassadors*. Not only were they invested with that high character; they were careful to demean themselves according to it; being diligent and assiduous in the business of their office. The more honourable a man's place or station is, the more guilty is he if he neglects the duties of it; and the more ungrateful to him by whom he has been advanced to it.

2. The master whom they served in this office; they were ambassadors *for Christ*. The Greek particle here used is the same that is repeated in the end of the verse, and is there rendered *instead of*. In the same sense it is used in the verse following: "He hath made him to be sin for us, *or* in our stead." And here, some consider it as having the same meaning.—Christ is invested by his Father, both with the prophetic, and with the kingly office. As a Prophet, he is the Father's Ambassador to sinners. This office he executed in person while on earth; but now he has committed the external part of it to gospel ministers, who, as his substitutes, perform the work that belongs to it, in his stead.—As a King, Christ has power to send Ambassadors, to treat with mankind in his own name; and has sent his apostles and their successors accordingly. Thus they are both the Ambassadors of Christ, as King in Zion, and also the Ambassadors of God, acting by virtue of a deputation from Christ in his prophetic character.

3. The

3. The business of their office ; it is to deal with sinners to " be reconciled to God." The word signifies, to be restored from a state of war to a state of peace, from a state of alienation to a state of favour. The pronoun *you*, both in the second clause of the verse and in the third, is a supplement ; neither is it to be found in the context nearer than the twelfth verse ; and what is wanting in this text to make the sense complete, may, with great propriety, be supplied from the verse immediately preceding. " God was in Christ " reconciling the world to himself ; *and therefore*, as " if God did beseech *them* by us, we pray *the world*— " to be reconciled unto God." The apostles were sent " into all the world, to preach the gospel to every *hu-* " *man* creature." And still their successors in office have a commission equally extensive.

4. The manner in which they performed this work ; *We pray you.* ' Acting by Christ's commission, and ' dealing with men's consciences as he did in person, ' when he was in the world, we might be bold to com- ' mand them to embrace the reconciliation proposed. ' But as we pretend not to be lords over your con- ' science, and would approve ourselves your servants ' for Jesus' sake, we condescend to implore you as sup- ' plicants, to beg it of you as an alms (for this is the ' proper meaning of the word,) that you would em- ' brace God's gracious offer, and suffer yourselves to ' be restored to his favour.'

5. We have the light in which their negotiations should be viewed. Having God's commission to speak as they did, they spake in his name. Their words were to be regarded as the words of God ; and when they prayed sinners to be reconciled, it was the same thing

thing as if God himself had condescended to beseech them. The original word here used has various meanings. It signifies to call, to exhort with authority, to intreat with importunity, and to comfort. With propriety is such a word here used, to intimate, that tho' God condescends to speak in the language of a suppliant, yet his words ought to be considered as having the force of an authoritative call; and we ought to view it as matter of the strongest consolation that he either calls or commands us to such a thing.

Now, as what the apostle here says has nothing in it peculiar to the apostolic office as such, we consider it as applicable to all faithful ministers of the gospel, in all ages: and we apprehend, that the sense of the text may be express'd in the following proposition.

As ministers of the gospel have the honour to be ambassadors for Christ, the main scope of all that they do, in the exercise of their office, should be, to deal with sinners in the most importunate manner, to be reconciled unto God: and, while they adhere to their commission, the same regard is due to their negotiations, as if they were immediately transacted by God himself.

IN prosecuting this subject a little, we propose, through Divine assistance, to speak a few words,

I. Of the character or function which gospel ministers sustain.

II. Of the business in which they should be employed.

III. Of the regard which is due to their negotiations; and then,

IV. To make a short application.

I. WE return to speak a little of the character here given to ministers of the gospel. They are called *Ambassadors for Christ*.

Ambassadors, you know, are persons sent by the powers of this world, to the courts of neighbouring princes, to attend to the interest of their masters, or to negotiate any particular business, as their commissions respectively bear. They are usually men both of rank and abilities: and are considered as representing their masters in the places to which they are sent. Their persons are therefore held sacred by the law of nations; and they enjoy privileges superior to those of any subject. The princes of this world usually send their ambassadors to other princes, or to sovereign states; to their own subjects they send none, much less to those who are in a state of rebellion against them. But God has graciously condescended to send *his* ambassadors even to rebels, to treat with them about returning to their allegiance. Easily could he crush the great rebellion, in which all mankind are naturally engaged, by inflicting condign punishment upon all that have taken arms against him. But *because he delighteth in mercy*, he hath chosen to send an embassy,—not to desire conditions of peace, nor yet to propose them; but to offer peace freely, and without conditions, to all that will receive it.

I know there are some who consider this honourable character as peculiar to the apostles, and therefore not belonging to ordinary ministers of the gospel; because they do not admit that Christ has fixed any method by which ordinary ministers should be called to their office, or invested with it. And if the last of these be true, the first must follow of course.—If any person should go to a foreign court, pretending to be

an ambassador from the king of Britain, he would be treated as an impostor, if he could not produce his commission, duly sealed and authenticated. In like manner, no man can be received as an ambassador of Christ, without an injury done to Christ himself, unless he can produce his credentials, and shew that he has a commission from the king of Zion.

It cannot be expected that ordinary ministers of the gospel should have their commission *immediately* from Christ. This was indeed peculiar to the apostles. Since the canon of Scripture was completed, no new revelations from heaven are to be expected. And if any man should now pretend to be called to the ministry by such a revelation, this pretension would be sufficient, alone, to convict him of imposture. But Christ, in his holy word, has sufficiently determined in what manner every gospel minister should enter upon his office. And he who enters upon it in the manner that he has prescribed, has the call of Christ, and bears his commission, as really as if he had been called by a voice from heaven: and therefore is as justly entitled to call himself an ambassador of Christ as Paul himself was.—If any should ask, What constitutes the call of Christ to this office? An answer may be gathered from the following particulars.

1. Those whom God designs for that office, he endows, in some degree, with those natural gifts and qualifications that are necessary to the discharge of the duties of it. There is a certain turn of the genius, or natural disposition, suited to every business or occupation of life. And if ever a man rises to eminence in any profession, it must, humanly speaking, be chiefly owing to the aptitude of his genius to that profession. When one's natural endowments are not suited

to his profession, he can neither have pleasure in his work, nor can his work have credit by him. This is as applicable to the business of the ministry as to any other. He who is the Head of the church, is also the God of nature; and, even as Mediator, he has the kingdom of providence committed to his management for the benefit of the church. In the course of providence, he bestows upon every man those talents which he requires him to occupy for the good of the church. As he bestows no talents which he does not call us to occupy; so he requires no improvement of talents which he has not given: nor does he call any man to a piece of work for which he has given him no suitable endowments. The qualifications requisite in those who are to be invested with this office are pointed out in the passages of Scripture referred to, in the margin *. To put any man into the office that wants those qualifications, is to transgress the command of Christ: And to suppose that any such person has the call of Christ to be a minister, is as preposterous as to suppose, that a wise prince would choose a fool to be his ambassador to a foreign court; and that after making a law, that none but a wise man should be so chosen.

2. To those whom God designs for this office, he usually gives a disposition, and even an inclination to the work of it, in preference to every other employment. It is wisely ordered in providence, that the bent of a man's genius, and of his inclination, tend usually the same way; so that, unless his inclination is either crossed, or biased by some adventitious circumstance, he will seldom fail to choose that course of life, in which his talents may be most profitably employed^d

* Tim. iii. 2,—7. Tit. i. 5,—9.

ployed. This, by the bye, should be a caution to parents, and others who may have the charge of young persons, to beware how they cross their inclinations in the choice of their employments: lest they bury their talents, and put it beyond their power effectually to serve their generation. As to ministers, it is expressly required, that they *take the oversight* of the flock of God, *not by constraint but willingly**. And this, as it warns candidates for the ministry not to shew unwillingness, where the call of God is otherways clear; so, it should guard the church against insisting with any to accept this honourable office, who have an aversion, either to the office itself, or to any part of the work of it. Such men can never be hearty in the performance of such work: and they will always have reason to suspect the validity of their call to it.

3. Those whom God calls to this office, he gradually brings forward to it by a series of providential dispensations, in which his own hand is visible. Some steps may be taken towards the accomplishment of God's design, before the person is capable to observe it, or to be active in choosing his own way. After he comes to think of these matters, he finds himself led from one step to another, ignorant often, and quite undetermined, what the next step shall be,—and incapable to form a conjecture as to the issue of the whole, till he gradually attains some acquaintance with those branches of learning that are necessary to a minister of the gospel, and such other acquired endowments as tend to qualify him for his work. If he thinks of betaking himself to another course of life, he finds every door shut upon him, his way is hedged in with

*

I

thorns,

* 1 Peter v. 2

thorns, and he finds himself constrained to choose that manner of life which God has previously chosen for him. Perhaps bars, apparently insuperable, may sometimes be laid in his way; but these bars are in due time removed, the hand of God is manifest in the removal of them: and it appears that the same hand laid them in the way, for ends worthy of God, and highly beneficial to the person himself. Thus, being separated from the womb, he is gradually prepared for the great work to which God has appointed him, furnished with the necessary endowments, and conducted to his intended station in the church; in such a manner that he sees matter of wonder, and of praise, in every change that passes over him; and he cannot doubt but the whole is the *doing of the Lord*.

4. As, in ordinary cases, every minister has the charge of a particular congregation,—and as the scriptures require, that every person who enjoys any office in the Christian church, should enter upon it with the consent of the people among whom he is to exercise it;—so, when Christ will actually call any person to the office of the ministry, he, in his providence, determines that people among whom he is to labour, to choose, invite, and call him, in a scriptural manner, to take the charge of their souls, and to exercise the pastoral office among them. God has promised, that when his people *acknowledge him in all their ways, he will direct their steps*. If ever they acknowledge him in any of their ways, it may be presumed they will, in a matter of such importance as the choice of their minister. God answers their prayers, by directing their choice to the very person, whom himself had previously chosen for them. And in this, more properly

perly than in any other case, the voice of the people may be considered as the voice of Gbd.

I said that no person should enter upon any office in the church of Christ, without the consent of the people; and I trust it may be proved. There is not, perhaps, any express precept for it in scripture; but there are a variety of approved examples, equivalent to a precept.—When one was appointed to the apostleship, in the room of Judas, though the particular person was chosen by lot, the two between whom the lots were cast, were chosen by the people: and surely by this choice, they signified their consent that either of the two should enjoy the office*. When the seven Deacons were chosen in the church at Jerusalem, the multitude were to look them out, or choose them; as the Apostles were to appoint, or ordain them to their office †. When Paul and Barnabas were returning towards Antioch, through the places where they had formerly preached, they *ordained them elders in every church* ‡. It is well known that the manner of expression there used, is borrowed from the practice of the Greeks, in choosing persons to civil offices,—which was done in their public assemblies: and it is plain, that these Christian Elders, some of whom were undoubtedly teaching elders, or ministers, were chosen in the same manner. The Apostles presided in the choice, and therefore it is ascribed to them; but they were chosen by the lifting up of hands, which would have been unnecessary and absurd, had Paul and Barnabas been the only choosers. They were chosen, therefore, by the people, who were members of their respective churches: and every individual gave his vote, by lifting up the hand. This

* Acts i. 15,—26.

† Acts vi. 3,—6.

‡ Acts xiv. 23.

was the manner in which all office-bearers, from the highest to the lowest, were chosen, in all the primitive churches.

If ever any person, since Christ himself left our world, had power to impose office-bearers upon the church, without the consent of her members, it surely was the Apostles, who had their commission immediately from Him, and enjoyed the infallible direction of his Spirit; but such a power they neither exercised nor ever claimed.—No reason can be assigned for the Apostles taking this method, which is not equally strong for our taking the same method still. Nor is it probable that they would have taken it, if they had not meant to set a pattern for the imitation of the church in all after ages. Surely, then, we are sufficiently warranted in following their example, till an equal authority can be produced for a different method of procedure. Yea, we hesitate not to affirm, that these scripture examples have the force of a positive institution, requiring the consent and choice of the body of the people among whom one is to labour in the work of the ministry, as a necessary ingredient of the call of Christ. And the man who enters upon the office without it, if he claims the character of an Ambassador for Christ, must find himself greatly at a loss to produce his credentials.

From this it does not follow, that a man who has been duly called should desist from the exercise of his office, as soon as his people have conceived an umbrage against his ministry. With equal reason it might be argued, that because no man should have a wife imposed upon him without his consent, therefore no man is bound to his wife, after he conceives a dislike to her. Though, in entering into any relation, all parties

parties should be voluntary,—and may withhold their consent without any reason assigned ; yet no relation, once constituted,—may be dissolved, without sufficient cause shewn. As no man ought to put away his wife, but for the cause of adultery ; so no people ought to expect or desire a separation from their minister, unless they can prove him guilty of error or immorality ; or, at least of palpable negligence in the business of his office.

Neither does it follow, that, in every case, a people is entitled to have the minister whom they have chosen. Every minister, when ordained, becomes a member of the Presbytery in whose bounds his congregation is situated. And as the Presbytery have no right to impose a minister upon the congregation, so neither have the congregation a right to impose a member upon the presbytery. The presbytery must judge of the gifts of the candidate, for the work of the ministry in general : as the congregation must judge of the suitableness of those gifts to *their* edification. And each has a mutual negative upon the other.

5. When Christ designs any man for the work of the ministry, he directs a presbytery, or ecclesiastical judicatory, consisting of various persons already invested with that office, judicially to ordain, or set him apart to it. We shall not now trouble you with any discussion of the controversy about the power of ordination, whether it belongs to the bishop or to the presbytery ? If the scriptures, as all presbyterians believe, and as might easily be proved, know nothing of the office of a bishop, as superior to that of a teaching presbyter, then, surely, the power of ordination cannot belong to that office. Besides, ordination is plainly spoken of in scripture, as an act of a presbytery.

Neglect not, says Paul to Timothy, the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery *. Christ has expressly said, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them* †. To the courts of his house he hath delegated his authority: and what they do in agreeableness to his word, may be considered as done by himself. *Whatsoever they bind on earth is bound in heaven, and what they lose on earth is loosed in heaven* ‡. When such a court, therefore, sets one apart to the office of the ministry, in the name of Christ, agreeably to his will, made known in his written word, and after the way has been paved for it, in the manner set forth in the above particulars,—that man is set apart to it by Christ himself, and receives a formal and authentic commission to be an ambassador for him.

6. When a man has thus obtained a providential call to this sacred office,—if he is acquainted with vital religion, the Spirit of God may bring home upon his heart and conscience, some portion of the written word, corresponding to his situation: enabling him to make a personal application of it, and to draw from it that encouragement and consolation, which are necessary to animate him for the work of his office. For instance, he may give him a comforting view of what our Lord said to his apostles, when he first appeared to them after his resurrection; *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you* §: or of what he afterwards said, when he was just about to leave them, *Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and, lo, I am with you always,*
even

* 1 Tim. iv. 14. † Matt. xviii. 20. ‡ Matt. xviii. 18. § John xx. 21.

even to the end of the world *. And this is that inward call, which, though it is not absolutely necessary to constitute the office, is of such importance to a faithful servant of Christ, that by it he is determined, though sensible of his own weakness and insufficiency for these things, to set forward with alacrity in every part of his work, assured that he does so at the command of Christ, and confident of enjoying his promised assistance in his own work.

I say, this may be the case after one has obtained the call of Providence: or it may take place in the instant of his being solemnly set apart to the office: but it is carefully to be observed, that it cannot take place before. Such passages of scripture as are expressive of a call to preach the gospel, can have no direction to any, but those whose duty it is, immediately to comply with that call, as being regularly invested with that office. And, as the Spirit of God, when bringing the words of Christ to remembrance, does neither put any other sense upon them, nor give them any other direction, than what they have as they stand in the scriptures; so he cannot speak, by such a passage, in an inward and efficacious manner, to any person, to whom he does not, at the same time, speak the same thing externally, in the scriptures themselves. Were we to admit, that such an inward call might, in this manner, be conveyed to a person not outwardly called, then any person, influenced by an enthusiastic brain, or by the suggestions of Satan, might imagine himself called, not only to preach the gospel, but also to do any thing, to which his own corrupt heart might incline him: and there would be no test, by which the workings of temptation, or of enthusiasm, might

* Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.

might be distinguished from the work of the Spirit of God. By this means I have known a person encouraged to persist, for a number of years, in a practice which he knows to be irregular and offensive in any other man, and yet believes to be not only lawful for him, but absolutely necessary to his salvation. If any passage of scripture may be considered as saying to one man, what it does not say to every other person in the same circumstances; then the scriptures are no better than a nose of wax, that may be moulded into what shape you please: and we have no fixed rule, either of faith or practice. If any man, therefore, imagines, that he has the call of the word and Spirit of God, to be a minister of the gospel, while he has not received the call of Providence, in the manner above described, he may rest assured, that he is, in so far, under a delusion. But when once a man is placed, by Divine Providence, within the direction of any passage of scripture, so that, in its native and obvious meaning, it looks to him,—he is then warranted to consider it as the word of God to him: and it is matter of great thankfulness if the Spirit of God, working by the scripture, enables him so to do.

By these several steps is the call of Christ conveyed to ordinary ministers of the gospel. Where all these are wanting, the man who takes upon him to exercise that office, is an impostor, a thief, and a robber among the flock of Christ. Where any of them are deficient, the call is so far irrelevant: and he ought neither to take upon him the office, nor to be countenanced in it, till his credentials be made out. But when there is a concurrence of all these, the man bears an authentic commission from the Head of the church; and
may

may say, with the same confidence as did the apostle Paul, *We are ambassadors for Christ.*

Ambassadors, as they transact their master's business, so they are maintained at his expence. In this respect the ambassadors of Christ resemble those of earthly kings. He bears the whole charge of the embassy; and furnishes them with all that is necessary for the acceptable discharge of the trust committed to them. I do not speak of his supplying them externally, with the necessaries of the present life; though he has likewise appointed a method in which they may be supplied with these, independent of the powers of this world, and of all those schemes that have been devised by the wisdom of men, which always has been, and always will be, foolishness with God. But what I chiefly intend, is that inward and spiritual supply, by which we may be carried through, in our work, arduous and difficult as it is, to the praise of God's glory. In contemplation of the work in which, as a minister of Christ, he was employed, the apostle Paul cries out, *Who is sufficient for these things* *? And he is utterly unfit for the office, who is not sensible, both of its importance and of his own absolute insufficiency for it. But every gospel minister may say, as the same apostle does, *Our sufficiency is of God, who can make us able ministers of the New Testament: not of the letter only, but of the Spirit* †.

Ministers are likewise entitled to this honourable designation, because the work in which they are engaged is the work of Christ. It is the same in which himself was employed while in our world; a work which nearly concerns the interests of his kingdom, and the honour of his mediatory crown. There are,

*

K

indeed,

* 2 Cor ii. 16

† 2 Cor iii. 5, 6.

indeed, too many, professing to be ministers, as well as private Christians, who *all mind their own things and not the things that are Jesus Christ's*. It began to be so in the Apostle's days*: And it is no wonder that it continues to be so now. It is of necessity, while a man is in this world, more especially if he is blest with a family, that he take some thought, and employ some part of his time, about the concerns of the present life. To be constantly employed in the business of this spiritual embassy is more than any mortal frame can bear. Some degree of relaxation is necessary: and different constitutions require it in different degrees. It is happy if a man can turn even his recreations to some account. But nothing should so far engage a minister's attention, as to make him remit his diligence in his Master's work. To this should he devote his person, his time, his talents, and even his worldly possessions, if he has any. In this he should be instant, in season, out of season. On this his mind should be continually intent: in this should his hands be constantly employed. He should labour, and toil, and sweat, and spend and be spent, for promoting the design of his embassy. In public and in private,—on week-days, as well as on the Sabbath,—by night as well as by day, he should give himself wholly to it. Disregarding the pleasure of men, and despising all inferior considerations, he should strive to approve himself a faithful servant of Christ; that when the Master appears, he may be in case to give an account of his negotiations, with joy and not with grief.

II. BUT what is this work in which gospel ministers should so exert themselves,—the business of this embassy

* Philip. ii. 21.

bassy upon which they are sent? They are to deal with sinners, in the most pressing manner,—and even to *pray* them *in Christ's stead*, to be reconciled unto God. To explain this a little, was the *second* thing proposed.

I trust there are few among you that need to be informed, that, when man was first created, a cordial and perfect friendship subsisted between his Creator and him: or that this happy friendship was broken, and dissolved by sin; so that every one of mankind is now born an enemy to God, and in a state of rebellion against him. It had been easy with God to have terminated this war when he pleased, by the total destruction of all the rebels. No terms of peace, that they could have offered, could ever have been accepted: nor could the mediation of all mere creatures have availed any thing, to bring about a reconciliation. No satisfaction, that creatures could have offered, was sufficient to appease his justice; nor could any created power have made such a change about us, as might have rendered us capable of acceptance in the eyes of his infinite holiness.

But it deserves our closest attention, and our warmest gratitude, that what no creature could do, God himself has graciously accomplished. From all eternity, he devised a method for the restoration of a number of mankind to peace and favour. And in the fulness of the appointed time, that wonderful device was put in execution. The only begotten Son of God, having assumed our nature, and in the character of an atoning High-Priest, offered himself a sacrifice to God; and so made full satisfaction to justice, and laid a sure foundation for peace on earth, and for the egress of Divine beneficence, and good will to-

wards men,—the same adorable person, in the character of a Prophet, came preaching, and offering peace, to all that are afar off, as well as to them that are near. Before his Incarnation, he managed his work, *at sundry times, and in divers manners*, by the instrumentality of *his servants the Prophets*. And now, since he no longer performs it, in his own human nature, on earth, he has *committed* to ministers of the gospel, as his Ambassadors, this *word of reconciliation*. Their business then is—To negotiate a treaty of peace between God and sinners, that they may be brought to accept the offers of peace, to lay aside the weapons of their rebellion, and to be reconciled unto God.

Though ministers of the gospel are often employed, as the mouth of their people to God, in public prayer,—they are not men's ambassadors, to deal with God to be reconciled unto them. None but Christ durst engage his heart to approach unto God with such a view: and he has done all that is necessary for this great purpose.

It has been disputed, whether God is actually reconciled to all sinners, in Christ,—or is become reconcileable only? There is danger in both extremes. To say that he is only reconcileable, may import, that Christ has only prevailed with him so far, as that he is willing to accept such satisfaction for our sin as we can give, and to restore us to favour upon such conditions as we have it in our power to perform. If this is the case, then all that Christ has done and suffered is in vain: and our condition is still as hopeless as that of devils. What satisfaction can *we* make for the least of all our offences? Or what conditions can *we* perform, who are dead in trespasses and sins?—On the other hand, to say that God is actually reconciled

to all, might be interpreted as signifying that all men are actually restored to his favour, and that sinners shall have peace, though they still walk in the imagination of their own heart. Such doctrine we hold in detestation. God is fully satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ, as all the atonement that ever can be made for any sin. This atonement he freely offers, and peace and reconciliation on its account, to all that hear the gospel indiscriminately. But while sinners continue to reject that gracious offer, they are still as much the objects of his wrath as if no such atonement had been made: He is angry with the wicked every day *; and therefore is at war with them still. How can he be actually reconciled to those, of whom the Holy Ghost testifies, that *the wrath of God abideth on them* †? But he is willing and ready to be reconciled to every sinner, without any other satisfaction, than what he has already received from Christ: and without any condition, that the sinner might be required to perform. While he brandishes the sword of justice in the one hand, and points it at the sinner's vitals,—with the other hand, he extends the sceptre of mercy, kindly inviting the person to touch it. The moment that he touches it by faith, God is perfectly reconciled, and *pacified towards him, for all that he has done*.—The scripture expression, in this, as in most other controverted cases, is the safest, *to wit, that God was, and is, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them*. To declare this, to all to whom we have an opportunity of declaring it, is the principal business of our embassy.

There are, indeed, many things contained in the scriptures, besides the particular doctrine of reconciliation

* Psalm vii. 11.

† John iii. 36.

ation through Jesus Christ: and every thing there contained is included in our instructions. Every doctrine must be taught, that God has revealed in his holy word; every duty there required, must be inculcated: we must endeavour to refute every error, and to discourage and reprove every sin. But all this must be done in a subserviency to the treaty of reconciliation, and with a view to promote it. Every truth must be set before our hearers, in its proper connection with this: and every duty inculcated in a way of shewing, that no duty can be accepted, or performed in such a manner as to be capable of acceptance, unless the performer is first *reconciled unto God*, through Jesus Christ.

We are not only to deal with those that are yet in a state of war with God: we have business also with them that are already restored to favour. *The edification of the body of Christ* is one end of a Gospel Ministry, as well as the conversion of sinners. But, while the saints continue in this world, though God is perfectly reconciled to them, the reconciliation is still but partial, and imperfect on their part. There is a remainder of unbelief, of enmity against God, and of every other corrupt disposition about them. While this is the case, we must continue our negotiations with them also. And never is the end of our embassy completely gained, with regard to any, till, at death, all the remains of their enmity are totally rooted out, and they as fully 'reconciled to God as he is to them.

In managing this treaty, the ambassadors of Christ are, in his name, and in the name of his God and Father, to make a free offer of peace and reconciliation, to every sinner that will, and to every one that will

not receive it: without exception, limitation, condition, or reservation. We must intreat, beseech, and insist with them to return to the favour of God, and accept of a free pardon of all their crimes: for such is the folly inherent in our corrupt nature, that even this—men are unwilling to do. We must call them to lay down the weapons of rebellion, to cultivate a superlative love to God, and to shew the sincerity of their reconciliation, by walking with God, in all the ways of new obedience. We must set before them, in the plainest terms, the danger to which they expose themselves, the impossibility of escaping out of the hand of God, or of sharing his favour, while they continue to fight against him: and use every other argument, that is calculated to have influence with a rational mind, to comply with the message which we are honoured to bear. Not that arguments, or moral suasion, can prevail with any, that are not made willing in the day of Christ's power: for a dead man can never be reasoned into life, nor persuaded to rise up and walk. But when the day of power comes, the Holy Ghost makes use of arguments, and moral suasion. He persuades, as well as enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, and reconciliation through him. And he makes use of the ministry of the word, as a vehicle, to convey both light into the understanding, and power into the heart. He deals with men as with rational creatures; and whatever may be a mean, in his hand, of prevailing with rational creatures, to comply with his gracious call, we are faithfully to set before them: in the faith that he will accompany the whole, or what part he pleases, with such power as will make it savingly effectual.

All this we are to do, at the same time, in a way of supporting the dignity of our character as Christ's ambassadors, and with all that humility that corresponds to our Master's example. We must not presume upon the dignity of our character, to assume a lordship over the consciences of any; but, condescending to the weaknesses, the humours, and even the prejudices of men, we should *pray* them to *be reconciled*. Influenced by love to their souls, we should ask it of them as a favour to ourselves, as well as a thing in which their own interest is deeply concerned. We should beg it with all that fervency, importunity, and earnestness, with which a needy person asks an alms: and, like Paul, we should *become all things to all men, that we may, by all means, gain some*.

If we have been so happy as to prevail with any, through the good hand of our God upon us, to accept the offered peace,—we must labour to conduct them, in the way of peace and holiness, till they come to the full possession of all the happy fruits of reconciliation. Knowing the dangers to which they are exposed the temptations with which they are liable to be assaulted, and the force of that law of sin in their members, by which they are ready to be led captive,—we are to *watch for their souls as they that must give an account*. If we see them ready to lift again those weapons which they had laid down, or turn aside to such practices as tend to disturb the peace, we must not lose a moment to give them faithful warning. If they have already turned aside, we must use our utmost endeavours for their reclaiming. If, through the severity of their afflictions, or from any other cause, they are in danger of concluding that God is still their enemy, and that no reconciliation has taken place,—we are to comfort them

them by assurances of the unchangeableness of his love, of his being perfectly in earnest in the offers of peace, and of his having designs to accomplish, by his severest dispensations, subservient to those thoughts of peace, which he always entertains towards them. In a word, we must labour, by every habile mean, to strengthen their faith in God, as perfectly reconciled to them; and to extirpate all the remains of their enmity against him; that so they may at length, be perfectly reconciled to God himself, to his law, as holy and just and good, to the whole method of salvation by Jesus Christ, and to all the wise disposals of his providence;

III. WE are now to speak of that regard which is due to the negotiations of Christ's Ambassadors.

Among the powers of this world, Ambassadors are considered as representing their respective masters. They are honoured in proportion as their masters would be, if they were present. Their negotiations are received in the same manner, as if their master treated in person. Their master's faith is pledged to fulfil their engagements, and to confirm their deeds, unless they have exceeded their commission. If any injury is done to them, it is considered as done to their master: and if he have power, it will be revenged accordingly. A remarkable instance of this took place at Corinth, almost two hundred years before the writing of this epistle: the effects of which were still felt by the Corinthians. The Romans sent ambassadors to treat with the petty states of Greece about a certain business: and the meeting was held at Corinth. The Roman ambassadors were insulted, and obliged to leave the place. As soon as this news reach-

ed Rome, war was declared against the Grecian states, and a decree was past for the destruction of the city of Corinth. This decree was executed by the Consul *Mummius*, with much severity. The walls of the city were razed, every house was reduced to ashes, all the men were put to the sword, and the women and children were sold for slaves. Though the city was rebuilt, by those of the inhabitants who had fled at the Consul's approach, it never recovered its ancient splendor.

To relate this piece of history had been foreign to our purpose, if it did not serve much to illustrate the passage of scripture before us. With much propriety and energy does the apostle urge the reception due to the ambassadors of Christ upon the Corinthians, who knew so well, from their mournful experience, what it was to maltreat the ambassadors of earthly powers. 'You have learned,' would he say, 'O ye Corinthians, at an expensive rate, what it is to insult the persons, and to scorn the message of the ambassadors of men: and what must it be to violate the ambassadors of God? If, when your fathers insulted the ambassadors of Rome, that haughty people took such an exemplary vengeance, of how much sorer punishment shall ye be counted worthy, if ye maltreat the ambassadors of Christ, and pour contempt upon the message which they bear? As we are honoured to bear this high office, you ought to consider us as speaking and acting in the name of God. Our words should be regarded as the words of God, and you ought to give them the same entertainment, as if they were spoken immediately by God himself. And if you are found despising our intreaties, you will find his resentment more dreadful than that of the Romans, in proportion

‘tion as he is more powerful than they, and as your
‘crime will be more heinous than that of your Fa-
‘thers was.’

We say not,—Paul does not say, that every thing spoken by a minister of the gospel is to be received implicitly, without trial or examination, as the word of God. If an ambassador departs from his instructions, and does or says what he had not in commission, he deserves contempt from those to whom he is sent, and punishment from his Master. Our instructions are open: every one has an opportunity to peruse them in the holy scriptures. *If we speak not according to this word, it is because there is neither light nor truth in us.* The Bereans are highly commended by the Spirit of God; because, when an inspired apostle preached, *they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so**. And shall frail and fallible men, who can pretend to no more than ordinary assistance in their ministrations, claim that implicate faith, which Paul was glad he received not? Nay, let every word that we speak undergo the strictest scrutiny. Compare it deliberately with *the law and the testimony*. Whatever you find contrary to the word of God, treat it with what contempt you please. But beware how you reject what is agreeable to that unerring rule.

Every man has a right, unalienable, to judge for himself. And, doubtless, your own judgment of the true sense of scripture must guide you, in the reception you give to our doctrine and exhortations. But it is not that, by which *we* must be finally judged. To our own Master we stand or fall: and we also must judge for ourselves. What we find, upon mature de-

liberation, agreeable to our commission, we must deliver to you, as what we have received of the Lord; whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear. If we mistake,—and we are as liable to be mistaken as you are;—if we substitute error for truth, or put sin in the place of duty, our conduct is highly criminal: and we must answer for it, to our Master at his coming. But if we really speak according to our instructions, your judging it to be otherwise will not excuse you for rejecting what we say. It is really the word of God to you; and you must answer to God for the reception you give it.

We plead not for personal honour to ourselves: though, if we are the ambassadors of Christ, some share of it is due to us for our work's sake. We know that nothing is more dangerous to us, or more sinful in you, than your giving to us that honour that is due to him that sent us. We are content, at least we know that we ought to be content, to be despised, rejected, insulted and persecuted, as our Master was,—if our message is but received, and sinners prevailed with to be reconciled unto God. Whatever we may suffer, in the way of being faithful to our trust, we look for an abundant compensation another day. In the mean time, we have no fear, but our persons will be duly respected, by all who give a proper reception to the message which we bear.

It is the success of our embassy about which we should be chiefly concerned: and this is the principal thing to which the text refers. We appear among you as the representatives of Christ. We speak unto you in his stead. And, while we speak according to his directions, it is the same thing as if He spake to you in person. Christ has his commission from the
 Father;

Father; as ours is derived from him: and therefore, what Christ says to you by us, is really spoken by God himself, and should be received accordingly. I speak not without warrant: Our Lord said to the seventy, when he sent them out,—unworthy as I am, he says it as really to me, and to all these my Fathers and Brethren whom you see present, *He that beareth you beareth me: and he that despiseth you despiseth me;—and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me* *.

In whatever style we address you, you ought to consider it in the same light, as if God himself bespoke you, from heaven, in the same manner. If we use the language of authority, it is God who commands you by us. If we address ourselves to your reason, and endeavour to prevail with you by arguments, it is God who condescends to reason with you. And when we put on the air of a supplicant, and *pray you to be reconciled*, we do it *in Christ's stead*, and it is *as if God did beseech you by us*.

Yes, God himself, the Eternal and Almighty God, whom you by your sin had so highly offended,—who could easily crush you with a word of his mouth; who could suffer nothing by your destruction, nor reap any advantage by your being spared,—even he condescends to become a supplicant to you—the creatures of his hand, the worms of his footstool, rebels against his government, and traitors to his crown! Influenced by pure and unmerited love, and actuated by no interested motive, he earnestly beseeches you to *be reconciled unto him*, without condition, and without reserve. And can you see the great Author of your being, and of all that you ever enjoyed, or ever can enjoy,—

* Luke x. 16.

joy,—as it were, on his knees before you, begging, with all the importunity of one that asks an alms to keep him from starving, that you would, in time, consult your own happiness, embrace the free offers of his favour, and not oblige him to treat you as his enemies? Can you see all this, and continue obstinate still? Surely, if this cannot, nothing ever will prevail with you to *be reconciled unto God.*

IV. IT now remains that we conclude with some improvement of what has been said.

And this subject may inform us, what we are to think of those men, who pretend to be ministers of the gospel, ambassadors of Christ, and yet have no credentials to produce: and what reception is due to them in that character.—If you find one called a minister, who, instead of having the call of Christ to that office, never thought seriously whether he had it or not; but, perhaps, laughs at all who pretend to have it, or to think it necessary: such a man, as he does not pretend to be an ambassador of Christ, can never hope for the reception due to one.—You may find another, who, instead of those qualifications that the New Testament requires in a minister of the gospel, is only qualified to practise agriculture, or to write a treatise upon it,—to compile a history, or to write a political tract; or one who has more pleasure, and perhaps more success too, in writing a play, than in composing a sermon. Such a man might be useful to society in another station; but when, in spite of nature, he thrusts himself into a pulpit, he counteracts the appointments of the God of Nature, and transgresses the express command of the Head of the church. He utterly mistakes his own talents: and either attempts to
occupy

occupy a talent which he has not, or, while improving what he has, must neglect an important work, to the performance of which he has solemnly devoted himself.—See you a man, who, instead of the call or consent of the people, whose pastor he takes upon him to be, contents himself with a presentation from the patron, and does not hesitate to intrude himself, upon a reluctant and reclaiming congregation; while, instead of being ordained by a lawful and right constitute Presbytery, he is put into one of the Priest's offices by a junto of men like himself,—escorted, perhaps, like Judas, when he came to betray his Master, with a band of armed men! Such a man *enters not in by the door*, into the fold of Christ, *but climbeth up some other way*: and, if it should be thought a hard saying, it is not we, but Christ, who hath pronounced him *a thief and a robber*. He cannot expect success in managing the treaty of peace with sinners: indeed, it is morally impossible that he should have any such design; for *the thief cometh not, but to kill and to steal, and to destroy**. Such men may have something amiable in their dispositions, they may be inoffensive in their walk: they may be eloquent speakers, and perhaps may preach sound doctrine: They may even be good men, and real Christians; for real Christians have often gone far astray. But, not having entered upon their office in the manner prescribed in the word of God, they cannot be viewed as having the call of Christ; and surely they have but little reason to expect his countenance in it. We dare not say, that they can never enjoy the divine assistance, nor be instrumental in doing good to souls; for we know that *Caiaphas* himself once spake by Divine inspiration; the

* John x. 1,—10.

the Lord shewing respect to the office, though irregularly conferred upon a very unworthy man. But surely they have reason to be afraid, lest their ministry lie under the blasting curse, pronounced against the Prophets of Jeremiah's time, *I sent them not, nor commanded them, therefore they shall not profit this people at all* *.

Not less severe is the judgment that we ought to pass upon those who have, or pretend to have, a commission to preach the gospel, and, instead of promoting the treaty of reconciliation, take methods directly or indirectly to impede it. Such are they who, by denying the doctrine of original sin, encourage men to think, that, never having been at war with God, they stand in no need of reconciliation. Such are they who represent the gospel as a new law, requiring faith, repentance, and sincere obedience, as the conditions of reconciliation,—while it affords no supernatural strength, for the performance of those conditions. These, rejecting the method of God's providing, set up another method of reconciliation. Which never can be effectual, till a person can be found, who is an enemy to God, and yet no slave to sin or Satan.—Such are they who tell us that we must not only be sensible of our sin and misery,—but must even repent and forsake sin, in order to our being welcome to Christ, or to reconciliation with God through him. This is to require us to heal ourselves, before we can be welcome to the physician.—Such are they who blasphemously deny the Supreme Deity of Christ, the covenant made with him from eternity, his proper satisfaction for sin, or the proper imputation of his righteousness to believers. Such men overturn the foundation of all reconciliation :

* Jerem. xxiii. 32.

ciliation : and, tho' they may invite us to be reconciled to God ; if their doctrine were true, it would be impossible for him, ever to be reconciled to us.—Such are they who teach men to bring any thing wrought in them, or done by them, either alone or in conjunction with the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of their restoration to the favour of God. This is to preach another gospel, in direct opposition to what the Spirit of God has declared, *viz.* that *by the works of the law no flesh living shall be justified* *. Such, in a word, are all those, who teach men to trust in imputed righteousness, in a way of neglecting gospel-holiness. This is to persuade men, that they may be reconciled to God, and yet act the part of enemies still.—These, and all other perverters of the gospel, if ever they had the commission of Christ, have forfeited it, by transgressing their instructions : instead of praying sinners to be reconciled to God, they drive them *upon the thick bosses of his buckler* : And, Oh ! what a dreadful reckoning will they, one day, have, for the souls whom they have led to destruction ?

Not much less guilty are they who, though they preach no false doctrine, yet preach not the *word of reconciliation*. They deliver fine discourses, upon the several branches of morality, but they are such discourses as you might have expected from *Socrates*, or *Seneca*. And indeed, these men, and their sayings, are much oftener in their mouths, than the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. A man may attend long enough upon their ministrations, and yet, like the disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus, never so much as hear *whether there be any Holy Ghost*. They make no difference between the morality of a Heathen and

*

M

that

* Rom. iii. 20.

that of a Christian; nor do they ever mention the true place that is due to morality in the Christian system. They speak much of piety and virtue, now and then of a Supreme being: but any scriptural name of God they seldom mention, and the name of Jesus Christ almost never. And, as it is said of the wicked, that *God is not in all their thoughts*,—so it may be said of them, that *God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself*, is not in all their discourses.—The great and important doctrines of the Trinity, of Predestination, of Federal Representation, of imputed Righteousness, efficacious Grace, and the perseverance of Saints, with others of a like nature, they do not openly impugn; but they carefully avoid them,—either as too abstruse, or as matters of doubtful disputation. They press moral duties, particularly those of the second table, with many specious arguments; but these arguments are drawn from the light of nature, and from the writings of heathen philosophers, rather than from the word of God. They even fall upon a method of heathenizing the peculiar doctrines and duties of Christianity: thus prayer shall be recommended, not as an appointed mean of obtaining promised blessings from the hand of God; but only as a natural mean of fixing good impressions in the heart, or of promoting social virtue. They speak, in one word, as if their main business were to polish society in this world, and not to deal with the conscience about the concerns of eternity. Such men, though they do not oppose the doctrine of reconciliation by Jesus Christ; yet, instead of promoting the treaty of peace, they indirectly hinder it; by drawing away men's attention to something else; which, though it may be of some utility, is not the *one thing needful*. He who would be faithful, in the
character

character of a Gospel Minister, should *determine*, as Paul did, *to know nothing among his hearers, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

From what has been said, we may also see, what we are to think of that spirit of licentiousness, that appears among the Christians of our day, in relation to the countenance given to pretenders to the ministerial office and character. If a man professes any manual occupation, we wish to have a proof of his abilities, before we will trust our work in his hand: But let any one pretend to preach the gospel, though no man knows whence or who he is, we crowd about him in thousands, and every one is eager to hear him. Yea, when we know him to be a member of a corrupt church, and to be himself of erroneous principles, or are sure that his call to the ministry was very defective and irregular,—even these things shall not hinder us to give him that reception that is due to an ambassador of Christ. Before you can safely give attendance upon the ministrations of any man, who pretends to preach the gospel, there are three things about which you ought to be satisfied.

1. That he has a regular commission: otherwise you may receive and encourage an impostor. And, surely, if Christ is dishonoured when his faithful ambassadors are rejected, he cannot be glorified by your receiving, that character, one who has no right to it.

2. That his avowed principles are agreeable to the word of God. We are expressly forbidden *to bear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge* *. If a man adheres to no system of doctrines, or if you know not what his system is; you can have no security,—as the world goes, you have not even a probability, that he will not teach

you the doctrine of devils, instead of the gospel of Christ. If you know him to be of erroneous principles, it is more than probable that you will hear him assert and vindicate error. In that case, by hearing him you transgress the command of God, and endanger the poisoning of your own soul. It is not enough that you think yourself qualified to distinguish between truth and error: and resolve to believe no more than what you find agreeable to truth. You should not even *hear the instruction that causeth to err*. Is there not a corrupt part within you, ready to embrace every error as well as every sin, when you are led into temptation? And have not persons more judicious, and better established than you can pretend to, been drawn aside by the specious arguments of *men that lie in wait to deceive*?

3. You should be satisfied, that he is a member of a church with which you may, with a safe conscience, maintain public and local communion. If he belongs to no constitute church, he can have no call to preach the gospel. If he belongs to a church that habitually opposes the truths and testimony of Jesus, your hearing him is a public act of communion with her: and you take part, for the time, in all that opposition. Though that was not your design, it was the native tendency of what you did: and no design can sanctify a bad action. You may say your communion with her was but occasional, and you usually adhere to another church. But in this you are self-condemned. If it is lawful to join with her once, it is lawful to do it again, —and so on to the end of your life: and then it must be unlawful to continue in a state of separation from her; for all unnecessary separation is schism.—Neither does it excuse you, that you have no communion with
her

her in fealing ordinances, but only in hearing a fermon; for, where the doctrine of a church is corrupt, this kind of communion is more dangerous than the other; as you are more liable to infection. Promifcuous hearing is not that *fowing befide all waters*, to which a bleffing is annexed; but a fruit of thofe *itching ears*, which began to be the plague of the church, even in the days of this apoftle *.

Hence alfo we may learn, what a fearful doom awaits all final defpifers of the gofpel. They defpife not Chrif's Ambaffadors, but himfelf, and his Father who fent him: and who can expect to do this with impunity? We need not mention the vengeance taken by the Romans upon the city and people of Corinth, for the violation of their ambaffadors: the vengeance of God is infinitely more terrible. Confider what befel the people of Ifrael, in the days of Zedekiah, for rejecting the meffage of God in the mouth of his prophets: and what the fame people fuffered, by the hands of the Romans, for rejecting this embaffy, when brought them by Chrif himfelf. Yet ftill a forer punifhment awaits them *who refufe him that fpeaketh to them from heaven*, by means of his ambaffadors on earth. All the judgments that ever were, or can be inflicted upon any in this world, are but a faint emblem of what is referved for final unbelievers, in their eternal ftate. Yea, the punifhment that fhall be inflicted, at the fecond coming of Chrif, upon any other denomination of finners, will be light in comparifon of theirs; for the lips of Truth have addreffed fuch perfons, in thefe awful words; *It fhall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhba, in the day of judgment than for you* †. Hitherto, finner, you have a way

* 2 Tim. iv. 3.

† Matth. x. 24.

way, and but one way to escape: give a kindly reception to our message, when *we pray you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God.*

To conclude—We may here see, what a blessing the gospel is, and a faithful gospel ministry, to those who are favoured with them. We, who enjoy this blessing, have an opportunity of restoration to peace and favour with God; while others, who have it not, are left to perish, for lack of the knowledge of the only method of peace. *How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace*?—Let the watchmen lift up their voice; with the voice together let them sing,* because to them is *this grace given,* that they should be *ambassadors for Christ.* Well may they say, as David says on another account, *What am I, O Lord, and what is my Father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto!*—Let all the inhabitants of our Jerusalem rejoice: let them celebrate the praises of God, in a triumphant song; because we still have an opportunity of hearing *the joyful sound.* Let us all wonder at the condescending manner, in which he beseeches us, to accept the offered peace: and let us praise him for committing this ministry to men like ourselves, whose terror cannot make us afraid. Let us praise him for a succession of faithful ambassadors among us: and for his thrusting forth new labourers into his harvest from time to time. Let us praise him for the work of this day in this place. And let us testify the sincerity of our gratitude, by a present improvement of our privilege: renouncing all further hostility, and being reconciled unto God. *What shall we render to*
the

* Isaiah lii. 7, 8.

the Lord for all his benefits towards us? Through his grace, we will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.

THE CHARGE.

REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

YOU are, this day, set apart to a very honourable office: to be an Ambassador for Christ. I feel myself unworthy to wash the feet of the servants of such a Master; but, being honoured to bear the same commission, and now called to execute my office, in delivering to you the instructions of our common Master,—I dare not, from any sense of unworthiness, decline this part of my duty. What exhortations, in the mean time, I deliver to you, I shall consider as equally binding upon myself: and I am confident, that if I speak according to *this word* *, all my Reverend Fathers and Brethren present, will also view them as binding upon them.

Permit me, first of all, to address you, in the same manner as you and I must address all those to whom we are sent. *I pray you, in Christ's stead, be you reconciled unto God.* I mean not to insinuate that you are hitherto an enemy to him: this can only be known to himself and to your own conscience. But you are sensible that you have a remainder of your natural enmity against him, which it is your interest daily to mortify: and you will find constant occasion of betaking yourself anew to the blood of reconciliation, for that purpose. Seek more and more acquaintance with vital religion.

* Pointing at the Bible.

religion. This will be the best mean of rendering your work a pleasure, and of qualifying you to labour in it, with some hope of success. You can never have satisfaction, nor can you really be serious, in praying others to be reconciled, or in pressing the motives to it, till you have felt their influence upon your own soul. It is a trite, but a just observation, that, in order to affect your hearers, you must be affected yourself; but how shall you be affected with those truths you deliver, unless you have felt their efficacy?

Remember that you are an ambassador, not of men, but of God: and beware of ever being more anxious to please them, than to be accepted of Him. Let it never be said of you, as of those temporizing believers among the rulers of the Jews, that you *loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God*. Popularity has oft been a snare to the most eminent servants of Christ: suffer not yourself to be bewitched by it. No man that wishes to have success in this ministry, will despise the good opinion of the people to whom he is sent. They who are prejudiced against your person, are not likely to profit by your ministrations. You will therefore guard, most scrupulously, against giving the smallest occasion for such a prejudice. If any groundless prejudice is taken up, you will then have the testimony of a good conscience to comfort you, and the assurance, that, though Israel be not gathered by your ministry, yet will God be glorified: nor shall you fail of receiving the gracious reward of your work. If, on the other hand, you are so happy as to retain the good opinion of your people, thank God for it, and be humble. The popular opinion is no sure test of merit. We have seen a man of sterling worth, and of substantial abilities, despised,—while another, un-

worthy

worthy to be compared with him, was applauded to the skies. No wonder:—the popular voice rejected Christ, and chose Barabbas. Neither is it more constant than it is just. The people of Lystra, one day, extolled Paul as a god, and would have done sacrifice to him: the next day, they stoned him till they thought him dead,—and dragged him through the streets of their city, to the burial of an ass. The higher you stand, in the popular favour, the readier you are to catch a fall: as the cord must needs break, which is stretched beyond its pitch. Besides, if you were sure of retaining it, nothing can be more dangerous to you, than to be valued above your true worth. Too many instances has the Secession Church already afforded, of ministers, whose talents were blasted, and they left to bring disgrace upon their character; as a judgment from God,—because they were exalted, in men's esteem, above Christ. Our glorious Master is a jealous God,—who *will not give his glory to another, nor his praise*,—even to his own ambassadors.

Consider the vast importance of the work to which you are called: and always maintain a deep sense of your own insufficiency for it. The more you are impressed with these, the more necessity will you see of giving yourself wholly to it. *Be instant*, in your public work, *in season, out of season*: losing no opportunity to prosecute the embassy upon which you are sent. Neglect not your studies; nor trust too much to them. Be as diligent in preparing your discourses, as if all your success depended on it; but as dependent upon Divine assistance in delivering, and as open to receive it, as if you had made no preparation.—Never venture to a pulpit without due preparation, when you have an opportunity for it; lest God, for your ar-

rogance, *confound you before the people.* Yet never decline public work for want of preparation, when you are so called to it, as to have no opportunity to prepare; but trust in Christ your Master, for his promised assistance in the time of need.

In all your public ministrations, guard cautiously against every thing that tends not to promote the treaty of reconciliation. Morality is good: but let all your morality be built upon Christ crucified. Entertain not your people with philosophical researches, or metaphysical niceties, or learned whims. It is not the wisdom of this world, but the religion of Jesus Christ, that you are to teach them. *Avoid foolish and old wives' fables*; and every thing below the dignity of the gospel. Let your stile be simple and sublime: these two are very consistent; yea, in a gospel sermon, they are inseparable. A prince in rags is insulted: and even the gospel of Christ, in a tawdry dress, becomes contemptible. But an affected gaiety of dress turns the prince into a coxcomb: and an affected stile makes both a minister and his doctrine ridiculous. The food of our souls, like that of our bodies, is always most wholesome, when least beholden to cookery.—Habituate yourself to read the most approved compositions; especially upon divine subjects: avoid servile imitation, and indulge your own natural taste: accustom yourself to speak accurately, in private conversation. In public speak composedly, grammatically, and with so much melody of cadence as not to offend a delicate ear. You will thus acquire a becoming stile, without seeming to study it. When thoughts are in readiness, words will follow of course. The weak of Christ's flock will understand you: and the learned will not despise you.

Avoid as death—every doctrine, however plausible, or however fashionable, that is not founded on the word of God. Weigh every sentiment in that balance, before you venture to express it: and remember that the souls of men are at stake. The wholesome food of divine truth tends not more to nourish them, than error does to kill them. And if any soul shall be poisoned by your means, *his blood will God require at your hand.*

Be zealous of your Master's honour and interests, as becomes an ambassador. *For a man to seek his own glory, is not glory: but to seek the honour of Christ is the ready way to find true honour for yourself. Him that honoureth me, says he, I will honour: but they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed* *. Bear open testimony, as occasion requires, against every sin, and every error, in the pulpit. Exert yourself, in the exercise of discipline, to purge out every appearance of the old leaven. In your private conversation, suffer not any sin to pass, in your presence, without a suitable reproof. But let your reproofs be tendered with prudence, with meekness, with firmness, and with a due regard to the difference of persons and places. By personal observation, I am convinced that a reproof so guarded, will be kindly received, and will produce a happy effect, when a little consultation with flesh and blood would prevent its being tendered. Never did I see a reproof more effectual, than one that was conveyed in a simple look.

Give all due deference to the Reverend Father, whose fellow-ambassador you are honoured to be †.

You

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

† The late Reverend MR JOHN WHITE, whose exemplary meekness, and unwearied diligence in his Master's work, rendered him, through the
Divine

You are his equal in point of office ; but, I trust, you will ever demean yourself, as much inferior to him in age and experience. He will not usurp over you, and you must not assume upon him. If ever there should happen a difference of judgment between you, in matters which affect not the conscience, you know whose province it is to yield. Beware of the beginning of strife : the best of men, and of ministers, are not proof against it. Between Paul and Barnabas, a difference once arose, about a trifle, so sharp that they were obliged to part, If ever such a thing should happen between you, it is odds but you will be to blame. His character has long been known, for a temper easy, peaceable, and yielding. perhaps to excess. On this account, you may be almost sure, that if such a case should happen, which God forbid,—even though you should not deserve the blame, all the world will lay it upon you.

Maintain a constant intelligence with the court of Heaven. Ambassadors have always their messengers ready, to bear an account to their masters—of all their procedure, to ask new directions, upon any unexpected emergence, and to notify the success of their negotiations. *Go thou and do likewise. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy steps,*—is a rule necessary to be observed by all ; but more necessary for a minister than for any other man. From God you must have all your strength and furniture for your work ;—and all your success in it. To him, therefore, you are to look for it, by a lively faith, and
by

Divine blessing, more useful in the church, than many men of more shining abilities.—After having been some time, laid aside from public work, by the infirmities of old age, he was called home, in the beginning of this year, while employed in family-worship.

by unceasing and fervent prayer. Pray for assistance and direction—in your closet-preparations, in your public administrations,—in the exercise of both the keys—of doctrine and of government. Pray for your people, and pray with them,—in public, in their private houses, and in your closet; that they may not *receive the grace of God in vain*. If you have a praying disposition, you will never want errands to the throne of grace, both in your own behalf and in theirs.

Be careful to *adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things*. In vain will you strive to promote the treaty of reconciliation by your doctrine, if you set an example of rebellion in your private life: This will have influence—much more than sufficient to defeat the other. *Avoid not only every sin, but every appearance of evil*: and every thing upon which the deceitful tongue may put a bad construction, or found a slanderous accusation. Many, you may be sure, will wait for your halting: and you will not be long without temptations. But, as I hope you will teach others, —learn also yourself, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and godly, in the present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*.

Finally, *My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*. Your work is arduous and difficult: *but your sure and all-sufficient help is in the name of Jehovah, who created the heavens, and who framed the earth*. Your stock of furniture, though not in your own hand, is inexhaustible; and your reward is sure. See that, by a constant exercise of faith, you draw all your supplies from that infinite fulness that dwells in Christ bodily. Preach by faith: study by faith:

pray

pray in faith : walk by faith : live by faith :—and according to your faith be it unto you.

Grace be with thee. Amen.

TO you, the people of this Congregation, I shall not now say much. God has granted your desire, and your eyes see both your teachers. It will be dreadful, if, while giving you what you sought, he *send leanness into your soul*. You have reason to fear that it may be so, if you was influenced, in your desire to have another minister, by any unlawful or sinister motive. If it was your contempt of the gospel, as already dispensed among you,—if it was a restless, turbulent and factious spirit,—if it was your *having itching ears*, as, alas! is the case with too many in the present generation,—or a vain desire to be like your neighbours, by having an eloquent or popular man to be your minister,—Then I fear it is with you and your young minister, as it was with Israel and their king. You did not despise God's aged servant, but himself: he has *given you a minister in his anger*, and you have reason to fear, that he will *take him away in his wrath*. *But, beloved, we hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak*. I trust you sought a minister from the Lord, from a single and upright desire, of having the great treaty of peace the more effectually carried on among you: that the work of your former pastor might not prove a burden to him, in his old age; nor your souls be deprived of their portion of meat in due season, through his inability to dispense it to you. I trust, you have looked for God's direction, in the choice you were to make,
and

and this day's work is the fruit of his direction given. If this is the case, you have reason to believe that he has granted your desire, in his love: that the Lord's servant, this day ordained among you, shall be a blessing to you, and that you shall be a comfort to him.

The relation between him and you is now fixed: and, like every other relation, this has its duties, binding upon the one side, as well as on the other. He is constituted an ambassador of God to you: as such receive him, honour him, and *esteem him highly, in love, for his work's sake*. But beware of provoking God to blast him to you, by esteeming him above his Master. Receive the word at his mouth, not as the word of men; but, as it is in truth, the word of God. Receive it not implicitly; he is a fallible man, like yourselves: but *search the scriptures daily, whether these things be so*. Suffer patiently the word of exhortation at his hand. Submit to his admonitions, his reproofs, and those censures which every one's case may require,—as if they came from his Master himself. And beware of taking offence at his faithfulness. He must *lift up his voice, among you like a trumpet*; to *shew* to all his hearers *their transgressions*, and to the members of this Congregation, in particular, *their sins*. And it will be hard indeed, if he cannot be faithful to his Master, without giving offence to you.

Beware, especially you of the elderhip, of presuming to direct, or dictate to him in any thing that belongs to his office as an ambassador. It is the duty of your office, to concur with your ministers, and even to advise them, in all that pertains to the government of the church, and the administration of her public funds: But, in matters purely doctrinal,

you

you have no right to interfere. They are your servants, indeed, for Jesus' sake: but they are to serve you by Christ's direction, not by yours. From him they have received their commission: and to him,—not to you,—they must be accountable for the execution of it.

Be not surprized, when you find him a man of like passions with others; or discover in him those imperfections, infirmities or failings,—which you have not, as yet, had occasion to observe: or which, in present circumstances, you have not been forward to take notice of. I trust, he has not more foibles or weaknesses than other men: but he cannot be mortal and be without them: and, tho' you may be blind to them now, you will discover them in due time. When you do, you must bear with them, and cover them in love: knowing that you stand in need of the same indulgence from him, and from one another.

You have promised him a comfortable subsistence among you: and I hope you will always make conscience of performing the promise. It is fit, that he who labours in such work, should be as free as possible, from all entanglement with the affairs of this life; *that he may please him who hath chosen him to be an ambassador.* It is the more necessary to put you in mind of this duty now, as it is the duty that, of all others, your minister himself will have least freedom to inculcate. He will rather suffer an injury, in this respect, than give you occasion to say, or to think, that he is more careful in seeking *yours* than *you*. But, if you can persuade yourselves that the gospel is of as much value to you, as any of the common necessaries of life,—for instance, the shoes you wear,—you will
not

not find this duty such a burden as it usually seems to be.

You are sensible, that the same duties which you owe to him, you owe, in a still higher degree, to your former pastor, who has laboured so long, and with so much success, among you. It is not with two ministers as with two masters: you may *love the one* and not *bate the other*: you may be attached to the one, and yet not *despise the other*. They are both servants of the same master; ambassadors from the same court: and, being employed in the same work; are entitled to the same reception and entertainment.

Above all, be careful to receive, in a becoming manner, the message that they bear. Without this, your respect for their persons will neither be of much value, nor of long continuance: and if you are enabled to do this, you will scarcely fail in dutifulness to them. Consider that *where much is given, much is also required*. Your privilege is now double to that of most other congregations: and, if it is misimproved, your sin will be doubly aggravated. Consider how dangerous it is to continue enemies to God. You can hope for no victory in that war: neither is it possible to escape: and how *dreadful a thing* is it, *to fall into the hands of the living God?* Consider the inestimable value of the blessing offered you. In being reconciled to God, you shall not only enjoy peace but favour: you shall even be made sons of God, and heirs of everlasting happiness and glory.—Consider what obligations you have, this day, laid yourselves under, to hearken to the ambassadors of peace. You have called them to labour among you. The principal business that they have in charge from their Master, is, to publish the word of reconciliation among you: nor can you

have any business with them, unless you resolve, through divine grace, to comply with the purport of their message. Influenced by all these considerations,—as often as you hear the glad tidings of the gospel from their mouth, be concerned to give them the hearing of faith: and embrace the offered peace. —Embrace it now. This moment it is offered to every individual in this numerous assembly: and perhaps it is the last offer of it that some of you shall enjoy. *Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* I too have the honour to be an *Ambassador for Christ: as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N III.

Stedfastness in the Cause of Christ recommended.

Preached at the opening of the ASSOCIATE SY-
NOD, at EDINBURGH, in May 1780.

REV. iii. II.

Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast; that no man take thy crown.

GREAT and manifold are the privileges that the Head of the Church has bestowed, both upon her and her members, even in this world. But he has not left them at liberty to use, or dispose of them as they please. In every thing that he has conferred upon us, himself still retains a property. He has determined what improvement we ought to make of every thing that we enjoy: he takes exact notice how these his appointments are observed: and he has assured us, that he will return, in a little, to call for an account of our stewardship.

And according to every man's improvement of what he now possesses, shall be his final lot, in the day of Christ's appearing. He who is found *faithful* in the *little* that is now entrusted with him, shall then be made *ruler over much*. But the man who neglects his talents, shall be accounted a wicked servant: much more he that abuses them, to the detriment of his Master's interests. So also shall he, who, through cowardice

ardice or indifference, suffers himself to be robbed of them, by any enemy. Such a man, instead of restoring to the master his *own with usury*, shall not be able to return even the talent that he had received. And instead of the crown of immortal glory, that shall be the reward of every faithful and wise servant, that man shall be taken, as an *unprofitable servant*, and cast into outer darkness; where shall be everlasting wailing and gnashing of teeth. If these things are duly considered, it will plainly appear to be the interest, as well as the duty, of every professor of Christianity, to endeavour a constant obedience to our Lord's injunction, addressed to the church of *Philadelphia*, in this text.

John, the son *Zebedee*, the *disciple whom Jesus loved*, having outlived all the rest of the apostles, and arrived at a very great age; was banished, during the bloody reign of *Domitian*, to the island that was called *Patmos*, for the word of God, and for the testimony of *Jesus Christ*. This island, though about thirty miles in circumference, was little inhabited or frequented. It lay off the western coast of the *Lesser Asia*; about six leagues south from the island *Samos*; and twenty, south west from the city of *Ephesus*. In this island, as himself informs us, he wrote this book: about the year of our Lord 96; twenty-five years after the destruction of *Jerusalem*.

After the general introduction and inscription, which are contained in the first chapter, we have the seven epistles, which *John*, by the special command of *Christ*, wrote to the same number of churches, which were in what was called the provincial *Asia*; and all at no great distance from the island where he then was.

These

These epistles take up the whole of this chapter, and the preceding.

The words now read make a part of the *sixth* of them, which was directed to *the angel of the church of Philadelphia*. Of this name there were anciently three cities; one in *Egypt*; one in *Syria*; and *this* in the Lesser *Asia*. It stood on the banks of the river *Cayster*, at the foot of mount *Imolus*: and in a very fruitful soil. But, being subject to frequent thunder and earthquakes, it never rose to be a place of great consequence.—It is now subject, as well as the rest of that country, to the the dominion of the Turks. And it is said, that, to this day, Christians enjoy more liberty there, than in most places under that government: there being still four churches of the Greek communion in that city. When, or by whom, the gospel was first published here, is uncertain. We know that *Paul* travelled, more than once, through the countries of *Phrygia* and *Pamphylia*: and as *Philadelphia* lay directly between these two, it is not improbable, that he was the first planter of this church.

In this, as in all the rest of these epistles, our Lord begins with giving such an account of himself, as corresponded to the condition of this church, v. 7.—He proceeds to a commendation of this church, and particularly of her *angel* or minister; because in much weakness, she had constantly adhered to the faith of Christ; and had not been ashamed, nor afraid to avouch his name, ver. 8. He promises to deliver her from those judaizing teachers, who had wrought much mischief there, as well as in the other churches;—by converting them to the purity of the Christian faith; and convincing them that he had loved her, ver. 9. He engages, as a gracious reward of her stedfast adherence

to his truth, to preserve her from that public calamity, which was about to come upon all the parts of the Roman empire; or, at least, upon Christians through the whole extent of it, ver. 10. *The hour of temptation*, here intended, is thought to be the third general persecution, that took place under the Emperor *Trajan*: though, if we were more fully acquainted with the history of those times, we might be capable of ascertaining, with more exactness, the meaning of this, and various other passages in these epistles.

In this verse, our Lord exhorts this church, and more especially her office-bearers, to persist, with stedfastness and constancy, in that adherence to his truths and cause, which he had commended a little before, and promised graciously to reward. In it, more particularly, we may observe the three things following:

I. An intimation given of the speedy approach of a solemn and interesting event; *Behold I come quickly.*

II. A necessary and important duty recommended, in the prospect of that event; *hold that fast which thou hast.*

III. A very awful danger to be avoided, by a careful performance of that duty; *that no man take thy crown.*

What Christ here says to the church of Philadelphia, is part of *what the Spirit saith to all the churches*. And what is here said to the *angel* of this church, is as really said to the office-bearers and judicatories of every church, to the end of the world: and to this Synod among the rest. And the sense of the words may be thus exprest.

‘ It is the indispenfible duty of every Church,—of every member of every church,—and more efpecially of thofe who are honoured to bear the office of a Gospel Ministry,—ftrenuoufly to hold faft all that with which Chrift has entrusted them; in the fure profpect of his speedy coming to judgment: left, by letting any part of it flip, they fall fhort of that crown of life, which he will then beftow, upon all who fhall be found faithful in keeping the word of his patience.’

All that is propofed, in this difcourfe, is only to give fome brief explication of each of the three things, already noticed, in the general divifion of the words; and then to conclude with fome improvement.

The *First* thing to be explained is, The intimation here given of the speedy approach of a great and interefting event; *Behold I come quickly*. We can be at no lofs to determine who is the Speaker in this paffage. The prophet describes him, in the firft chapter of this Book, 13th 14th 15th and 16th verfes. Yea, he describes himfelf, in the 7th verfe of this chapter. And neither of thefe descriptions can apply to any other perfon, but our Lord Jefus Chrift. He it is, who *holdeth the ftars in his right hand, and walketh in the midft of the golden candlefticks: and out of whose mouth proceedeth a fharp two-edged fword*. He alone hath the *key of David, opening fo as no man can fhut; and fhutting that none can open*.

There are various fenfes, in which Chrift may be faid, and has been faid, to come. We read of his coming into our world, in human nature, to *finifh transgreffion, and make an end of fin*. In this fenfe fpake the

the

the patriarch *. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,—until Shiloh come.* We hear of his coming to execute judgments upon an unbelieving and rebellious people: a dreadful instance of which took place among the Jews, about forty years after his resurrection. This is that coming, which himself is generally understood to mean, when he says,—*there be some standing here who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom* †.—The scriptures also speak of his coming in a gracious way, by a free and full communication of the influences of his Spirit, to revive his work in the church. Of this is the prophet *Haggai* to be understood ‡. *I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come:* for to this an inspired apostle applies the passage §. In a word, there is his final coming to judgment; of which himself testifies at the conclusion of this book, in words very similar to those here used; *Surely I come quickly.*

The warning in the text has been understood, by different expofitors, of all these, except the first. Some understand it of his coming to execute vengeance upon hypocrites and unbelievers, particularly in that *hour of temptation*, which is foretold in the preceding verse: as if he had said, ‘*Though thou hast hitherto, kept the word of my patience, and though I have promised to keep thee in the hour of temptation; yet if thou wilt have the accomplishment of this promise, thou must continue to keep, and hold it fast: for that hour is not far off. I am just coming to send it upon them that dwell upon the earth.*’—Some understand it of his coming in a gracious way: and they think it refers to the deliverance from the hour of temptation.

‘*Thou*

* Gen. xlix. 10. † Matth. xvi. 28. ‡ Hag. ii. 7. § Heb. xii. 26.

‘Thou hast kept my word, and thou mayest be encouraged to keep it still, in the assured hope of receiving the promised reward; for the hour of temptation, though sharp, shall be but short. I will speedily come, not only to keep thee, but also to deliver all my people from it, in the different parts of the world: and to grant them a reviving time.’

But, I apprehend, the words cannot be understood, with propriety, of any other coming of Christ, but his final coming to judgment: commonly called his second coming. The speedy approach of the hour of temptation could have little influence with this church, as an argument to hold fast; when she had express security for preservation from it. And, for the same reason, the argument drawn from its being speedily over, could be of little weight.—But the consideration of Christ’s second coming, had the same force with the Christians of Philadelphia, that it has with regard to all others. Besides, it is only at his second coming, that the crown is to be conferred upon those who hold fast. And if we compare this passage with others, that are allowed to refer to that great event, the manner of expression is so very similar, that no one can persuade himself—they are meant of different events. This is particularly the case, with regard to the passage already mentioned, in the close of the last chapter of this book.

That Christ shall come again, to judge the quick and the dead, at the last day, is a truth, of which we are as much assured, as of any thing else that God has revealed. To this himself bore a dying testimony, when he said, before the Jewish Sanhedrim, *Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of*

God, and coming in the clouds of heaven *. But when that decisive day shall be, it is impossible to determine. Many attempts have been made, to fix the precise time of it: But all such attempts have only served to evince the folly, not to say the impiety, of those who made them. And the same will be the success of all future attempts of the same kind. Even Christ himself, while in our world, instead of pretending to fix it, declared, that *of that day and hour knoweth no man; no not the angels that are in heaven: neither the Son, but the Father* †. It is purposely kept a secret; that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord.

Yet there are certain *signs of the times*, by which we may judge, in some degree, concerning the approach of that solemn day. As we have, in scripture, a concise history of God's procedure towards the church, from the beginning of the world, till the completion of the sacred canon; so we have, particularly in this book, a short prophetic account of the principal events, that have taken place since it was written, and that will take place, in relation to the church, till the end of time. And were it not that these prophecies are purposely delivered in such terms, that they cannot be fully understood, till the event explain them,—from them much might be gathered, towards determining how long the world shall stand. As it is, when we see these prophecies accomplished, we ought to consider every event foretold in them, as a step towards the second coming of Christ. We may judge, with tolerable precision, how much, of what Christ has foretold, is already past: and from thence we may form conjectures, as to what is yet to come.

Judging

* Matth. xxvi. 64.

† Mark xiii. 32.

Judging by this rule, a very small degree of attention may convince us, that the great event, of which we speak, is neither very far off, nor very near. It cannot be at a great distance. A good many years before this book was written, the Apostle Paul considered the period in which he wrote, as the *last times**. In this, and other passages of *the prophecy of this book*, our Lord speaks as if he were already on his way. He speaks not of future time, *I will come*; but, in the present, *Behold I come quickly*. Even then, he was making preparation for his actual appearing: Since that time, seventeen hundred years have almost elapsed: And a great many events have happened, that are here foretold. Thus it appears, that he has already made a considerable progress, towards his second coming.

Neither, on the other hand, can it be very near. Various important events must yet take place, before *the mystery of God be finished*. For instance; though the Jews, God's ancient people, have long been *broken off for their unbelief*, yet *God is able to graff them in again*: and we are assured he will do it, in his own time and way. For though *blindness in part is happened to them, til the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*; yet, when that shall have taken place, then *all Israel shall be saved* †. The Turkish empire,—or, at least, the Mahomedan religion, of which that empire is the principal support,—is to be overthrown; that way may be made for the conversion of the Jews: the greatest part of whom are scattered, thro' the different parts of that extensive monarchy. This is what interpreters generally understand, by the *pouring out of the vial upon the river Euphrates, whereby the waters*

* Heb. i. 1.

† Rom. xi. 23,—26.

thereof shall be dried up; that the way of the kings of the east may be prepared *. The church of Christ is to be advanced, to a state of dignity, as well as of tranquillity and peace, superior to any thing that ever she has enjoyed heretofore; and is, at the same time, to have her boundaries extended, over the whole habitable world. In that prosperous state she is to continue, for a considerable length of time: the scriptures express it by *a thousand years*. A description of it we have, in the *twentieth* chapter of this book, from the beginning to the 7th verse.—Whether we understand that thousand years of a definite, or of an indefinite time; whether we consider them as commencing at the Reformation, or at the total downfall of *Antichrist*;—we are sure, that a great part of them is yet to come. Yea, we are sure, that a principal part of the glory that belongs to that period, has never yet appeared in the world. They must have an opinion, of the present state of the protestant churches, by much too favourable, who consider it as agreeing, in almost any respect, with the description just now referred to.

In a special manner, the scriptures assure us, that, in order to pave the way for this prosperous state of the church, and for the second coming of Christ,—the whole fabric of superstition and idolatry, that has been so artfully raised, and so long supported, in the *Romish church*, shall be overthrown from the foundation. As Paul assures his Thessalonians, that the *day of Christ* should not come, except there should be a falling away first, and that man of sin should be revealed, the son of perdition †; so may we be likewise assured, that it shall not come, until that wicked one be consumed, with

* ev. xvi. 12. † 2 Thess. ii. 3, 8.

the breath of the Lord's mouth, and destroyed with the brightness of his coming. It is some time since this kingdom of antichrist began to fall; but when he shall be totally overthrown, none has yet been able, positively to determine. Reformation has, for many years, been making but a slow progress. Rather, the kingdom of graven images has, in some places, been gaining ground. It has been so, in an alarming degree, among ourselves. And I pray God, that *the deadly wound*, which was given to the *head of the beast*, by the Reformation, may not yet be *healed*: and we permitted to *go back even to Babylon*, before we be *delivered*. But, if it should even be so, we are firmly assured, that the kingdom of Christ shall prevail at last: and the cry shall be heard, *Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and shall no more arise*. To accomplish all these important events, must needs require a considerable space of time: and therefore, we may reasonably conclude, that the coming of Christ is not yet very near.

Concerning the manner of his coming, or the transactions of that great and dreadful day, we propose not to speak at large. At a time when the inhabitants of the world will have as little expectation of it, as we have this day,—the Son of God will descend from heaven, in human nature: adorned with all his own, and all his Father's glory: accompanied by all the hosts of elect angels, and with all the myriads of glorified saints. *He will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God*; by the astonishing sound of which, the dead shall be roused, from the sleep of thousands of years: and they that are alive on the earth shall, in a *moment* be so changed, as that no difference shall remain, between

tween them and those that have been longest in their graves. Then the saints, both dead and living, shall be *caught up together, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.* Being set on his right hand, acknowledged by him, in the sight of an assembled world, and adjudged to wear a crown of eternal life and glory in his presence,—they shall join with him in judging and condemning reprobate angels and men. *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal*.*

There is no other event of equal importance as this, to any man or woman: *for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.* There we must *give an impartial account of all the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad:* of all the privileges that ever we enjoyed,—of all the talents that were committed to our trust,—of all the opportunities we had to improve them,—of all our improvement, and all our neglect, and all our abuse of them. *There every eye shall see* the great Judge: and every one shall receive a sentence from him, final and irreverfible, according as his works shall be. Neither friend nor enemy, dead nor living, shall be able to fit his summons. There shall be no appeal from his sentence: nor any delay of its execution.

We may be well affured, that none of us, in this generation, shall continue alive, at the second coming of Christ. We must all be swept away by the besom of death, as hundreds of generations have been before us—Yet, it concerns us all, to be prepared for his coming, as much as if we knew that it would be tomorrow; and that *we should then be alive and remain.* It is but a little when he will come to every individual

* Matth. xxv. 46.

individual among us, by his messenger death. In the same estate, in which death finds us, it will leave us. And after death, we can undergo no change, till the resurrection. In the same estate, therefore, that death finds us, we will be found at the coming of Christ. If we are not prepared for that great event before death, we can never be prepared at all; for there is no preparation in the grave, whither we go.

WE proceed, *Secondly*, To the consideration of the duty, that is recommended to us in the text, and ought to be practised in the view of Christ's coming; as it is express in these words, *hold that fast which thou hast*. And here it may be proper to enquire, What it is that we are called to *hold fast*? and what is to be understood by our holding it fast?

1st, What we are called to hold fast, may in part, be gathered from the preceding part of this epistle. If we view the text in its connection with what goes before, we shall see what the church of Philadelphia *had*; and this is what she is called to *hold fast*

Through the good hand of God upon her, this church had attained a good measure of conformity to the will of Christ; both in her doctrine and practice. Of all the seven churches, to whom these epistles were directed, there are but two, in which our Lord finds nothing to reprove; that of *Smyrna*, and this of *Philadelphia*. The churches of *Ephesus*, of *Pergamos*, and of *Thyatira*, are all highly commended; but still he hath *somewhat against* them. But against this church he brings no charge at all. She had attained some degree of purity: and she was endeavouring to maintain it; as far as was consistent with human imperfection,

perfection, and with her own particular infirmities, for she had but a *little strength*. Her imperfection and infirmity he graciously overlooks: and exhorts her to *bold fast* that degree of purity which she had attained. As every church, as well as every person must be imperfect, while in this world,—it will always be necessary to make progress, in conformity to the *pattern shewn* in divine revelation. But it is peculiarly shameful when a church falls backward, and suffers herself to lose what she had formerly attained. Some defects and imperfections might be winked at, in an infant church,—or one that was just emerging from the darkness of superstition, and was aiming at further reformation,—which would be altogether intolerable in a church that had been of long standing, and had formerly been remarkable for her purity and zeal. Thus a great degree of folly and impertinence may be born with in a child; but if a man who had acquired a reputation for wisdom, should return to such childish things, he would be thought to have lost his senses. What the Spirit of God says, with regard to particular persons, may, with the same propriety, be applied to churches: *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him* *.

It is likewise apparent, that this church had been remarkable for her zeal and activity, in contending for the truth: and had resisted many temptations to fall from her own stedfastness. She had *kept* the word of Christ, *the word of his patience*, and had *not denied* his name. What she had formerly kept so strenuously—was undoubtedly a part of what she now had: and this also she was called to *bold fast*. She was not to remit in her zeal: nor to suffer herself to be

* Heb. x. 38.

be overcome by temptations that she had formerly resisted. She was not, in any time coming, to give up with any part of that, for which she had so laudibly contended hitherto. Though the members of a church are changed from time to time, she continues the same church, through all succeeding generations; while a church continues in the same place, or among the same people. And if ever any church is found to let that slip, which had been justly matter of testimony with her before,—her former practice will rise up in judgment against her: and she will be self-condemned.

But every church that has the word of divine revelation in her hands, may be said to *have* all that this word contains: and all *that*—every church, as well as the church of *Philadelphia*, is called to hold fast. Though the *word of Christ's patience* is frequently understood to mean, that part of revealed truth, which is peculiarly born down and opposed, in any particular period; yet, it must be viewed as comprehending all that is contained in the scriptures at large. This was it that the church of *Philadelphia* had kept: this, therefore, she now *had*: and this she is commanded still to hold fast. Whatever Christ, as the great Prophet sent from God, hath made known to the church, is committed to her, to be kept pure and entire; and to be transmitted to succeeding generations, in the same condition in which it was received. To this purpose speaks the psalmist Asaph*. *He hath established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel; which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children who should*

*

Q

be

* Psal. lxxviii. 5. 6.

be born: *who should arise, and declare them to their children.* To enumerate all the parts of this sacred *depositum*, which Christ has entrusted to the church; and which every member of the church should exert himself to retain, to improve during his own life, and to deliver entire to posterity,—would be impossible in one discourse. We cannot but mention a few generals.

1. We are called to *hold fast* all those *doctrines*, which are taught in the scriptures of truth, and exhibited as the matter of our faith. The church of Christ is called *the pillar and ground of truth* *: to intimate, that it belongs to her to support the truth, to preserve it from oblivion and from corruption, and to exhibit it to public view; as a pillar supports, preserves, and exhibits the inscription that is written upon it. No divine truth is made known to us in vain. But, whatever was the end of its revelation, that end must be, so far, lost, if any such truth is either forgotten or perverted,—by ignorance or by error. However little value may be put, by some men, upon some truths; because they are pleased to call them circumstantial, there is not one proposition contained in the word of God, which is not worthy to be contended for, even to a *resisting unto blood*. Christ himself mentions it, as one main end of his coming into the world; and all his followers should consider it as a principal end of their existence, that they *should bear witness to the truth* †.

2. We should *hold fast* all the *laws* of Christ's kingdom. As in the character of a prophet, he has given us a complete system of divine truth, containing all that we ought to believe concerning God; so, in the character

* 1 Tim. iii. 15.

† John xviii. 37.

character of a Lawgiver and King, he has given us a perfect code of laws, containing all that God requires of us. These laws he enjoins the church to observe: and to see that they be observed by all her members. To the church representative, *i. e.* to the judicatories of the church, he has given power and authority to execute these laws, and to enforce the observation of them: not with pecuniary mulcts, not with corporal punishments, nor with civil penalties of any kind; but with those wholesome censures, that himself has instituted in his word, *for edification, and not for destruction.* If any of the laws of Christ be forgotten, or fall into desuetude,—if the church, in her constitute capacity transgress them, or suffer them to be transgressed by her members,—she is disobedient to the injunction in the text; and is in danger of losing her crown.

3. We must *hold fast* every ordinance of divine worship, that is appointed in the word of God: nothing must be added to them,—nothing diminished from them. Every man, that has a servant, considers it as his indisputable right, to determine how, and with what he will be served. And surely that right cannot be denied to God himself. That some kind of worship is due to him, no person, who acknowledges the being of a God, can deny. How he is to be worshipped, himself has made known to the church, in all ages. To neglect any part of his instituted worship, is not only to disobey, but to rob him. And to pretend to worship him by what he has not instituted, is to usurp his prerogative. Thus, all will-worship is a species of idolatry, and is equally dangerous to him that invents, and to him that practises it. The examples of *Nadab* and *Abihu*, of *Korah* and his company, of *Uzza* and

the men of *Beth-Shemesh*, of king *Uzziab*, and various others, are recorded in scripture, for the express purpose of warning all men, that they take not upon them to approach unto God, unless in *the due order*. Besides, all corruptions in the worship of God are so many grievous injuries done to the church herself. Those ordinances by which God is worshipped—are likewise the appointed means, by which he maintains communion with his worshippers; and in so doing, affords them a happiness superior to all that can arise from the abundance of *corn and wine*. In proportion as these ordinances are corrupted, our communion with God is prevented, and our happiness consequently marred. Those superstitious rites, that some, who call themselves Christians, have introduced into the worship of God, many of which are still retained in a neighbouring church, are undoubtedly much to blame; for that ignorance of vital religion, that so mournfully prevails among their people.

4. We are to *hold fast* that *form of government* which Christ has established in his church. Very early did ambition and carnal policy begin to have influence with those who had the affairs of the church in their hands. This led them to model the church of Christ; after the pattern of the kingdoms of this world. By this means the popish hierarchy was established, the *mystery of iniquity* was completed, and antichrist was raised to his throne. At the Reformation, the princes of this world, sensible how incompatible the popish form of government was, with the peace of civil states,—took it for granted, that all church government would be so, that was independent of the power of the civil magistrate. For this reason, they attempted to subject the *church* to the *state*: and make ecclesiastical

ecclesiastical government a mere branch of the civil policy. In this attempt they were but too successful; Hence every national church, at this day professing the protestant religion, is degenerated into an appendage of the civil government: just as the various kingdoms of Europe were formerly considered, and treated, as appendages of the See of Rome. The native consequence of this is, that it is now become fashionable, to teach, and believe, that all church government is a matter of mere indifference: that Christ has instituted no particular form of government in his church; but has left it to the civil magistrate, or else to I know not whom, to set up, in every church, what form of government they think most agreeable. According to this doctrine, presbytery may be the best form of government in one church, episcopacy in another, independency in a third, and so on. But Christ's *dove*, his *undefiled*, that catholic church which is his spouse, — *is but one*. She is a regular organized body, whose parts are all homogeneous, and agree with one another.—The King of Zion is not so careless about the state of his kingdom, nor so unfaithful over his Father's house, as to leave it to any man, or any set of men, to model it according to their pleasure. He has instituted a form of government in it, essentially different from all the kingdoms of this world, and totally independent upon them: which none has power to change. The man who attempts to change it, usurps the throne of Christ: and the church that submits to any such change, does, in so far, renounce her head, and set up another in his place. I trust we are all satisfied, and therefore it would be superfluous now to prove, that this form of government, which Christ has instituted, is the *Presbyterial*; the essence of which consists

consists in the exact parity of all the ministers of the church, and the due subordination of her judicatories. For *that*, let us continue zealous, as we would approve ourselves faithful subjects and servants of Jesus Christ.

5. We must hold fast all the *privileges, rights, and immunities*, that Christ, in his holy word, has bequeathed and desponed to his church, or to her members; for instance, the right of the church to call her own assemblies, the right of the Christian people to choose their own office-bearers; and all others of a similar nature. These are not to be tamely given up, to any that would rob us of them: much less are they to be voluntarily resigned into the hands of the great men of the world,—as has been shamefully done among us. They must be retained at all hazards, and contended for with unshaken firmness: not merely on account of their value to us, or from regard to our own interest; but chiefly, from respect to him by whom they were bestowed; and under an impresson of the solemn account that we must give of all that he has bestowed upon us, at his coming.—If we do otherwise, we are guilty of the same sin, that is so sharply reprov'd in the church of Judah, *I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold; which they prepared for Baal* *.

6. As a mean of preserving all the rest, we must hold fast that pure and holy *discipline*, which Christ has set up as a hedge about his church, and about all that she possesses. However unwilling some members of the church may be, to submit to the discipline of the Lord's house, however remiss some may be, in the administration of it,—however much slander and reproach

* Hof. ii. 8.

proach they may suffer, who would endeavour to be faithful in this respect,—and however little effect it has, for reclaiming offenders, in our day; it will always be found, that where the exercise of discipline is relaxed, that church does not long retain, either her purity, or her other privileges. How can she? when the hedge of God's vineyard is broken down, what can be safe within? when no due endeavours are used to *purge out the old leaven*, who can be surprized, if *the whole lump be leavened*?

2dly, If any enquire what we are to understand by our *holding fast* these things? It includes the following particulars.

1. An unshaken adherence to them all, notwithstanding any attempts of enemies to draw us aside. The expression in the text necessarily supposes such attempts. There can be little occasion for holding fast a thing, unless there be some danger of its slipping through our fingers, or else of its being wrested from us by some external force. As it was the main design of Christ's coming into our world, to destroy the works of the devil; so it has always been Satan's principal design to destroy the works of Christ: to render abortive what he has done for his people, and to deprive them of all those advantages which he has procured for them, or bestowed upon them. Of the pure doctrines of Christ he labours to deprive the church, by sowing the tares of error, and by introducing sloth and ignorance among her members. He labours to rob her of the laws of Christ, or else of all the benefit that she might derive from them, by leading her members into scandalous practices, and by preventing the regular exercise of discipline. He deprives her of the pure
worship

worship of God, by introducing superstition and idolatry in its place. And, in general, every thing that our Lord requires us to *hold fast*, Satan endeavours to take from us, either by force or by fraud. In all our endeavours to *hold it fast* we must still have an eye to this: and while we struggle to maintain our possession, our endeavours should still be adapted to resist the enemy, according to the manner in which he exerts himself against us.

2. It includes an open and constant avouching of that adherence, notwithstanding all temptations, of whatever kind, to the contrary. It is not enough that we hold fast, in our hearts, those truths which Christ has revealed, continuing unshaken in our faith of them: it is also necessary, that we *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering* *. A profession of the name of Christ, where there is no real adherence to him in the heart, is an open mocking of God; but to satisfy ourselves with believing in the heart, or indeed to pretend to it, is to deceive ourselves; unless *confession is made with the mouth unto salvation*. It is indispensibly requisite that we give Christ our heart; but it is also requisite that we confess him before men. When we do not; we shew that we are ashamed of him: we materially *deny his name*. Sometimes the enemy strives to lead us astray in this respect, by promising great advantages in the way of denying Christ: sometimes he endeavours to terrify us, by threatening or inflicting many evils, upon those who faithfully persist in confessing him: and often both these are joined together. But it is our duty to harden ourselves alike against all his allurements and against all his terrors. With cheerfulness must we forego every advantage that can be attained by turning our back
upon

upon Christ: and resolvé to *suffer the loss of all things*, rather than give up the smallest article of what he has entrusted us with. Yea, we must not hesitate a moment, about submitting to the worst that devils or men can inflict, rather than even seem to be ashamed of him. Sufficient to balance all earthly considerations is that solemn declaration made by our Lord himself*; *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

3. A strenuous contending for it, when we see it impugned, born down or opposed: and when any attempt is made to destroy, or take it out of the way. All Christians, while in this world, must consider themselves as soldiers, and soldiers in the field. As we may be assured that the enemy will not only seek our destruction, but also the destruction of all that we have; and particularly of all that belongs to the Captain of our salvation among our hands; so we must exert ourselves, not only for our own preservation, but likewise in defence of all that Christ has left among us. A soldier, in the day of battle, must be peculiarly attentive to his colours, and ready at all hazards, to defend them. The word of Christ's patience is the Christian's colours,—the *banner* which God hath given to them that fear him, that it may be displayed because of the truth †: and in its behalf we should exert ourselves to the utmost. Whoever, in our sight or hearing; set themselves in opposition to any thing that we have received from Christ, we must not only bear a suitable testimony in its behalf; we must likewise set ourselves for its defence: not with carnal weapons,

*

R

but

* Matth. x. 31, 32.

† Psal. lx. 4.

but with arguments drawn from the word of God, and from sound reason. Neither a sense of our own weakness, nor of the superior strength of the enemy, should influence us to desert the cause. Still we should quit ourselves like men, and be strong: in a firm dependence upon his gracious assistance, who has *chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty* *. Thus we are to *contend earnestly for the faith*, and for every thing else, that Christ hath *once delivered to the saints*.

4. It necessarily includes a careful and habitual improvement of all that Christ hath given us, in the manner that corresponds to his design in bestowing it. We have nothing for which we must not be accountable to him that gave it. Nor has Christ given us any thing, that may not, through his grace, be so improved, that he may, at his coming, receive his *own with usury*. Christianity is no mere speculative science. The laws of Christ are of no use to us, if they serve not to regulate our practice. Every truth that he has revealed to us, is calculated to have its influence upon the heart and life. Even the privileges that we enjoy are intended to call forth our gratitude, and so to animate us to a life of holiness: that we may thereby glorify God on the earth, and be gradually prepared for the final enjoyment of him in heaven. In all the gifts, that ever our exalted Redeemer gave unto men on earth, his uniform design was, and still is, the continued *edification* of his *body* the church, and of all her several members, in faith, in holiness and comfort; *till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man*:

* 1 Cor. i. 27.

to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ *. Unless this design is kept in view; so as we, in the use of all his gifts, may be workers together with him in the promoting of it,—it is impossible to hold fast what he has given us, in a manner corresponding to the sense of this text.

It is now time to proceed to the *Third* and last thing observed in the words; which was, The danger that is to be avoided, by a due performance of what is above enjoined. This is exprest in these words, *that no man take thy crown.*—The word *man* is not properly in the original: The clause might be read without it: *that none take thy crown.* And it should be understood in a sense more extensive than our translation admits of. Our crown, indeed, is often in danger from men; but it is much oftner endangered by the assaults and temptations of Satan.—Against devils, therefore, as well as men,—and, in general, against all whose endeavours tend to cut us short of our crown, should we be continually on our guard, that none of them be allowed to rob us of it. For the better understanding of this part of the text, the following things are to be observed.

Our blessed Lord, at his second coming, will bestow a crown of immortal glory upon every person who shall be found to have persevered to the end, in holding fast what he had bestowed upon them in this world. The connection between the first clause of this verse and the last manifestly intimates, that this crown is to be expected by the faithful followers of Christ, at his coming.—All Christians, from the moment of their conversion, are made kings and priests unto God: but

* Eph. iv. 13.

in this world they are only kings in minority, or more properly, *heirs of the kingdom*. In the other world, they will be actually invested with the royal dignity : and the day of Christ's coming will be the day of their solemn inauguration, or coronation. Hence is the promise of Christ to the church of *Smyrna* * ; *Be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life*. The exhortation there delivered to that church, is materially the same with that addressed to the church of *Philadelphia* in this text : and enforced by the same motive. And both are part of *what the Spirit saith to all the churches*. A crown of life, therefore, shall, in that decisive day, be enjoyed by every person in every church, who is enabled to persist in a faithful obedience to this injunction : not as a debt due to their merit ; but as a reward graciously annexed to their service. Of this crown the Apostle Paul, in the close of his days, express the most lively hope †, *I have fought, says he, the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : and henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me in that day : and not to me only ; but unto all them also that love his appearing*.

This gracious promise of a crown of life, being directed to all that hear the gospel, without distinction ; accompanied with the command to be faithful, or to hold fast what Christ has entrusted us with ; the crown is, by this means, and in this way, offered to every one that enjoys the dispensation of grace. Thus every one is not only warranted to look upon it as his own, in point of access, but also to hope for the final attainment of it. And he who neglects the crown, or suffers

* Rev. xi. 10.

† 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

fers himself to fall short of it, through the neglect of that faithfulness, to which it is annexed,—by *following after lying vanities*, really *forsakes his own mercy*.

The man, on the other hand, who, being savingly united to Christ, and influenced by his Spirit, aims at the faithfulness which Christ requires, though he is not yet in actual possession of the crown, has a sure and unalienable interest in it. It is his own as truly as if he were already wearing it. And he cannot fail to obtain the full and immediate possession of it, at Christ's coming.

But, it being impossible for men to judge otherwise than by the outward appearance, every one who holds fast his profession, and aims at a corresponding practice, is to be considered by us, in the judgment of charity, as being in Christ, and having an interest in the promised crown. We may consider it as *his* crown, and are warranted to speak of it in that manner. So speaks our Lord, in the text, though he knew the hearts of all men. He says *thy crown*, even while he supposes that the person to whom he speaks may come short of it.

Yet none, who fall totally and finally away from their steadfastness shall ever inherit the crown. It is, indeed, matter of comfort and of promise, that none, who ever had an actual interest in it, shall ever be suffered thus to fall away, or to lose it. Nay, they *are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation*; while the everlasting inheritance, the crown here spoken of, is *reserved in heaven for them* *. But when a person makes shipwreck of his profession, being guilty of a total and final apostacy, he thereby gives evidence,

* 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

dence, that he never had any real interest in the crown, whatever his pretensions may have been. And when Christ comes, he shall assuredly be deprived of it. His fair appearances, his hopeful beginnings, his continuing to hold fast for a time, will never come into consideration before *his* dread tribunal, unless as a witness against himself. As an unfaithful and unwise servant, he will be condemned to *outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Yea, even partial and temporary defection lays a bar in the way of our attaining the crown: and tends to diminish the weight of it, if we do attain it at the last. It lays a bar in the way,—and such a bar as nothing can remove, but an extraordinary exertion of all-subduing grace. Every act of unfaithfulness richly deserves exclusion from the kingdom: and if such exclusion does not follow upon it, the sole reason is, because he with whom we have to do is *God and not man.*—It tends also to diminish the weight of our crown, if we come, with difficulty to the possession of it: For every person on the right hand of Christ, as well as every one who shall be found on his left hand at his coming, shall then be rewarded, *according as his works shall be.* He who has built *Gold and silver, and precious stones,* in the house of God; so that his work may abide the fire, shall not only have his soul for a prey, but shall likewise enjoy a plentiful reward of his work. Christ shall publicly declare his approbation of what he has done, and acknowledge him to have acted the part of a good and faithful servant. Such shall be the happiness of every one who has been enabled, constantly and faithfully to hold fast all that he has received of the Lord. And this he will consider, without doubt, as a considerable addition to his weight

of glory : a precious jewel in his crown. But such a jewel can never be set in the crown of that man who has made apostacy, or fallen from his own stedfastness. In as far as he has done so, his work must be lost : Christ can never approve or reward what such a man did against himself, his truths, or his laws. And himself can only *be saved as it were by fire.*

From all this it clearly appears, that every attempt to move us from our stedfastness, is an indirect attempt to rob us of our crown. The connection, which Christ hath instituted, between our holding fast his name, and our enjoying the crown at his coming, nothing can possibly dissolve. The two will ever continue inseparably joined together. The man who holds the one shall have the other : and he who gives up with one, infallibly loses both. Hence, that enemy would effectually take from us our crown, who should finally prevail with us to give up what we have received from Christ, or to betray that important trust, which he has committed to us.

Those enemies, indeed, who set themselves to deprive us of what we have, and are here called to hold fast, are incapable of enjoying that crown, which they may take from us : but one may take from another, what himself cannot retain, or what he does not wish to possess. Satan well knows that he never can enjoy our crown : and it is not with any such view that he attempts to take it from us. Envy, hateful and pernicious as it is, is a less malignant passion, than that by which he is influenced. Pure malice is his only motive : and if we lose our crown, his whole end is gained. Our Lord, then, does not mean that our crown is to be worn by him that takes it ; but solely, that he robs us of it, who moves us from our stedfastness.

ness. A similar form of speech is used in various other passages of scripture. Thus Solomon exhorts*, *Remove thy way far from her, and come not near the door of her house: lest thou give thine honour to another, and thy years unto the cruel.* The cruel may take from a man both his years and his honour; but themselves can enjoy neither; yet he whom they destroy may be said to give his years to them. Thus our enemies may be said to take our crown, when they prevail with us to give up with the word of Christ's patience; because it is as effectually lost to us, as if they were to enjoy it in our stead.

But there is a sense, in which we may suffer another both to take and to wear our crown. In certain games, which, of old, were celebrated with much solemnity, crowns of various denominations, were proposed as the reward of the victors: and whether they run or wrestled, the crown was in their eye, as the prize for which they contended. So Christians are sometimes represented as wrestling *against principalities and powers*, and sometimes as running in a race. But, in whatever light we view them, still this glorious crown is in their eye, as *the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* There are races, in which, however many run, only one can obtain the prize. But there are others, in which prizes of different value are given to different persons, according to the manner in which they respectively acquit themselves. He who runs well, and keeps the start for a while, bids fair for the first prize: it is already looked upon as his own, both by himself and others. But if he slack his pace, another gets before him, and seizes the crown which he counted upon as his own; so that he

can

* Prov. v. 8, 9.

can only come in for the second prize. To this our Lord is thought, by some, to allude in these words: for such is the Christian race. Here every one that runs lawfully receives a crown; but every one's crown is proportioned to his success in running. A holy emulation should, therefore, influence every runner. Every church should strive to go before every other: and every Christian to outrun his brethren, in holding fast what we have from Christ. Every one that gets before us we should consider as if he intended to gain the crown that we wished and hoped to enjoy. Each one should exert himself, as if he expected the first prize,—the most weighty and glorious crown.

IT now remains that we draw to a conclusion with some improvement of the subject. And it affords us a variety of useful information and direction; for instance,

1. It informs us how widely they are mistaken, and how miserably they will be disappointed in a little, who allow themselves to say in their hearts, *Our Lord delayeth his coming*: and from that consideration, indulge themselves in *beating their fellow-servants*, in abusing the Master's talents, neglecting his work, or any otherwise transgressing his injunctions. To every such person Christ will certainly come, *at an hour when he thinks not*: and, if he is not blessed with repentance, will *cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites* *. Christ is *not slack* in relation to this matter, *as some men count slackness*. *Behold he cometh quickly*. Ever since he made this declaration, he has been, as it were, on his way: and he certainly will come, as soon as the way is paved for it,

*

S

by

* Matth. xxiv. 49, 50.

by the accomplishment of those events which are written in the prophecy of this book. Though his actual coming to judgment may yet be at some distance, it is but a very short time when he will come to every one of us by death. And as death finds us, so will we appear before his tribunal, at his coming. To those who indulge themselves in sin, or who doubt whether he will come at all or not,—on account of his apparent delays, he will come much sooner than they desire. And to those that *wait for him*, it is but *a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*

2. It shews us, in what light we ought to view all our privileges, possessions and endowments of every kind. They are not our property: nor are we at liberty to dispose of any, even the least of them, at our pleasure. They are all our Master's talents, which he has committed into our hand, with a strict charge to *occupy till he come*; and with a positive assurance, that, when he comes, he will require his *own with usury*. If therefore, we find ourselves more favoured than many others, let us be more thankful in proportion, more zealous, and more diligent than they.—We have the word and ordinances of God, in some measure, both in purity and plenty; while many of our brethren of mankind are left to perish without the knowledge of the way of salvation: and many of those who are called Christians, have divine institutions so far corrupted, that the things which are of God can scarcely be distinguished from the doctrines and inventions of men. Instead of improving this for the nourishment of our lusts, particularly of our pride, as we are too apt to do,—let us be careful to distinguish ourselves as much, by our diligence and activity in Christ's service, as he has distinguished

distinguished us in point of privilege. We know, that *to whom much is given, of him shall much be required*: and it is highly reasonable that it should be so; for, even in the common affairs of this life, *to whom men have given much, of him they will ask the more* *.

3. This subject evinces, how incompatible with genuine Christianity—is a life of sloth and inactivity, or a life of indifference and carelessness about spiritual things, and particularly about the public interests of the kingdom of Christ. Even in regard to what concerns this world, it is no man's interest, any more than his duty, to live idle: much less in relation to spiritual things. Every one of us has it as a principal part of our business here, to prepare for the second coming of Christ, and for that eternity which is to follow. We can never be ready for his coming, unless we have a previous interest in that crown which he will then bestow; and be in a condition to give him some proper account of what we now enjoy by his bounty. This we can never be, unless in the way of *occupying till he come*. We must work, and run, and strive, and wrestle, and *hold fast*. Our enemies are never idle: and if, at any time, we give ourselves up to sloth, or fall asleep in security, they will be sure to improve the opportunity thereby afforded them. If they cannot wrest from us by force what Christ has entrusted us with, they will leave no means unattempted, to catch it away by guile. And it will be a sorry account that we can give of it, if we can only say, as the Roman soldiers were taught to say of the body of our Lord, *they stole it away while we slept*.

4. This subject points out to us, both the necessity of separation from corrupt churches, and the precise

* Luke xii. 48.

time when such separation becomes necessary. One of those, which are thought the most powerful arguments against separation, is drawn from this consideration, that Christ himself, when dictating these epistles to the Asiatic churches,—though he censures some of them for very gross corruptions, never exhorts any of their members to separate from their communion, in order to keep their garments clean. The truth of the premises is admitted, but the conclusion does not follow. He positively enjoins upon such churches—a reformation of their respective corruptions: and if he had required separation from them, it must have been upon the supposition, that no regard would be paid to his injunction. To make this supposition, would not only have been most dishonourable to those churches, but plainly derogatory to his own authority. But can it be supposed, that, if those churches, or any of them had contemned such an injunction, and refused to be reformed, it would have been the duty of their members, to have held communion with them in these corruptions, rather than to have erected themselves into a separate church? But, to confine ourselves to the text;—It must be the duty of every private Christian, as well of every church, to hold fast what we have received from Christ. If any church refuses to comply with this exhortation, it is the duty of her members and children, to *plead with* their *mother* on that account. If their pleadings are ineffectual, they must still *hold fast* for themselves. And if matters come to such a pass, that they cannot hold, or enjoy communion with her, in those things of Christ which she still hath, without giving up with those things that she has let go, and taking part in those corruptions that she obstinately retains,—then it must be a duty to separate,

rate,

rate, as the only way left, to keep our own hands clean. We ought always to *endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace*; but we must also hold fast whatever Christ has delivered to us: and surely one command of Christ does not contradict another. We can never be called to maintain unity, at the expence of purity: nor to avoid schism, by giving up with that *faith*, or any part of it, *which was once delivered to the saints*. Even with corrupt churches we are to hold communion, as long as we can do so, in a way of holding fast what we have received of the Lord; but no longer. If the church herself attempts to rob us of what we have, and will not allow us communion with her, unless we give it up, we ought not to hesitate which to choose. If our separation from the national church of Scotland—cannot be vindicated on this principle, we are ready to give it up.

5. This subject sets before us the danger, as well as the sin of apostacy, or backsliding from any part of reformation that had once been attained, either by a church, or by any individual. They who are guilty of it, transgress an exprefs command of Christ; and so pour contempt upon his authority, and dishonour upon himself. They also do the greatest injury to their own souls: they, in so far, renounce, and give away their crown. What shall we then think of the conduct of some men, who once *joined sweet counsel* with this Synod, and *walked to the house of God in their company*; who have turned their back upon some of the most material articles of that testimony which they once espoused, and upon various parts of that reformation which they, in conjunction with us, had attained: and all this, through their preposterous attachment

tachment to an oath, that binds them to the communion of the national church, which yet they avow themselves to have forsaken. Before they went out from us,—this court had espoused a judicial testimony for the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the reformed church of Scotland, in her purest times. They had also published an act for renewing our solemn covenants, with a bond adapted to the present state of the church. And our brethren had been among the most forward to promote that work, and to join in it.—But no sooner had they left this Synod, than they began to find pretended mistakes in the Judicial Testimony, and, after ten years labour spent upon it, have, at last, published what they call a *Re-exhibition* of it, so mutilated and changed, that it is no longer consistent with itself. And this they have done, in such a manner, as makes it evident, that this testimony is no longer of any judicial authority among them: the whole, as re-exhibited, being merely the work of a committee, who could not pretend to any judicial powers. The solemn duty of public covenanting with God, after many of them had joined in it with apparent cheerfulness, they have totally neglected for thirty years and more: and some of them have not been ashamed to impugn and vilify it from the press; at least, as it is practised among us: though we still practise it in the same manner, as themselves concurred in appointing it to be done.—Is this to hold fast what they once had? Have these men forgot that Christ cometh quickly? Or is it, with them, a matter of no consequence, who take their crown?

6. In a word, this subject informs us of this comfortable truth, that none of the followers of Christ are required, any more than *Job* was,—to serve, or to fear

God

God for nought. Indeed, our best services are both imperfect and defiled: and therefore, instead of claiming, or expecting any reward, as a debt due to us on that account; we have reason to adore the forbearance of God, if we are not punished for the manner in which they are performed.—But *God is not unrighteous, to forget our work and labour of love.* A great reward is graciously provided, for them that keep his statutes. *A crown of glory, that fadeth not away,* shall, at the coming of Christ, be the final reward of all that *hold fast his name,* and are *faithful for him unto the death.* All those earthly advantages, that we might gain by turning away from him, we may rationally despise; as well as all the things that we can suffer,—whether from devils or men, for our adherence to the word of his patience, or for our obedience to his laws: while we have respect to the glorious compensation secured to us in that day. He has made it our interest to do our duty: and to neglect or violate it is the greatest injury that we can do ourselves.

I Shall now conclude with a short ADDRESS, first to the Members of this Synod who are present, and then to the Christian people, of whom this audience is composed.

REVEREND FATHERS AND BRETHREN,

I am sensible of my unfitness to set before you the duties of your station and office. Instead of exhorting you, I have need to be exhorted by you. But, considering your appointment of me to this service, as the call of our common Master,—I dare not, on any pretence, decline recalling to your mind and my own, a few things, that our Lord expects of us, and will require

quire at his coming,—as they are suggested by this text.

What was written to this church of *Philadelphia*; the Spirit of God still continues to say to all churches. What is said to the churches in general, is peculiarly addressed to the *angels* or office-bearers of every church: more especially, when, being assembled in their judicative capacity, they represent the churches themselves. To us, therefore, is the word of this exhortation sent. Thus saith the Lord Jesus Christ to this REVEREND SYNOD, *Behold I come quickly, hold that fast which you have: let no man take your crown.*

Let us, then, consider attentively what it is that we have: what our Master has entrusted us with, and expects an account of from us, at his coming. We must be accountable for all that is contained in the volume of divine revelation, and for the manner in which we shall have conducted ourselves, as *stewards of the mysteries of God*. We must be answerable for all the purity, and conformity to the divine pattern, that has ever been attained by the reformed church of Scotland, whose representatives we have the honour to be; for our diligence in preserving and maintaining it, and in transmitting it entire to succeeding generations. We must give an account of all those truths and duties that were held fast, and witnessed for, by this church in former times, and by those of her members who *resisted unto blood, striving against sin*. Their testimony is now among our hands: and we are called to hold it fast as they did; though we should be obliged to do it at the same expence. We are entrusted with all that is, in a peculiar manner, *the word of CHRIST's patience*, in our own day: and we are called

to be the more zealous in keeping it, in the view of an *hour of temptation*, which God seems threatening to send upon these isles of the sea, to try them that dwell in our sinning lands. We must answer, as every other man must do, for our own souls; and for all the talents of every kind, that are committed to us respectively. And at our hand will all those souls be required, that are now put under our charge. Oh! how weighty and important is our trust? Well might it be said, even by an inspired apostle, *Who is sufficient for these things?* Happy it is, that we may add, as he did,—*our sufficiency is of God.*

Let us always bear in mind, that our Lord is on his way: and let us not forget what we have to expect from him, at his coming. If we are ever so faithful and diligent, we are but unprofitable servants still, and can merit nothing; but if we do hold fast till he come, we may be assured of a crown: and our crown shall be so much the more brilliant, as our work is now difficult, and our charge heavy. On the other hand, if we are unfaithful, even though the root of the matter be in us, our crown shall be diminished, our work shall be lost, and our souls only saved, *as it were by fire.* But if we are habitually undutiful to our Master, and suffer ourselves to be robbed of what he has committed to our trust,—we shall finally lose our crown: and our misery, in the other world, shall bear an exact proportion to our honour, our talents, our privileges, and the importance of the trust that is committed to us now. *If it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for those to whom the gospel has been clearly and purely dispensed;—how intolerable must it be for that man, who, being called to preach the gospel to others, brings*

their blood upon his head by his unfaithfulness, and is himself a cast-away!

Let us, therefore, be careful to acquaint ourselves, more and more, with what we have received, of the Lord. We all *know but in part*, and therefore *prophecy but in part*. While this is the case, we all need to grow in knowledge, as well as in every other grace. We can neither hold fast ourselves, nor instruct our people how to do so,—nor be helpful to them in so doing, as the duty of our office requires, unless in as far as we know what we and they have received. The scriptures of truth are the only source of all religious knowledge; especially of that which befits a minister of the gospel. Let us, therefore, make it the principal employment of our private hours, to study and *search the scriptures*, especially in the original languages. By this means we shall both be qualified for the public duties of our office, and shall find our own spiritual edification and satisfaction promoted, in a more effectual manner than by any other means.—Let us be diligent to acquaint ourselves with what Christ has done for his church, particularly for the church of *Scotland*, in former times; and what she, by his good hand upon her, has attained; that we may not let slip, at our ease, what our progenitors held fast, at the expence of all that was dear to them in the world.—Let us be peculiarly attentive to the *signs* of our own times; that we may know *what Israel ought to do*, what article of the name of Christ we are peculiarly called to hold fast, what progress he is making towards his second coming, and how we ought to demean ourselves, as faithful watchmen, upon the walls of our Jerusalem.

Let us take every competent method of imparting

to our people whatever we ourselves know, in relation to these matters: and of exciting them to *strive together* with us, in holding that fast which we have. It is not enough that we labour to do the duty required in the text: we must take care that the same duty be not neglected by any of those, *over whom the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers*. For, if any of them fall from their stedfastness, through our neglect,—much more if they are driven from it by our misconduct, their blood will be required at our hands.—To avoid this dreadful issue, let us always *be instant in season, out of season*, labouring to *declare the whole counsel of God*. Let us *be diligent to know the state* of our respective flocks, that we may pertinently apply what we have received of the Lord, to their condition: for this end, let us beware of negligence in respect of those duties of our office, that are of a less public nature; such as catechising, visiting the sick, exhorting from house to house, and affording opportunities to our people, of private conversation about their spiritual concerns.

Let us be careful, in our judicative capacity, to maintain the distinction that Christ himself has made, between his spiritual kingdom and the world that lieth in wickedness,—to prevent the entrance of corruptions, or of corrupt persons, into the church,—and to *purge out the old leaven*, as soon as it begins to appear. For this end, let us always consider a regular attendance upon those judicatories, of which we have the honour to be members, as an essential part of the duty of our office. There may be cases of necessity, in which our attendance might be a sin, rather than a duty: and even cases that render it impossible. But, unless our necessity is both real and urgent, we are not

more excusable in neglecting this, than any other branch of our Master's work.—Not only must each of us be answerable, in our own place, for all the deeds, and for all the omissions, of courts in which we are present and acting members; unless we give suitable testimony against what is amiss: we must likewise answer for all that is done or omitted in our absence, when we are absent without necessity; because we ought to have been present, to cast in our mite for promoting the work of God, and for preventing what might be prejudicial to it. You will bear with me in expressing my fears, that the thin meetings of this Synod, as well as of inferior judicatories may be owing to our falling from first love, and beginning to remit in our obedience to our Master's injunction in this text.

Let each of us consider attentively what particular gifts or talents have been bestowed upon us by the great Head of the church: and what opportunities, or calls, he gives to improve them. We are all invested with the same office; our work, therefore, in the general substance of it, is the same: and we have all reason to expect the assistance of the same Spirit, in the performance of it. But *there are still diversities of gifts by the same Spirit*: and every one is called to improve every gift that he possesses, according as providence gives him an opportunity. Hence very different pieces of work may be called for, at the hand of different persons, who all bear the same office. One may be highly culpable for neglecting that, to which another has no call: And one may be guilty of high presumption, in attempting that which his brother cannot neglect without sin. Instances of this kind will readily occur to every attentive mind. *Every man is accepted, according to what he hath, and not according*

to what he hath not: and it is what we respectively have that we are called both to hold fast, and to occupy till Christ come.

Let us be watchful and circumspect in our private walk; setting before our people, and the world, an example of all holy conversation and godliness. For this end, let us hold fast by the unerring rule of God's law: and keep a steady eye upon the great Pattern, that was set before us by him, who is the chief Angel of all the churches.

And, both in our public, and in our private character, let us carefully guard against every thing that may tend to deprive the church of any that she has received from Christ. Among many other fruits of his love, he has bequeathed to her, and left with her *his Peace*. And wo to the man by whom she is disturbed in the possession of it. Let us therefore exert ourselves, to subdue, in our own breasts, all disposition to wrangling and contention: and to crush the first appearances of it among our people. Have we not, in this respect, another sad proof of falling from first love? Have there not been, in late times;—are there not at present,—*wars and fightings*, animosities and divisions, in various congregations under the inspection of this Synod? Have ministers themselves been as blameless as they ought to have been, in this matter? Has there never been any appearance of private resentment, or of a factious party spirit, even in this court? Have the members of it never given evidence of such a spirit, in their conduct towards one another without doors? To be more particular here, might seem presumptuous in me: and might irritate those passions that I wish to assuage; but they are strangers in our Israel who know not that there is too much reason for what I say.

To us it belongs, to set others apart to the same office with which ourselves are invested; and we cannot be duly careful to hold fast what we have, unless we are anxiously solicitous, to commit this sacred office, to none but *able and faithful men*. Let us carefully inspect the morals, and the education of all that are pointing towards public work. Let due experiment be made of the aptitude of their talents, for public usefulness. Let a diligent scrutiny be made into their learning and other ministerial gifts. Let us have proofs of their exemplary life, and edifying conversation. Let their stedfast attachment to the word of Christ's patience be apparent. After all our care we may be deceived; for men can judge only by the outward appearance. But we are inexcusable if we allow ourselves to be influenced by partial friendship, by mistaken lenity, or by any other motive whatever, to lay hands upon any man who is like to prove a disgrace to the office, either through his deficiency in ministerial endowments, or the instability of his mind, or the irregularity of his life.—We are not duly attentive to the words of Christ in the text, if we are not concerned that our successors in office, be zealous and active, when we are in our graves, in holding fast till he come.

In a word, Let us be humbled, this day and every day, for our manifold short-comings, imperfections and sins, against this and every other command of Christ. And if we have failed heretofore, let us be so much the more diligent and strenuous, in holding fast all revealed truth, and every commanded duty, in all time to come; and so much more diffident of our strength and ability for so doing. But however sensible of our own weakness, let us always *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*.

I shall

I Shall conclude with a few words to the People in this Assembly.

To you also, my dear friends, is the word of this exhortation sent.—You also have your talents, your privileges, and attainments: all which you have received from Christ: and for which you must be accountable to him, at his coming. You also have the promise of a crown; and you shall not fail of obtaining it, if you are enabled to persevere to the end, in *holding that fast which you have*. That you may not come short of it, beware of receiving any thing, as from Christ, which has not his stamp upon it. *Cease from bearing the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge*. In our day, alas! *many say, lo! here is Christ, and lo! he is there*. One man shall teach you one system of doctrine, and another shall teach you a second, quite opposite to it: both shall pretend to have received from Christ, all that they deliver to you; and both will tell you that you must hold fast whatever they respectively teach you. But the system of divine truth, which Christ hath given to his church, must be one: its parts are all consistent, and connected with one another. If you would know what it is that you are to receive as from him, the only method you can pursue with success—is that which was pointed out by the prophet, almost three thousand years ago*, *To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*. The word of God is the only sure and infallible rule, both of faith and manners. To that standard you must bring all the doctrines, and all the pretensions of men: and, however unskilful you may be, it is absolutely necessary that you judge for yourself. By this you must

: prove

* Isa. viii. 20.

prove all things, and hold fast only that which is found to be good.—Beware of resting in any knowledge of the scriptures, or any conformity to them, that you have already attained. But, like Paul, *forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, press ye towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, that is in Christ Jesus.* Let no man spoil you of what you have, *through philosophy or vain deceit*, or by any other means: and if any man attempts to do so, consider him as one that would *take your crown*. Strive so to improve what you have received, that your stock may be daily augmented: and you may, if possible, return to your Lord ten talents for one that you received from him.—If you cannot, at least, give him back his own with usury, all that you now enjoy will tend to aggravate your misery, in the day of his coming. Endeavour to go one before another, in a clear and distinct knowledge of divine truth, and in an earnest contending for it: in acquaintance with all the laws of Christ's house, and in a stedfast and persevering conformity to them.

In one word, let a holy emulation, without any mixture of envy, or grudging at one another's progress, influence us all, ministers and people, in the service of our common Lord. And that we may never remit in our diligence, let us always bear in mind his second coming; and aim at being always in such a state of readiness for it,—that, when we hear him saying, as in the text,—*Behold I come quickly*, every one of us may be in a condition, from the heart to reply,

Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus.

S E R M O N I V .

*The Saving Arm of God a sure Defence to the Church
of Christ, against all her Enemies.*

Preached before the ASSOCIATE SYNOD,

At EDINBURGH, April 30. 1771.

ISAIAH XXvi. 1.

*—We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and
bulwarks.*

THE church of Christ has many enemies, both open and disguised. These enemies are strong, as they are many: and she, considered in herself, has no might against them. They are indefatigable in their endeavours against her: and she is often shamefully remiss in her opposition to them. Yet none of their attempts can ever do her a real injury, or even bring her into real danger? The *mighty God* has graciously undertaken her protection. He will effectually defend her against all their rage: he will grant her salvation from all that they threaten, and all that they can inflict upon her. He will give her a complete victory, and an eternal triumph at the last. In every condition, however sensible of her own weakness, and of the helplessness of all human aid, she may sing the song in the text; and say, *we have a strong city*: be-

cause she has always reason to add, *Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.*

The Spirit of God having, in the preceding chapter, foretold, by the mouth of the prophet, many great and good things, that God would do for his church, in New Testament days, and the final overthrow of all her enemies;—he comes, in this chapter, to shew what use she ought to make, and through divine grace, shall make—of all God's gracious benefits. She shall cheerfully celebrate his goodness to her, in songs of gratitude and praise. And a pattern of such a song is exhibited in the chapter.

The inscription of this sacred ode, we have in the beginning of this verse. It is a *song that shall be sung in the land of Judah, in that day.* It has been observed by some interpreters, that the designation *that day* is often given, in the prophetic parts of scripture, to the New Testament period,—which commenced with the actual rising of *the Sun of righteousness.* And that it has this application here, is manifest: The original word is in what Hebrews call the emphatic state. It must refer to the same day as the promises and prophecies of the foregoing chapter: *that day,* when, in the mountain of the gospel church, God shall make unto all people a feast of fat things: when the covering of the face shall be taken off, that had formerly been cast over all people; and Gentiles, as well as Jews, shall be allowed to see and know *the mystery that had been hid from former ages and generations.*

Judah was that tribe who continued in their allegiance to God, and to the house of David—God's anointed, after the revolt of the other ten. It was that tribe, in which the pure worship of God was retained, and

of which the *Messiah* was to come. On these accounts, it was a remarkable type of the New Testament church, and what is here spoken of the type, is to be understood of the Antitype. Not only in the land of Judah, literally speaking, but in the whole church of Christ, wheresoever she is spread abroad, among all peoples, and nations, and kindreds, and tongues, and languages, shall this song be sung. God, when he fills the hearts of his people with food, and brings the *fortress* of their enemies to the ground, even to the dust. will also fill them with spiritual gladness, and dispose and enable them to sing his praises, in a manner corresponding to the pattern here set before them. It is not necessary that they always make use of the very words of this song, in celebrating the praises of God: any more than it is necessary to make use of the precise words of the *Lord's Prayer*, in all our addresses to the throne of grace. But as all our prayers should be agreeable to the pattern that Christ taught us,—so all our acceptable praises ought to be, and will be—expressed, in words of a similar import to those which the Holy Ghost here teacheth.

The words of our text contain the first note, or rather the first stanza of this spiritual song. And in it we find the church glorying in her strength, and then declaring wherein her great strength lieth.

I. She glories in her strength, in these words, *We have a strong city*. The church is compared to a city, in this and various other passages of scripture, chiefly in reference to Jerusalem, her type.—Cities have usually some order or regularity observed in their external structure: and our Jerusalem is *a city compacted together*. Her plan was laid by the wisdom of God, and executed by his own hand. Cities have their magi-

strates and courts of justice: and in the church are set thrones of judgment, even the thrones of the house of David. Christ her King is in her, and by his authority is she governed. Cities have their peculiar privileges, confirmed to them by charter: so the church has been *blest with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus*; and these blessings are made sure to her by the promise and oath of God. Cities have usually some kind of traffic, and so has the church; she trades with heaven itself, and all her citizens have their *burgess-ship* there. Whatever it was that made Jerusalem the joy of all the land of Judah, is to be found in the church of Christ, in a spiritual sense. In her are placed the symbols of God's presence: in her is his solemn worship performed: in her he dwells graciously, and will dwell for ever; having chosen her for his habitation. And he is always *known in her palaces, for a refuge*.

Cities have usually their walls and fortifications, to defend them from the attacks of an enemy. Jerusalem, in particular, was strongly fortified, both by nature and art. Much stronger is our spiritual city. She is, indeed, weak and defenceless in herself, and in outward appearance. Her enemies are often disposed to say of her, as *Tobiah the Ammonite* once said of her type; *If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall* *. Hence they are often surprised when they find their attempts against her baffled, by means so unlikely; and hence they persist in their efforts, after all the disappointments they have sustained. But her fortifications are invisible to a carnal eye, her strength is omnipotence itself: and this strength, though

* Neh. iv. 3.

though impregnable, can only be seen by the eye of faith.

In this spiritual city, and in her unconquerable strength, every member of the church has a personal interest; and hence every individual is represented as joining in this song, and saying, *We have a strong city.* Every genuine Christian has an interest in all the privileges of the church: and therefore every one ought to have a special concern about all her interest. Whatever evil befalls her is matter of grief to them: and every good thing that she enjoys, affords them matter of a song.

II. She declares wherein her great strength lieth: that strength in which she boasts, and of which she sings so loudly, *salvation*, says she, *will God appoint, for walls and bulwarks.* The particle *for* is not in the original language: neither is the name *God*. The word which we render to *appoint* signifies to *place, fix, or establish.* And the word which is translated *bulwarks*, being in the singular number, signifies properly, personal *strength, valour, or courage;* but is used by metaphor, in various senses. It is expressive of an *army, of riches, of the bulwark, or out work* of a fortified place.—These considerations have occasioned some variety among interpreters, concerning the sense of the passage. Some read it thus, *God will make her walls and bulwarks salvation:* meaning that he will so effectually defend both her and her fortifications, that they shall not only be safe, but Salvation in the abstract. Others read the words disjunctively thus, *God will appoint Salvation for her, and walls and bulwarks.* i. e. He will effectually save and deliver her from all the injuries that enemies have already done to her: and will so fortify her with walls and bulwarks, that they shall

never be able to hurt her in time to come. Others consider the word *Salvation* as a name of God, put for *the God of Salvation*: and then the meaning is, that God himself, acting as the God of salvation, will furnish her with walls and bulwarks. From this the sense adopted by our translators differs but little: and therefore we shall not depart from it; provided that the word *appoint* be not understood of a decretive, or judicial appointment only—but of an actual establishment or collocation,—agreeably to what we have in another passage of this book *, *I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory*: and provided that the last word of the verse be understood in all the latitude of its signification, as including riches, armies, valour, and all other means of defence, as well as bulwarks: in a word, all the sinews of defensive war: for all these does the salvation of God supply to his church.

Our holy city is fortified, both with walls and bulwarks. She has the means both of defending herself, and of annoying those enemies that disturb her peace. The discipline and government of the church have sometimes been considered as her walls and bulwarks: and, no doubt they are means, which the God of salvation has appointed for preserving her purity and peace; but these, as well as her other privileges, stand in need to be protected by this Salvation. Salvation, in general, signifies deliverance from some present misery, or some imminent danger. And here it must be understood of the power of God's Saving Arm, interposed for the deliverance of his church from all the attempts of enemies. He does not always so defend her, as never to suffer her to be in danger: neither is she always secured, against apparent injuries. She is often

* Chapter xlvi. 13.

often brought very low, by the prevalence of her enemies. But in her greatest danger, in her lowest case, her God does not forget her, nor is her defence departed from her. God will save her out of all her troubles: and will not only preserve her from suffering any real injury, but will even over-rule all matters so, that all her present sufferings shall issue in her future advantage. Thus the power of God is to her a more sure defence than a tenfold wall of brass. Not only has God provided her with walls and bulwarks, but himself is instead of all fortifications to her. The walls of other cities may serve to prevent the entrance of an enemy; but the salvation of God can drive out the most powerful enemy, after he has made a lodgment in the heart of this city. And this salvation is so firmly settled, fixed, and established, for walls and bulwarks to her, that she may rest assured, in the time of her deepest distress, of her enemies being finally repulsed.

In discoursing a little further from this subject, we propose not to insist upon the similitude between the church of God and a fortified city; nor yet to enquire how fitly that salvation, which he works for her, may be compared to walls and bulwarks. But, leaving metaphors, we take the sense of the words to be express'd in the following proposition.

The saving arm of God being her assured protection, the church of Christ is abundantly fortified, against all the attempts of enemies from every quarter.

The method of prosecuting this doctrine shall be, through divine assistance,

I. To mention some of those enemies, against whom the church is fortified,

II. To

II. To speak of that Salvation, which is her defence.

III. To enquire what about the church is secured by this Salvation; and,

IV. To conclude with a few inferences, for the Improvement of the subject.

The *First* thing proposed was, to mention some of those enemies, against whose attempts she is fortified. And indeed, she is secured, by this salvation, against the attempts of all enemies whatsoever. *No weapon that is formed against her shall ever prosper; but every tongue that riseth against her in judgment, she shall condemn* *. However many there be, that set themselves against her, or take counsel together to ruin her, she has nothing to fear, either from their power or their policy. They may associate themselves together, but they shall be broken in pieces: and all their united efforts shall have as little effect, as a blast of hail upon the ramparts of the best fortified city. *The blast of the terrible ones shall only be as a storm against the wall* †. But, more particularly.

1. She is fortified against all the attempts of Satan. He is her first and most powerful enemy. It is long since God put enmity between him and her. Her first erection was in open defiance of him. It tended to frustrate all the designs of his malice against the human family, to disappoint all his endeavours, and all his expectations, when he thought he had accomplished the final destruction of the whole race. The persons of whom the church is made up, were once subdued and enslaved by him, along with the rest of mankind: but the mighty One, upon whom God laid our help

* Isa. liv. 17.

† Isa. xxv. 4

help from eternity, graciously undertook, that *the prey of the mighty should be taken away, and the captives of the terrible one—delivered.* To accomplish this undertaking, he encountered all the powers of darkness, and triumphed over them in his cross. He goes forth, in the dispensation of the gospel, armed with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; by this means all whom the Father has given him from eternity, are rescued from that cruel bondage in which Satan held them. They are all brought into this strong city, admitted to a free burghers-ship in it: and infallibly secured against ever falling again under the power of their enemy.—The church of Christ has, in all ages, been the devil's grand eye-fore. Against her has he aimed all his fiery darts; as knowing that there is no other method of dishonouring God, more effectually than by doing injury to her. But hitherto he has still wasted his endeavours to no purpose: and he will do so to the end. He who has already redeemed her from his tyranny, is able to maintain his conquest: and he will never suffer one hair of the head of any of her citizens to be lost. She is founded upon an impregnable rock, and *the gates of hell shall never prevail against her.*

2. The church of Christ, though she is not of this world, continues in the world while in the militant state. And a wicked world is always disposed to take part with Satan against her? The ancient enmity subsists, not only between the serpent and the woman; but also between his seed and her seed. As all the genuine members of the church, being the spiritual seed of the woman, are enemies to Satan's kingdom and interest,—so all who continue in an unregenerate state, being, like the Jews in the days of Christ's flesh, of their father the devil, are disposed to take part with

him against the church and her members. Having a rooted enmity against God himself, they are likewise enemies to the church, which is God's inheritance, and the place where he desires to dwell. This enmity is not always alike apparent: nor does it always produce the same effects; because it is often restrained by him who has the hearts of all men in his hand. But as often as this restraint is withdrawn, and in proportion as it is so, it breaks forth, in reproaches, slanders, oppressions, persecutions, and injuries of every kind.

But the world can have no more success against the church, or any of her members, than Satan, the spirit that is in the world, can have. Christ warns his disciples, that *in the world they shall have tribulation*; but he adds, *be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* *. The bush in Horeb was a proper emblem of the church of Christ. However often she has burned, in the fire of persecution, and however high the flames have arisen, she never has been consumed, and she never will. On the contrary, like Israel in Egypt, the more she is oppressed, the more she grows. And her enemies are surprised to find all their labour lost, all their enterprizes rendered abortive, and the church, after all that they can do, *looking forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners*: and all this brought about by an invisible hand, in a manner for which they can never account. Instead of being a sufferer, in the issue, by all that her enemies and persecutors can either say or do against her, she shall reap unspeakable advantage from all. After they shall have exerted all their power, and exhausted all their cunning, in devising and executing methods for her extirpation, she shall be found in a
 much

* John xvi. 33.

much more prosperous condition than she was before they began: while God shall return their mischief upon their own head, and cause their violent dealing to come down, with a triple vengeance, on their own pate. *Jerusalem shall always prove a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with her shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against her* *. But,

3. The church has enemies within her own walls: and is often in the greatest perils by false brethren. These, though perhaps less powerful, are often more dangerous, than any of the former. Against the most furious assaults of an enemy from without, the citizens may be on their guard. But an enemy within the city, enjoying the privileges of a citizen, and the confidence of those whom he calls his brethren, is always the more dangerous the less he is suspected. And if one deserts to the enemy's camp, after having long resided within the city, he can inform the enemy where the defence is weakest, or the guard most remiss; and so may contribute more to his success, than a thousand who never were admitted within the gates.—Against such false and treacherous friends, no created skill can guard. But such are the walls and bulwarks of our city, and so much superior to those of any other,—that she is as much secured against the treachery of professed friends, as against the assaults of open enemies. And they who lodge within her walls, are best acquainted with all her defects and weaknesses, and know best how to take advantage of them, can have no more hope of success against her, than those against whom her gates have always been shut.

Now, these domestic enemies of the church, as they have various ways of entering, so they have also different methods of exerting themselves against her.

They have various ways of entering: and their entrance is always the more easy, as the church is wholly made up of persons who were once enemies. All the genuine members of the church have been conquered by the grace of Christ her King, brought in from the enemy's camp, and made his willing subjects in the day of his power. No wonder then, that some, who are still enemies in their hearts, should enter in disguise: more especially, as the admission of members into the visible church is committed to men of like passions with others, and therefore as liable as any to be imposed upon by false appearances. Some there are, who, being born within the church, and early acknowledged as citizens, by baptism,—but never being born again, nor made real members of the church invisible,—grow up in her bosom, and are nursed on her knees, with a principle of enmity against her, and against her King, still reigning in their hearts.—O ye that have the charge of the rising generation, whether as parents or otherwise, be careful to pay your vows, by bringing them up in the fear of God, and in acquaintance with the high towers, the palaces, the bulwarks of Zion: and wrestle much at the throne of grace, that God may bless your endeavours with success,—and make them real favourers of the dust thereof: lest otherwise they be foremost in breaking down her carved work, and you be instrumental in bringing up those who shall be plagues to that church, which you would desire to set above your chiefest joy.

Others, having learned the art of dissimulation to
such

such a degree, as to be capable of imposing upon the church, and perhaps upon themselves, are admitted to her communion, as friends to her interests, and those of her King,—but soon discover themselves to be no other than enemies under a mask. This calls aloud for the utmost circumspection in those who bear office in the church,—and for a constant dependence upon the great Head of the church, for assistance and direction in the matter of admission to church communion: that we may be preserved from giving the childrens bread to dogs, or admitting into the bosom of the church—those who will improve that privilege no otherwise than as giving them an opportunity of being more successful in their [endeavours against her peace. We can never be too much on our guard, either against those who would come in privily to spy out our liberty, that they may bring us into bondage,—or against them, who, through ignorance of her constitution and of the truths upon which she is built, or through want of attachment to either, are in danger of betraying the church into the hand of the enemy.

This suggests another method, by which these false brethren may enter: and would to God it were not too often exemplified, in our degenerate times. When the discipline of the church is relaxed, and persons are entrusted with her government, who have no due concern for her purity, her privileges are promiscuously bestowed upon all that apply for them; at least, upon many who walk in such a manner as to prove themselves enemies to the cross of Christ. By this means, the number of intestine foes is every day increased, and the number of genuine citizens diminishes in proportion, till a very small remnant is all that is left, to pre-

vent her being as Sodom, in point of wickedness, or being made like unto Gomorrha—in point of punishment.—Yea, that particular church, in which a practice so destructive to her constitution is continued, may, at length be so far subjected to the power of the enemy, that, instead of being a church of Christ, she may become a synagogue of Satan.

These disguised enemies of the church, have likewise different methods of exerting themselves against her.—Some, while they maintain a flaming profession of religion, are so untender in their practice and conversation, that they bring a reproach upon the religion which they profess, and upon the society to which they belong: the good ways of God are evil spoken of, and his name is blasphemed through them. A more dangerous enemy the city of God has not, than the man who loudly calls Christ *Lord, Lord*, and yet openly neglects, or refuses to *do the things that he says*.

Others take a more subtle method of undermining the interests of the church. They pretend much zeal for religion, and much friendship for religious persons: and whatever is their private manner of life, they take care that in public, their conduct shall be blameless. But their chief employment is carefully to mark all the failings and infirmities of their brethren, to listen with avidity to every charge that the voice of slander brings against them. And, instead of bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love, they expose them in the blackest colours, and with many exaggerations. Instead of refuting slanderous reports, or even giving themselves the trouble to enquire how far they are true, they take pleasure in propogating them: and, all this, perhaps, under pretence of testifying against sin, or lamenting over it.—Thus the characters

characters of fellow-christians are murdered, offences are caused to abound, discord is sown among brethren, the peace of the church is disturbed, and both the persons and profession of men better than themselves, become, through their means, objects of contempt and ridicule to the open enemies of religion.

Others there are, more honest, though not less malignant, than any of the former, who, having espoused the cause of religion, and appeared, for a time, full of zeal for the interest of the church, at length cast off the mask, and openly discover themselves on the enemy's side: levelling the heaviest strokes of their axes and hammers, against that carved work which themselves had been active in setting up. These are they who lead the van in the Dragon's army. They are the chief instruments, by whom he maintains his opposition to the work of God. And when such are gained over to his side, then it is that he sets up his ensigns, for signs of triumph before God. The Spirit of God has said, *if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*: but, if Satan is capable of taking pleasure in any thing; the apostate is the man according to his heart.

Against all these, and all other sorts of disguised enemies, the church is sufficiently protected, by the salvation of God. He can never be imposed upon by false appearances; for he seeth the heart. He knows all the schemes, that are laid by such men, for hurting the church, before they can be discovered by men; yea, before they be known to themselves.—And he will finally break in sunder every snare that they lay, either for the church, or for any of her genuine members. For her *help is in the name of JEHOVAH, who made heaven and earth*.

4. The church has enemies, not only within her walls, but even in the hearts of her best friends, and sincerest members. That principle of corruption that is not totally subdued in the best Christians; as it is inimical to God, must also be inimical to the church: and, as far as it prevails, its effects must be always hurtful to her. She has, in all ages, suffered more from the passions, the prejudices, the infirmities, and the falls of her best friends, than from all the combined efforts, of the powers of earth and hell. Even they whom divine providence has called to be watchmen upon her walls, being men of like passions with others, are in danger of proving the greatest disturbers of her peace. It will be so, unless he *who holdeth the stars in his right hand, and walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks*, keep a perpetual watch over his servants, and over his work among their hands.—Oh! what need have ministers of the gospel, above all other men, to be continually on their guard, against their own spirits—their passions, humours and corruptions? And what need of constant dependence upon God, that he may direct their counsels, assist them in their ministrations, preside in their meetings, and preserve them, in every case, from giving a wrong touch to the ark of God among their hands? This we have reason to expect he will do, in answer to the prayers of his people: for one method that he takes, for placing salvation as walls and bulwarks to our city, is by clothing *her priests with salvation*; so that *her saints shout aloud for joy* *.

The SECOND thing proposed, in our method was, to speak of that salvation, which God has promised to appoint

* Psa. cxxxii. 16.

appoint for walls and bulwarks to the church. And here, without insisting, we shall but mention the following things.

Salvation, as was formerly hinted, bears an evident relation to misery, and to danger. Where neither of these is, there can be no need of salvation. The church, in this world, is never out of danger; and she is often subject to various miseries. The walls, which God has placed around her, do not preserve her from being assaulted,—nor even from being plundered, and sacked. Often is the enemy permitted to enter God's heritage, to defile his sanctuary, and even to lay Jerusalem on heaps. But out of those heaps of rubbish that had been burnt—will God revive the stones of his sanctuary; and after all the ravages of enemies, the church shall appear more glorious than ever. Our spiritual city differs from all others, in this respect, that, whereas their fortifications serve to keep the enemy at a distance; and if once he gets within, instead of annoying him any further, they are of the same use to him, to defend his possession, as they had been to defend the citizens against him. But the walls and bulwarks of our city can never be made useful to any enemy.—Her artillery can never be turned against herself, nor against any of her citizens: nor can ever the enemy choose such a position, as that it may not play, with success, upon him. After he has got possession,—and when enemies and citizens walk promiscuously in the streets,—this salvation may assail the enemy and protect the citizen: it may drive out the one, and secure to the other a peaceable residence within.—It is not security, but Salvation, by which she is protected. And God often suffers enemies to prevail so far, that her condition seems, in the eyes of men, to be despe-

rate,—that his name, his power and grace may be the more glorified, in *working salvation*, for her, *in the midst of the earth*.

It is but a partial Salvation, that she can hope to enjoy in this world. Her enemies, though often repulsed, will still return to the charge: or if one enemy is subdued, another starts up in his room.—While she is singing of one victory, she must gird on her harness, in the view of another battle. Her God has all her enemies under his sovereign controul, and they can neither move hand nor tongue against her without his permission. But the many sins and corruptions, that remain about her, provoke him, from time to time, to lengthen the enemy's chain. Thus the *Affyrian* was *the rod of his anger, and the staff in the hand of his indignation*. When he has sufficiently corrected her, he turns his hand against the enemy, the staff of his indignation is cast into the fire, and a new salvation fills her mouth again with laughter, and her tongue with melody. Thus it shall continue to be, in a greater or less degree, while she continues in a militant state: sometimes the enemy prevailing, and the church reduced to a very low and distressed condition: and at other times the Lord arising as one that awaketh *out of sleep, or as a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine: smiting her enemies in their hinder parts, and putting them to a perpetual reproach*.

But her salvation shall one day be complete. Her glorious King now sits at his Father's right hand, expecting till all his enemies be made his footstool. Then shall they be put under her feet also, she shall obtain a decisive victory, and enjoy an everlasting triumph over them all. Her salvation will then be
final

final and complete: and nothing shall be left to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain.

It merits observation, that it is not any salvation already wrought for her, or enjoyed by her, that the church considers as her strength; but that salvation which is still with God, and which he will appoint for her, when the time of her need shall come. The manner of expression here is remarkable. The church speaks of her strength in the present time; *We HAVE a strong city*: but, when she comes to shew wherein her great strength lieth, she changes to the future; *Salvation WILL God appoint*. She is presently strong, by reason of that salvation which God will appoint for her hereafter: or rather of that Salvation that is in God himself, and that shall be forthcoming to her in every time of future need. This is not, indeed, the manner of man. Had she been to speak in the language of the men of this world, she would have said, *We have a strong city*; for God hath appointed *walls and bulwarks*: or, *we shall have a strong city*, when he shall *appoint Salvation for walls and bulwarks*. In no other strain can they speak, who see things only by the eye of sense. But the inhabitants of this spiritual city, are taught to see the things of God by the eye of faith, in the glass of his word of grace and promise. By this means, they look upon that Salvation which is in God as their own: and depend as much upon what he has promised to do for them, or give to them, as upon what he has already done, or what they presently enjoy.—From every salvation that he has already wrought, faith draws encouragement: considering it as a pledge of what he will work in time to come. But it is only that Salvation which is in God's

Almighty Arm, and which he has promised to employ in her defence, when occasion shall require, that she considers as her strength: as being to her instead of *walls and bulwarks*.

From the whole it appears, that the church and her members are here taught to make their boast, not in any thing about themselves, nor in any thing that they can do for themselves, or that any created power can do for them; nor yet in any thing that God has already done: but solely in what God is to her, and what he has promised to do for her. She is strong and secure, not on account of that hedge of discipline that God has planted around her, nor of that spiritual valour and courage, with which divine grace has endued her citizens, and which they are ready to exert in her defence, when the enemy comes in like a flood; but on account of God's Saving Arm, which he is always ready to make bare in her cause, in the fight of all the nations; and which he will infallibly employ, in saving her, from time to time, from all the tyranny, oppression, and injury, that she may suffer, or with which she may be threatened, by any enemy: until he shall bring her to the final enjoyment of complete and eternal salvation at the last. And is she not, indeed, a strong city;—is she not sufficiently fortified, and securely protected,—when her walls and bulwarks are no other, than the almighty power of the God of salvation?

WE now come to the THIRD thing proposed, which was, To consider what about the church is secured against the attempts of enemies, by the Salvation of God. She may lose much of what may appear to a carnal eye, as most valuable to her. She may lose
the

the countenance of the powers of this world. She may be deprived of her flourishing outward appearance. She may almost be robbed, for a time, of her visible subsistence. For no less a period than twelve hundred and sixty years, has she been driven into the wilderness; so that her best friends scarcely knew where to find her.—Her members may not only be spoiled of all that they hold dear in this world; but may also be subjected to all that the world reckons evil.—They may have,—they often have had *trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonments*. They have been forced to *wander about in sheeps-skins, and goats-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented*. Though *the world was not worthy of them*, they have *wandered in deserts, and in mountains, in dens and in caves of the earth*. They have even been *stoned, and sawn asunder, and tempted, and slain with the sword* *. They have suffered all the indignities, and all the tortures, both in life and death, that the rage of wicked men, or the malice of devils—could either invent or execute. All this has happened since the days of the apostles, as well as before that period. And surely all this is more than sufficient to persuade a carnal man—that her fortifications are useless, and her Defence is utterly departed.—But, in the eye of the church herself, and of all her genuine children, all this is perfectly consistent with the all-sufficiency of that Salvation by which she is defended.—All is still safe, that is necessary, either to her being, or her well-being: and all that is essential to the happiness of any of her citizens. More particularly,

1. Her foundation is always safe. She is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself*

* Heb. xi. 36, 37, 38

himself being the chief corner stone. This is the foundation that God has laid; and, however much the superstructure may be demolished, it never can be shaken. While the foundation stands, there is still hope that the building may be repaired, and the head-stone, at length put upon it. In the lowest condition to which the church was ever reduced, her friends have still this answer to give to *the messengers of the nations*,—*The Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of the people shall trust in it* *.

2. Her existence is always safe. The church may be driven into the wilderness; but she shall never be driven out of the world. The principal use of this lower world, is to be a nursery for the church, till all that were chosen of God from eternity—come, in the unity of the faith, to a state of perfection in Christ, and the whole church be presented to him, without spot or wrinkle. When this shall be accomplished, the earth and all the works thereof shall be burnt up. As the throne of Christ is established for ever; so shall his seed continue as long as the moon endureth.—However many enemies the church may have, and however loudly they may cry out, *raze it, raze it*; they shall never be able to accomplish their purpose, in her total extinction. By the sin of any particular church, God may be provoked to remove her candlestick out of his place: but the lamp that God has ordained for his Anointed will always continue to shine, in some part of the world, till the sun itself shall be extinguished.

3. Her particular citizens are all safe, under the protection of God's Saving Arm. I say not that they shall always be preserved from outward and temporal sufferings.

sufferings. On the contrary, we are assured that thro' manifold tribulations they must enter into the kingdom.—Not only may they be stript of their worldly possessions, their reputation, their liberty, or their life, by their oppressors and persecutors: they may suffer much even from the hand of God. The sin that cleaves to them, makes it necessary, that they should be often, and severely chastened. *God will visit their iniquities with rods, and their sins with chastisements.* Yea, when he finds it necessary to visit that part of the world where their lot is cast with a public stroke, judgment often begins at the house of God: and his children share, as deeply as any other, in the common calamity. But out of all their troubles, this Salvation will, at last, set them free. All their losses shall be retrieved, and that with interest—an hundred fold. An abundant compensation shall be made for all their sufferings. Their souls shall be given them for a prey: their bodies shall be rescued from the power of the grave, and not a hair of their head shall finally be lost.—Other cities, though they may continue flourishing for ages, are every day changing their inhabitants. One generation is swept away by death, in a few years, —another succeeds, and that again is quickly swept away in its turn. But this city of God never loses or changes any of her citizens. She is daily receiving new accessions, even when the work of God goes on so slowly, that they are but gathered one by one, as at this day. But no person that ever becomes an inhabitant here shall ever cease to be so. Death cannot drive any out of the city: it only transports them to another quarter of it; for the church triumphant and the church militant are one and the same society.— And every person that enters within these walls of
Salvation,

Salvation, has the fullest security, that he *shall go no more out.*

4. Her privileges and immunities are all safe. These having been purchased for her by the blood of Christ, and bestowed upon her by his God and Father, are also preserved by divine power and grace; and none shall ever be suffered to deprive her of them. She may be deprived of those temporal privileges and emoluments, which have been conferred upon her by earthly princes or others: perhaps it had been better if she had never enjoyed them. She may even be deprived, for a season, of the use of some of those privileges which Christ her King hath bestowed: Or she may be reduced to the necessity of enjoying them at the hazard of the lives of her citizens. The privilege of choosing her own office-bearers, of administering her own government, independent of the kingdoms of this world, or even of holding her assemblies for the worship of God, men may for a time prevent her from using or enjoying the benefit of them. But, these and her other privileges, being secured to her by a charter from her only lawful King; her right to them can never be abolished. They are guaranteed to her by him that bestowed them. He will restore her, in his own time, to the full enjoyment of them. And he will have a day of reckoning with those who have attempted to rob her of them.

5. Her treasures are all safe. She has a twofold treasure: a treasure of grace, and a treasure of truth. Both these are, in some respect, lodged in the hand of Christ. Hence, even in the days of his flesh, he was seen and known, by his disciples, as *full of grace and truth.* Her treasure of grace is wholly in his hands: and is secured in the heavenly places, against all the attempts

attempts of enemies. They can neither diminish it, nor hinder her, nor any of her citizens to receive their necessary supplies from thence; for, *out of his fulness they all receive, even grace for grace.*—Her treasure of divine truth is likewise in his hand, though in a more improper sense: as it belongs to him, both to reveal the truth to her, in his Prophetic character,—and, in his Royal capacity, to make it effectual for all the purposes for which it is revealed. But this treasure is more immediately committed into the hands of the church herself: and still she has it *in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*—And in that warfare that she is obliged to maintain, against Satan and his auxiliaries, a principal part of the service required of her and her members is, to defend this treasure: *earnestly contending for the faith, once delivered to the saints.*—Her treasure of grace is beyond the reach of the enemy: and all that he can attempt, with regard to it, is only to intercept her communication with it. But, in all ages, he has exerted his utmost efforts to rob her of divine truth. Hence all those floods of error, that, in different periods, he has spued out of his mouth; with a view to subvert the truth, or to draw the church aside from her adherence to it. But even this treasure is not to be preserved, by the mere efforts of the church or her members. The God of Salvation, who, being infinite in faithfulness, as well as in power, keepeth truth for ever, will effectually preserve every article of that system of truth, of which himself is the author. He will disappoint all the endeavours of the enemy against it,—divert the floods of error, causing them to be swallowed up by the earth,—and second the contendings of his servants and people, in the behalf

of the true faith: so that, instead of being either lost or obscured, the light of divine truth will shine the more clearly, for all the pernicious errors, with which the church has been, or ever will be infested.

6. Her real interests are all safe and secure: and that to such a degree, that neither shall she suffer any harm, in the issue,—nor shall her enemies gain any advantage, by all their apparent success. If God, for a short moment, seems to give her up into the enemy's hand,—that he may correct her for her sin, purge her from corruption, teach her to renounce all confidence in an arm of flesh, and to place her sole dependence upon his Salvation;—he will not only turn his hand against her enemies in a little,—but he will make every advantage that they have over her, so much clear gain to her. Their triumphs shall be turned into the howlings of despair: and he will *double unto them double, for all that they have done unto her.*

7. In a word, her eternal inheritance is perfectly safe and secure. However poor and contemptible the church of Christ may appear now, she has, in reversion, *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading.* This inheritance is reserved in heaven for her, under the hand of Christ her representative: while she, and all her members are kept for the inheritance, by the power of God's Saving Arm. She is now travelling through the wilderness, towards the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you.—Though enemies may assault her camp here, they can neither mar her inheritance in the land of promise, nor prevent her attaining the possession of it in a little. In spite of all their combined efforts, she shall there enjoy never-ending peace and happiness: rejoicing and triumphing in that Salvation, which God, during her
 militant

militant estate, has appointed to her, *for walls and bulwarks.*

WE are now to conclude with some Improvement of what has been said. It shall be exprest in the following observations.

I. The church of Christ, considered as such, has but little occasion for the favour and protection of earthly princes: and little cause to regret the want of it.—The powers of this world are ordained of God; and therefore ought to be honoured by all the members of the church, and obeyed in all their lawful commands.—But if we consult the history of all the kingdoms and states that ever were in the world, we shall find that their rulers were, for the most part, more friendly to the interests of *the rulers of the darkness of this world*, than to the cause of God, or the prosperity of the church.—For the church, therefore, to constitute them the guardians of her privileges, or to trust in them for her defence,—is to commit herself into those hands, that are most like to do her an injury.

Among the gracious promises, which are to be accomplished to the church in New Testament days, this is one,—*Kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers.* From hence some have concluded, that the civil magistrate ought to exercise his authority, and in due time shall exercise it, for the preservation and propagation of the true religion, for the suppression of heresy, for promoting the interests of the church, and giving sanction to the decrees and determinations of her judicatories. But with equal propriety might they argue, that all civil government should be subordinate to the church, and

that the kings of the earth should kiss the toe of an ecclesiastical officer; for it follows in the same verse, *they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet* *. This promise is accomplished, not when the civil powers exert their authority for corroborating the laws of the church, or for punishing those who disturb her peace by false doctrines, or by schismatical practices: for all exercise of civil authority about things purely religious or ecclesiastical, is an usurpation of the royal authority of Christ, and is prejudicial both to the spirituality and independence of his kingdom.—But this promise is accomplished, when the kings, queens, and nobles of the earth embrace the true religion, join themselves to the true church of Christ,—set an example of all holy conversation and godliness before those of inferior stations,—countenance and encourage such as are found in the faith and walk agreeably to the gospel,—and employ every opportunity, that their high station affords them, for promoting the true interest of the church, by means that are of a spiritual nature, and are calculated for the advantage of a spiritual society.

If the members of the church of Christ are protected in their civil rights, as all good subjects ought, if they are not disturbed in the exercise of religion, nor subjected to any sinful impositions upon their consciences,—this is the greatest part of what the city of God has to expect from civil magistrates, in their official capacity. The enemies with whom the church is called to wrestle, are *spiritual wickednesses in high places*. The weapons of her warfare, therefore, are not carnal; but mighty through God, to the pulling down

* Isa. xlix. 25.

down of their strong holds. The civil sword is of use to punish crimes against society, to defend mens lives, liberties, and worldly property. It may subdue earthly kingdoms, and effect Revolutions in civil states. But it is neither calculated to propagate, nor to defend this spiritual city. The only weapon, by which this can be done successfully, is *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* There is such an essential difference between the constitution of the church of Christ, and that of the kingdoms of this world,—that no man, by virtue of any office that he may bear in the one, has a right to claim any authority in the other. As no minister of the gospél is more to the civil state, than a private subject; so he that possesses the highest office in the state, is no more to the church than a private member: though he has it in his power to do more for the interest of religion than many others; just as the head of a family may do more for it than he who is but a hired servant in that family.

We plead not for the exemption of the church, or of churchmen, from the authority of civil magistrates; nor for any right in them, to judge and determine causes of a civil nature, that relate to themselves or their brethren. This is one of the abominations of Antichrist's religion. Christ himself disclaimed any such right: and so will all his faithful servants. The ministers of religion ought to be subject to the laws of their country, to the authority of the magistrate, and to the cognizance of courts of justice, in the very same manner as any other person.—But, on the other hand, the king himself, and all that bear office under him, ought to be subject to the laws of Christ, to the discipline of the church and to the authority of the courts

courts of the Lord's house, in all matters purely ecclesiastical,—as much as the meanest peasant. And till this be the case, the promise above referred to cannot have its full accomplishment.

While the church of Christ was totally disconnected with the civil state, for three hundred years after her first erection, she continued to flourish and to spread, notwithstanding all that opposition and persecution could do to the contrary. But no sooner had the mistaken zeal of some earthly princes, made laws for the establishment of the church, provided rich livings and worldly dignities for her ministers, taken her under the protection of the civil state, and incorporated her with the political constitution,—than the church began rapidly to decline, and all those corruptions were introduced, by which she was turned, at length, into a synagogue of Satan. This unhallowed connection between the church and the state, was the very thing that raised antichrist to his throne, and brought the princes of Europe under the most shameful subjection to papal tyranny. And to this are to be imputed all those usurpations of the crown-rights of Christ, and those infringements of the privileges of his subjects, that are still chargeable upon the civil powers, in all protestant countries. While this continues, it is of necessity either that the church must be degraded into a mere appendage of the kingdoms of this world; or else the kingdoms of the world must again become fiefs of the church, and the reign of ecclesiastical despotism must be renewed.

This Synod, and the body of people in connection with them, have been accused, with equal confidence and falsehood, of a disposition to promote the Reformation of the church, by means of civil pains and penalties.

ties. It has even been said, that we are sworn to prosecute, yea, to *extirpate* with fire and sword, all that are of a different opinion from ourselves, in religious matters. But far be all such dispositions and principles from the church of Christ. An opposite spirit breathes through our whole constitution, and opposite principles are the very hinge upon which it turns. Let carnal weapons be used for carnal purposes. Let civil laws, civil authority, and civil punishments, be employed for the benefit of civil society. The church of Christ needs them not: nor will they ever be of real advantage to her.—In relation to the civil government of our country, we reckon our situation much more eligible than that of any national church can be.—Perhaps we are nearer to that situation in which every church ought to be, than any other society ever was, since the days of *Constantine* the great. As a church, we are not known in law, and therefore cannot be under its protection; and if there are laws in force against us, we have never been materially hurt by their execution. As individuals, we enjoy the protection of government; in the same manner as our fellow-subjects: and I hope we shall never yield to any of them, in a steady attachment to the political constitution, or in a ready subjection, either to the good laws of our country, or to those to whom the nation has entrusted the execution of them. Yet are we firmly persuaded, that neither royal edicts, nor acts of parliament,—nor fleets nor armies,—nor gibbets nor pillories,—nor fines nor prisons, are a proper defence or protection to the church of Christ. The *Salvation* of God alone can be to her *for walls and bulwarks*.

2. It is neither upon ordinances nor instruments, upon
on

on her own endeavours, nor those of her members, nor upon any created assistance, that the church of Christ ought to depend for safety or prosperity. We have much reason to be thankful for divine ordinances,—particularly for the ordinance of discipline, and for that government which Christ hath instituted, as means of preserving the internal peace, as well as the purity of the church. But ordinances can only be means: and even as means they can be useful no further than as the Saving Arm of God works by them. We ought also to be thankful to an exalted Redeemer, for giving *some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* But these earthen vessels have nothing in them that can be profitable to the church, unless God puts it into them. So far are they from being capable to defend the church, that they cannot be faithful as watchmen on her walls: they can neither observe the approach of danger, nor give proper warning of it, nor can they be any otherwise useful in their place, unless in as far as they are clothed with the same Salvation that is to the church for walls and bulwarks. Every member of the church ought, in his own station, to be *valiant for the truth upon the earth*, and to exert himself to the utmost, in behalf of all the rights of the church. But the battle is the Lord's; and if we are victorious, we must be indebted for it to the salvation of God. Let us therefore give over trusting to man, or *making flesh our arm.* Let us use appointed means, let us employ instruments, let no human endeavours be wanting, for promoting the work of God, or the prosperity of the church; but still let us be denied to all these, and to all sublunary help.

help.—While *some trust in chariots, and some in horses, we will remember only the name of the Lord our God.*

3. Neither the church of God, nor any particular Christian, has any thing to fear, from the number, the power, the policy, or even the success—of their enemies.—As for number, they are more that are for us, than all that can be against us. All the holy angels are ready to execute the commandments of God, in working salvation for the church. Yea, the visible elements, in their courses, will fight, if need be, against her enemies.—If we speak of power, she is weak, indeed, in herself, but her *strength is God alone*: and, unless her enemies are stronger than Omnipotence, what can she have to fear? Their policy can avail them nothing; for God, who revealed to the prophet in Samaria, what the king of Syria spake in his bed-chamber, can easily disconcert, and if he pleases, disclose all their most secret and most crafty counsels. It never can be difficult for infinite wisdom, to *bring to nought the counsel of the heathen, or to make of none effect what the people devise. But the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the purposes of his heart to all generations* *. As for the success of her enemies, it shall be short-lived. God permits them to succeed for a time, that their overthrow may be the more disastrous, that his own hand may be the more visible in it, and that his people may be sensible, that they owe their preservation and deliverance to nothing but his salvation. This we may be sure of, that however many troops may overcome her, and however often,—like Gad, she shall overcome them all at the last. And

*

A a

as

* Psa. xxxiii. 10, 11.

as the walls that surround a city inclose every one of her citizens, every genuine member of the church is as safe as she herself is, under the protection of this Salvation. With regard to all her enemies, even in the midst of their greatest success, our spiritual city may adopt the triumphant language, that was put into the mouth of her type by the Spirit of God in the prophet. 'The virgin, the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn: the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? against whom dost thou exalt thyself, and lift up thine hand on high? Against the Holy One of Israel *.'

4. This subject informs us what it is that really brings the church of Christ into danger. Often has a cry been raised, by hypocritical and designing men, that the church was in danger, when any thing was on the wheels, that was inconsistent with their own selfish and interested views. And often has this cry been permitted to have influence for retarding the work of God, and furthering the designs of enemies against the church.—But it is not the diminution of the power, the riches, or the political influence of church-men, that brings the church into danger: In proportion as these have increased, the spiritual interests of the church have always been found to decline. It is not the abolition of those penal laws, by which the powers of this world have attempted to fortify her: These are none of the bulwarks that ever her King erected, or ordered to be erected, about her. It is not her being divested of those gaudy trappings, with which her mistaken friends, instead

* Isa xxxvii. 22, 33.

stead of adorning her as a bride for her husband, have covered her with the attire of an harlot. It is not her being deserted by the great, the noble, the wise, and learned of the world; nor even their being all joined in a combination against her.—Nothing but her own sin can bring her into real danger; because this, and nothing else, tends to deprive her of her protection, or to cause her defence to depart from her. The Lord's hand is never shortened that it cannot save,—he can never want power to deliver. But often does her sin provoke him to withdraw his Saving Arm; then she has neither walls nor bulwarks, but becomes a ready prey to every enemy.

This, by the way, serves as a sufficient refutation to those who endeavour to traduce the exercise of fasting and humiliation, in which we profess, this day, to be engaged; or to find fault with the frequency of it.—Are there not with us sins against the Holy One of Israel? Has he not, on that account, sadly withdrawn from us the protection and the joy of his Salvation? And does he not expressly call us to *turn* to him from sin, *with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning?* And who are they that dare forbid what God himself has required. We had much need to beware of satisfying ourselves with external profession or appearance. It will avail us nothing *to bow down the head as a bulrush, or to spread sackcloth and ashes under us.*—It will make our condition worse, if we *fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.*—But if we are enabled to keep the fast that God hath chosen,—*to rend our hearts and not our garments, and turn unto the Lord our God,*—we have reason to hope, that he will shew himself *gracious and*

merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenting him of the evil.

5. We may here see plentiful encouragement to every member of the church, as well as to those who bear office in her, to continue strenuous and undaunted, in opposing every enemy, in defending every privilege that God has bestowed upon the church, every ordinance that he has instituted in her, and every truth that he has revealed to her. We are sure of being finally successful, for *God is with us*. The walls of our city are in themselves impregnable, and therefore, neither our own weakness, nor the strength of the enemy should discourage us from making a vigorous defence.—If we give ourselves up to sloth, indifference, or carnal security,—though it be under a pretence of trusting in that Salvation, by which our city is made strong, we provoke God to deprive us of his protection, and suffer the enemy to come in like a flood.—Who ever expected that any city should be protected by her fortifications, however strong, without the exertions of those within? Let us therefore *be courageous, and play the men, for our people, and for the city of our God*: not hoping for success from our own efforts; but depending solely upon God's Salvation; assured, that *the Lord will do that which seemeth him good*.

6. In one word, We have here an ample fund of consolation to all those who are affected with the low condition of the church of God in our day, with the multitude of enemies that have begirt her round, or with the loud noise of those *axes and hammers* with which they are endeavouring to demolish her *carved work*. To such we may address ourselves, in the words of God to Joshua, *Get thee up, why liest thou thus*

thus upon thy face? Give not way to a desponding inactivity. Bestir yourself, in the post assigned you, against the common enemy. Mourn deeply for your own sins, and for those of the church. Plead with God that he may take away the iniquities of the land as in one day, and that he may appear, with salvation in his hand, for our defence and deliverance. While you plead, be sure to trust him, that he will, in due time, *arise, and have mercy upon Zion;—that the time to favour her will shortly come,—the time that he hath set.—Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces.* Be sure to mark those walls and bulwarks that are mentioned in the text: that ye may tell it to the generation following. And the substance of all that you have to tell them, in proof of the security and stability of the church is, that *this God is our God for ever and ever; and will be our guide even unto death.* Tell them that there is a period approaching, when this God will assuredly perform to his church this promise,—*Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates praise*.*

Mistake me not, I beseech you. God forbid that we should confine this encouragement. or any part of what has been said of the church in general, to any particular party or society: or exclude, as some will be ready enough to insinuate,—from a title to God's protection, all that are not of the same opinion, or of the same communion with ourselves. This song is composed for the use of the church catholic. It may
and

and ought to be sung, by every church, and by every member of every church, in every period of time, and in every place of the world. Let all who are really within the city of God, join with us,—and let us join with them, in laying claim to the protection of God's Saving Arm, and making our boast in it.—But surely none can deny us the privilege that is common to all Christians: nor hinder us, for ourselves,—and with a particular application to that church, which is represented by this Synod, to adopt, and to sing this song,—*We have a strong city: Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.*

SERMON

S E R M O N V.

*An Abundant Blessing Promised to the Church upon
her Spiritual Provision.*

A N

A D M I S S I O N S E R M O N,

W I T H A

C H A R G E.

PSALM CXXXII. 15.

I will abundantly bless her provision.

SUCH is the constitution of human nature, that it is impossible for us to subsist, without daily supplies of those things that tend to nourish and refresh our bodies.—Neither can the principle of spiritual life be maintained, in those souls where divine grace has implanted it, without that spiritual food, which is adapted to its nature. But, though we cannot be nourished without food, we may have food in plenty and not be nourished. Our bodies will starve, in the midst of plenty, unless we eat and drink what is provided for us.—And our souls will never be profited, by the abundance of our spiritual provision, unless we receive and use it by faith: Yea, we may use the most wholesome provision, and yet decline apace. A diseased
body

body will gradually sink into the grave, though fed with delicacies, and nourished with cordials: and our souls will continue lean from day to day, though God hath provided us *a feast of fat things*; unless his blessing accompany the provision that he has made for us.

God has, this day given, to you of this Congregation, a prospect of enjoying your spiritual provision: and in so doing, I trust, he has answered many of your prayers. But beware, lest, while giving you what you sought, he send leanness into your souls. This will undoubtedly be the case, unless his rich blessing accompany the ministrations of his servant, who is sent among you. For this blessing therefore, you ought now to pray, with the greatest fervency. And in so doing, you may draw much encouragement from the promise in the text. For God as really says of the church now, and of every particular Congregation, in which his ordinances are regularly dispensed, as ever he said of the literal Jerusalem, *I will abundantly bless her provision.*

In the 8th, 9th, and 10th verses of this Psalm, we have a solemn prayer, supposed to have been offered up to God, when the ark of his covenant was brought from the house of Obededom to Jerusalem, in the days of David. The substance of which is, ‘ That now, ‘ when the ark, which was the visible symbol of his ‘ presence, was come to that place, where he had chosen to put his name, and where it was expected to ‘ remain, during the continuance of that dispensation, ‘ God himself would graciously condescend to be present with it, and among his people:—that the ministers of the sanctuary might be so assisted, protected ‘ and beautified with God’s Salvation, and the ordi- ‘ nances

‘ nances dispensed by them so blessed for answering
 ‘ the ends of their institution,—that all acceptable
 ‘ worshippers, in attending upon them, might find
 ‘ their hearts filled with holy joy, and their mouths
 ‘ with praise :—and that God, instead of turning away
 ‘ David his anointed, by whom this prayer was offer-
 ‘ ed, without a gracious answer, would give a new
 ‘ proof of that love to him, which he had so often and
 ‘ so publicly declared, by freely granting his re-
 ‘ quest.’

David was a remarkable type of Christ. And many things in scripture, that had a primary respect to David, have their ultimate accomplishment in him. When we adopt such a prayer, instead of expecting any thing for the sake of David; we should have our eye fixed on David’s Antitype. As we should look for the acceptance of our persons and services, for the sake of that atonement which he made for us on earth; so we should put all our prayers into his hands, as our Advocate and Intercessor in heaven. And though God; who heareth not sinners, can receive no petitions immediately from us; yet we may rest assured, that the love that God the Father bears to Christ, and the sweet favour that he smells in his sacrifice will never consist with his turning away *his* face, or denying any request that he presents in our behalf.

In the 11th and 12th verses we have an account of God’s covenant with David, confirmed by his oath, that he would establish his Seed upon his throne for ever. The first part of what is secured to David by this oath, relates to Christ. It was applied to him by an angel from heaven *, *The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign*

*

B b

over

over the house of Jacob for ever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end. This part of the promise is absolute, and nothing could hinder its accomplishment. The other part of the promise is conditional, and relates to the perpetuation of the throne of Israel, among the literal posterity of David's sons: the performance of it depended upon their keeping God's covenant, and the testimony that he gave them. They kept it not: and therefore God turned them off the throne, dispersed the nation, and made the land desolate, as it is this day.

The two verses immediately preceding our text exhibit an account of the choice that God had made of mount Zion, to which the ark was now brought, as the fixed place of his solemn worship, and a promise that he would continue to reside there, by the visible symbols of his presence, so long as that form of administration should continue in the church. Mount Zion, or Jerusalem, which was partly built upon that hill, was an eminent type of the New Testament church: which is therefore called *the holy city, the New Jerusalem* *. Of her, rather than of her type, is this gracious declaration to be understood. She is God's rest, which he hath chosen and desired, where he hath taken up his residence, by his holy Spirit which is given her, as well as by those external ordinances which are now the symbols of his presence. And from her, while the sun and moon endure, his gracious and comfortable presence shall never be totally withdrawn.

The psalm is concluded with a bundle of great and precious promises, relative to those special benefits, that shall accrue to the church from God's gracious residence

* Rev. xxi. 2.

fidence in her. And these promises correspond, in a remarkable manner, to the prayer that we saw express'd in the 9th and 10th verses. The same things are here promised, which are there prayed for, and almost in the same words. As every prayer of faith is dictated by the Spirit of God, and founded on his promise; so God, in the distribution of promised blessings to his church and people, does often so adapt his benefactions to their requests, that he leaves them no room to doubt, of his intending thereby to answer their prayers,—as well as to accomplish his own promise.

The first of these promises is express'd in the words of this text. As these words related to the literal Jerusalem, we have no doubt but they are meant of that blessing which that people had reason to expect upon that temporal provision, which they enjoyed in that land of promise; though under that figure was represented even to them, that spiritual provision which God had made for them, and exhibited to them, in those ordinances, that were henceforth to be dispensed in Jerusalem. Neither can we doubt, that the people of God, at this day, as well as then, have reason to expect a blessing, upon all that God bestows upon them of the good things of this life: for *godliness bath the promise of the life that now is*, as well as of *that which is to come*. But, as the words refer to New Testament days, they are chiefly to be understood as containing a promise, that God will give to the church of Christ, to every particular branch of the catholic body, and to every genuine member of every church,—along with that spiritual provision, which is set before us in gospel ordinances,—such a special and saving blessing as may render that provision effectual,

for nourishing our souls up to the day of complete redemption.

Viewing the words in this sense, we may observe in them the five following things:

I. The glorious Speaker, promising in the pronoun *I*.

II. The party spoken of, in the pronoun *her*.

III. The benefit promised, a Blessing, *I will bless*.

IV. The more immediate subject of this Blessing, *her provision*.

V. The degree in which it should be bestowed, *abundantly*.

A few words concerning each of these, with some short Improvement of the subject, is all that is intended at this time.

As to the FIRST thing mentioned; the Great Speaker, in this, and in every other gospel promise, is God himself. Whether we consider this and the following verses, as uttered from the oracle, in answer to David's prayer,—whether they had been spoken by God to the Psalmist—on some former occasion, and are rehearsed, for the encouragement of the people now assembled,—or whether, in the composition of this Psalm, he was moved by the Holy Ghost, to speak in this manner in the name of God,—it matters not. We are sure that this sentence was given, like all other scripture, by inspiration of God, and is to be regarded as spoken to us by himself.

Indeed, had this promise been made by any other, it would have been of little avail. Every good and perfect gift comes originally from the Father of lights: yet there are some good things that God has given into the hands of men,—and that men may bestow upon
their

their fellow-creatures. With regard to these, a man's promise may sometimes be worthy of trust. But the blessing here promised is of such a nature, that none but God can bestow it. Concerning him only can that be truly said, that Balak said of Balaam very foolishly, *I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.*—He who hath promised, O Zion, abundantly to bless thy provision, is no other than thy God; a God of infinite power and faithfulness: and thou mayest,—with the greatest confidence and assurance, depend upon his infallible testimony, that it shall be to thee—even as he hath said.

There are several things mentioned concerning God, in this context, that ought to be carefully attended to, while we trust in him for the accomplishment of this promise. He is the God for whom a habitation has been prepared in the church. David was not alone in his resolution, not to *go into the tabernacle of his house, nor to go up into his bed, till he had found a place for the Lord, a place of habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.* The same is the resolution of every one to whom this promise is accomplished, or by whom it is believably applied. They who pretend to receive from God, and will give him nothing, are yet strangers to that faith, by which spiritual blessings are received. If you enjoy the blessing of God upon your provision, you will cheerfully contribute your mite for preparing him an habitation. Not only will you do what you can for the support of his ordinances among you, you will dedicate to him your heart, as a tabernacle in which he may dwell. You will invite him to reside in your house and family if you have one: you will even consider your body as a temple of the
Holy

Holy Ghost, and endeavour to keep it pure for his reception. Think not that by thus preparing him an habitation, you become entitled to his blessing upon your provision. Nay, this blessing, and all other spiritual benefits must come in the channel of free and unmerited grace. But the same grace by which you become interested in this promise, will also dispose you to sing this note of the song of Moses, *He is my God and I will exalt him, my father's God, and I will prepare him an habitation* *.

He is the same God who hath chosen Zion, and taken up his habitation in her. The heavens, yea the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. Yet this glorious and high God disdains not to dwell with men upon earth. As soon as David had prepared a place for him, he said of it, *this is my rest, here will I dwell, for I have desired it*. He says the same thing concerning the church still. And still he is in the midst of her, so that she shall not be moved. By this means he knows every circumstance, relative to her, and to every one of her members: he is ready to hear all the requests of his people, and to grant them without loss of time. You need not go far to present your petitions, to represent your grievances, or to table your complaints before him. Neither need you wait long for an answer. *The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart*. Equally near is he whose word it is, to accomplish his gracious word to you, and grant your request as soon as you have made it.

In a word, he is the God from whom all her provision comes. Accordingly, he promises, in the latter part of this verse, to *satisfy her poor with bread*. He will give that provision with which they are to be satisfied.

* Exod. xv. 2.

tified. He will give it in such a free and gratuitous manner, that even the poor, who cannot buy; shall not be famished. He will give it in such quantity, that they may be satisfied. And he will so bless it to them, that they shall be satisfied indeed. As he knows what provision is suitable to every one's taste, and to every one's need: He knows what blessing is proper to make every one's provision effectual, for affording him the promised satisfaction.

THE SECOND thing noticed in the words was the party spoken of, concerning whom this promise is to be understood, and to whom it shall be accomplished. *I will bless HER provision.* The antecedent is Zion, mentioned in the preceding verse: meaning, as was said, Jerusalem as the type; and the church of Christ, as the antitype.—Now the church is spoken of in the feminine gender, chiefly to put us in mind of two things. 1. Of her weakness and helplessness, considered in herself. She and all her members are weak and defenceless as silly women. Though many enemies are confederate against her, no effectual resistance could be made to them, if the Lord of hosts were not on her side. Neither could she, or any of her children be the better for the victory, when these enemies are subdued, if it were not a law of her King, that *women who remain at home should distribute the prey.* 2. Of that happy relation that subsists between Christ and her. So close and intimate is that mysterious relation, that it can be compared to no other earthly relation—so fitly as to that between husband and wife. He has betrothed her to himself for ever. He nourishes and cherishes her, as a loving husband the wife of his youth. He has even left father and mother, that he
might

might cleave unto her. He performs all the duties of a husband to her: and it is incumbent upon her to perform all the duties of a wife to him. He calls her his *love*, his *dove*, his *undefiled*: and she says, in raptures, concerning him, *My beloved is mine and I am his*.

Now, concerning this Zion, where God took up his residence in the days of David, two things are remarkable: both which are to be found, in a spiritual sense, about the church of Christ; and both which serve to render it matter of wonder, that God should either condescend to dwell in her, or to bestow her provision upon her, or to bless it when he has bestowed it.

1. This Zion was originally no more than a little barren rocky hill: fit neither for pasture nor tillage, nor, apparently, for any other valuable purpose. It had its very name from drought and barrenness, as the derivation of the word is known to intimate. Yet here it was that God chose to take up his residence; and to bestow his blessing. He set not up his dwelling in the fruitful hill of Bashan, nor on the goodly mountain Lebanon, but upon the useless and contemptible hill of Zion. So, the church of Christ is so far from being originally better than the rest of the world, that there is no other part of it more worthless than she. She is made up of the weak, the foolish, the despised things of the world; of the poor, the miserable, the wretched, the blind, the naked,—yea of the very chief of sinners.—Whatever qualifications are to be found about her, or about those individuals who compose her, instead of being the causes, are all the fruits of his love.

2. Zion was a place that had long continued in the possession

possession of those who were enemies to God and to his people. Though Jerusalem stood in the heart of the land of promise; yet the Jebusites continued to possess it, till the days of David. And when he proposed to take it from them, they set him at open defiance: boasting that the blind and the lame were sufficient to defend it against him and all his army*. Yea, that particular spot, where the temple was afterwards built, continued to be the property of a native Jebusite, till David bought it of him, in the day of the pestilence, towards the close of his reign. Yet in this spot did God choose to dwell, and not in any of those cities that had been possessed by his peculiar people, for almost five hundred years. This, no doubt, contained a dark intimation, that the New Testament church, which mount Zion prefigured, was chiefly to be gathered from among the Gentiles,—and that the Jews were not always to continue, exclusively God's peculiar people. But it might have a further meaning: For the church of Christ is wholly made up of persons, who were originally enemies to God, and under the dominion of Satan, his greatest enemy; persons who reject all his gracious proposals of coming to dwell in them and among them; and, though spiritually blind and lame, take upon them to defend the castle of their hearts, against all the gracious assaults of David's Son and Lord. Though God has purchased this habitation for himself, with the blood of his own eternal Son; yet when he comes to take possession,—instead of a kindly welcome, he meets with all the resistance that enmity itself can make: and never could he come in, if he did not subdue his enemies, and the blind and the lame, by the irresistible hand of his Om-

*

C c

nipotence.

* See 2 Sam. v. 6,—10.

nipotence.—Yet, when he has taken possession in this manner, he is so far from resenting her opposition, that he both furnishes those very persons, who made it, with all necessary supplies, and graciously engages *abundantly to bless their provision.*

For this promise belongs not only to the church in general, but likewise to all her members individually; so that every one is warranted to look for the accomplishment of it to himself, as well as to the church, or to the particular congregation with which he is connected. As the natural body cannot, in any ordinary case, be nourished, while particular members of it fall into decay; and as every member receives its share of nourishment, from that provision by which the life of the body is sustained;—so it is with the body mystical. It is by doing good to the members severally, that God promotes the advantage of the church at large. As every Israelite was allowed to gather of that manna, that fell about the camp in the wilderness; and as the whole people must have perished, unless individuals had been nourished by it;—so that spiritual bread from heaven, which God, in the dispensation of the gospel, gives to the visible church, every particular hearer of the gospel is warranted to receive, appropriate, and use, for the nourishment of his own immortal soul: and it is by making it effectual for the nourishment of particular souls, that God blesses it, so as to make it truly beneficial to the church at large.

THE THIRD thing observed in the words was, the benefit promised by God to the church; a Blessing: *I will BLESS her provision.* Every one knows that blessing is opposed to cursing. The curse of God is that

that judicial sentence, which he, as the great Judge of all the earth, hath passed against every transgressor of his holy law, adjudging him to suffer that punishment, which the law has annexed to his sin. As all men have sinned in their first father, we all come into the world under that curse: and we can only be set free from it by Christ, who was *made a curse for us*.

The blessing of God, therefore, is that sentence, which is past in the court of Heaven, absolving the person from the sentence of the law curse, and adjudging him to enjoy a happiness proportioned to the misery which his former sentence bound upon him.—From this definition, the two following things are manifest.

1. That, strictly speaking, none has power to bless but God only. That sentence of cursing which was past by his authority, no subordinate authority can reverse. Neither can any creature bestow that happiness, to which we are adjudged by the blessing; and it were idle for any person to pretend to pass a sentence which he has not power to execute. When, therefore, the scriptures speak of one man blessing another, it must either be understood of his praying to God for a blessing upon him,—or, at most, of his ministerially declaring him to be blessed of God: intimating the sentence, in God's name, which can only be past by his authority.—And when we are said to bless God, the word must still be understood in a more improper sense. God is infinitely, immutably, and eternally blessed, or happy, in and of himself. None can add any thing to his blessedness. None has authority to pass a sentence of blessing upon him. Nor can any person rationally wish him to be more blessed than he is. In blessing God, therefore, we do but express our

sense of his infinite blessedness, our acquiescence in it, and our gratitude to him, as the original source of all blessedness to us, and to all the creatures that are capable of it.

2. That persons only, and not things, are the proper objects of blessing. As rational beings only are capable of happiness or misery; so rational creatures only can be adjudged to either: and therefore they only can either be cursed or blessed.—Yet, in various places of scripture, the blessing is spoken of as terminating upon irrational, and inanimate things,—as well as the curse. When our first father had sinned, God said unto him, among other things, *Cursed is the ground for thy sake*: And the expression is explained by what follows; *in sorrow shalt thou eat of it, all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee* *. The meaning is, that the curse which was pronounced against man should affect even the ground that he cultivated; so that, instead of affording him what was suited to promote his happiness, as before,—it should yield him thorns and thistles: and though it should still produce the necessaries of life, man would be so far from finding himself happy in the enjoyment of them, that he should use them in sorrow, all the days of his mortal life. In this sense, God still curses all the common benefits or blessings of life, to all those who lay not his word to heart, that they may give glory to his name; as he threatens by the prophet †. That is, he not only deprives those benefits of any tendency to make them happy; but he likewise gives them a commission to be means of furthering and aggravating their misery: and this, as a native effect of that sentence of condemnation, that stands in force
against

* Gen. iii. 17, 18. † Mal. ii. 2.

against the persons themselves, on account of their sin.

On the other hand, as soon as any person is brought into a state of union with Christ, and is blessed in him, —being justified freely by the grace of God, through the imputation of his righteousness; not only is that person adjudged to happiness; but that sentence has an effect upon all that he meets with in the course of providence. All the common benefits of life have a commission from God, to be means, not merely of rendering his present life happy, as far as happiness is attainable here,—but likewise of preparing him for eternal happiness, and of conducting him to it. Yea, the trials, afflictions, and miseries of this life, are all under an appointment of God, to be conducive to the same end. Hence that saying of the Apostle Paul *, *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.*

In this sense it is, that God here promises to bless Zion's Provision. Having pronounced a sentence, from that throne upon which he sits, as the supreme Judge of all,—by virtue of which the church, and all her members, are entitled, in law, to eternal happiness and glory; and having made such provision for them as is necessary during their pilgrimage in this world;—he graciously makes that provision effectual, not only for supporting their spiritual life, till they come to the place of their happiness, but likewise for strengthening them to accomplish their spiritual journey, for preparing them for the happy estate to which they are adjudged, for aggravating their happiness when they come to possess it, and even for giving them a foretaste

of

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

of it while they are on the way. This provision is set before all that are within the boundaries of the visible church, in the dispensation of the gospel. But, with regard to those persons who still continue under the curse, this, as well as every thing else that they enjoy, is affected by that dreadful sentence. And unless that sentence is abolished, all the effect of those means of grace that they enjoy, will only be to render their misery, at the second coming of Christ, more intollerable than that of the wretched inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrha*.

With regard to all those who are genuine members of the church invisible, these means of grace shall have a very different effect. Being influenced by that sentence of blessing, which was past upon their persons, in the day of their justification,—their provision shall be made effectual, to answer all those ends, for which God gives it into their hand. In the use of it, they enjoy a present happiness, with which nothing deserves to be compared, that can arise from the abundance of corn and wine. And by it they shall all be nourished up, in faith, in holiness, and comfort, till they arrive at *the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*. This is that blessing which is here promised to the church, upon her spiritual provision.

BUT what is the Provision, that God will so bless to Zion and her children? This was the FOURTH particular to be spoken of: and an answer to the question may be gathered from the following observations.

The word which we here render provision, signifies properly that provision, or food, which a person enjoys on a journey, or while leading a wandering life. The church,

church,

church, and all her members, while in this world, are in a way-faring state: travelling through a vast and howling wilderness, towards that land, where God hath promised her an eternal residence. And it is upon her journey provision that this blessing is promised.

As the people of Israel, when travelling through the wilderness of Arabia, towards the land of Canaan, found nothing in the desert to sustain them; and the provisions that they brought with them out of Egypt were soon exhausted, they must soon have perished for want, if God had not fed them miraculously with manna. So it is with the spiritual Israel. They have nothing of their own to support the life of their souls: and the wilderness, through which they pass, affords nothing fit for that purpose. They behoved, therefore, to perish, if their heavenly Father did not give them the true bread from heaven, which is no other than the flesh and blood of his own eternal Son, which he gave for the life of the world. Had man continued in his estate of original integrity, this provision had never been made for him: it had not been necessary, nor suitable to his condition. But for sinners, such as all mankind now are, there is no other provision suitable. The church of Christ, in her itinerant state has no other: and she has no occasion for any other; for Christ's *flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed* *.

Upon this provision the Christian feeds, when, by faith, he receives and appropriates Christ and his righteousness, as offered to him in the gospel,—unites with him, and derives virtue from him, for spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. No man can have the
proper

* See John vi. 32,—38.

proper use of his bodily food, unless it be received into his mouth, digested in his stomach, and so incorporated with him, as to supply the waste of nature, and restore the vital fluids, after they had been exhausted by fasting or exercise. In this case, his food really becomes part of himself; and can no more be separated from him by any human art. So it is in respect of this spiritual provision. We cannot feed upon the flesh and blood of Christ in a corporal or carnal manner: nor must he be understood literally, when he represents his flesh and blood as the meat and drink of his people. It is meant of that surety-righteousness, which he wrought for us, when his flesh was bruised, and his blood shed. This every believer receives, and improves as the ground of all his hopes for eternity; as the foundation of all his pleadings at the throne of grace, and as the only source of all his joy and comfort: he derives from it all his nourishment, is kept by it from fainting under a sense either of guilt or misery: and as all the benefits of salvation are the fruits of it, whatever strength or spiritual growth he attains in the enjoyment of any of those benefits,—all may be considered as the happy effect of his living upon this provision.

Now, as God gave the typical bread to Israel in the wilderness; by causing it to fall round about their tabernacles, so that every one might gather of it what was sufficient for himself and family;—so our heavenly Father giveth us this true bread from heaven, by making a free and open exhibition of it, in the word of his grace, the gospel of our salvation, and in those ordinances which he has instituted in the church. All these are as so many tables, upon which this provision is served up, or so many vessels in which it is set forth.

forth.—In the sacrament of the Lord's supper it is served up to the friends of Christ only, the genuine members of the church invisible: But in the gospel it is set before all the members of the visible church, and before all sinners of every denomination, indiscriminately. Every one is not only warranted, but expressly called and invited to come and eat of Wisdom's bread, and drink of the wine that she hath mingled. Hence God promises to *make*,—and now actually has made, *in this mountain* of the gospel church, and that *unto all people, a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined* *. Though there are too many who are present at this feast, in respect of an outward attendance upon ordinances, and yet never put their hand to their mouth, nor taste of this provision;—yet every person who is a Christian indeed, has the yoke taken off from his jaws, when this meat is set before him; he finds the words of God sweeter than honey to his mouth. The new *man* really *liveth not by bread alone; but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* †.

It may appear superfluous to promise a blessing upon this Spiritual Provision; in regard that the flesh and blood of Christ being the procuring cause of the blessing; no person can really enjoy the one and want the other. As soon as any person truly makes use of this provision, he is thereby secured against the curse of the law, and interested in the blessing. Neither is it possible for any person to eat of it, without having it so blessed as to answer the end of it, in the actual nourishment of his spiritual life. The word, therefore, would seem to be used here, not to signify this spiritual food itself, but those ordinances in which it is exhibited

*

D d

bited

* Isa. xxv. 6.

† Matth. iv. 4.

bited and brought to hand. These many persons enjoy, who continue strangers to the blessing: and they may be continued in a church, where few have them so blessed to their souls, as to receive spiritual nourishment, or any saving advantage by them. But all who are truly within the church invisible, as God has distinguished them from all hypocrites, and mere nominal Christians, by taking up a gracious residence in them and with them; so does he also bestow upon them a spiritual and saving blessing, along with outward ordinances. And this is that which is promised in the text.

Thus the words contain an engagement that God would not only set up, and continue in the church, those ordinances, which are the external means of conveying to the souls of his people their spiritual provision; but would also bestow upon her, and upon all such of her members, as embrace this promise by faith, —such a blessing upon ordinances, as shall render them effectual, for all the ends of their institution,—and for all the purposes of salvation and happiness to those who thus enjoy them: particularly, that ordinances shall be useful, as means of conveying into the souls of church members, that spiritual food, by which alone they can be nourished up to the day of complete redemption.

Neither do I think that the temporal provision of the inhabitants of Zion is to be excluded. It is a comfortable truth, that all who are subjects of the divine blessing in Christ, have all that they possess so influenced and improved by that blessing, that they enjoy a happiness, even in their temporal possessions, that can never be experienced by any of those who continue under the curse. This is it that makes a *lit-*

tle that a just man hath, better than the riches of many wicked. It cannot be doubted that the promise had a reference to this, in its first application to the typical Zion. And why should it be excluded in regard to the antitype? Yea, Christian,—you may plead this promise, and draw encouragement from it, even in praying for a new covenant blessing upon your daily bread; though you ought chiefly to improve it as a ground of faith, that God will bless the gospel, and the ordinances of a gospel dispensation, with success, through the efficacious co-operation of his Spirit, for bringing many souls among you to salvation.

THE LAST thing observed in the words, and none of the least comfortable, was the degree in which this blessing shall be bestowed, intimated in the word *abundantly*. All who enjoy the blessing of God, may, in one sense, be said to enjoy it in the same degree: for all enjoy it in perfection. Every justified person is completely secured against the curse, and is irrevocably adjudged to the final enjoyment of all blessedness.—But, in respect of the fruits of that blessing, which are enjoyed in this life, there is often a great difference. The sentence of blessing begins to have effect upon every Christian, as soon as it is pronounced: and it shall be fully executed upon them all at the last. But the effects of it upon some are scarcely perceptible, in this world;—while others have been so blessed, with the communications of divine love and grace, even in this life, that the clay vessel could hold no more.

With regard to the church in general, there is likewise a great difference between the effects of the di-

vine blessing upon her, and upon her provision,—at different times, and in different places. Sometimes ordinances are accompanied with such an efficacious blessing, that, by means of them, *a nation is born at once, and a kingdom brought forth as in one day.* At other times, the success attending them is so very small, that the elect of God are but gathered on by one: and men can scarcely know, by sensible observation, whether there be any blessing attending Zion's Provision or not.

This difference is owing, neither to any difference in the ordinances themselves, nor in the manner in which they are dispensed, nor in the character or intentions of those persons who are employed in the administration of them. Oftentimes the gospel is dispensed with much purity and perspicuity, and yet is attended with so little success, that there is reason for Isaiah's complaint, *Who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?* This was the sad case, even when Christ himself was the Preacher *. And, on the other hand, we doubt not, but in some cases, the blessing of God may be seen to accompany his ordinances, when the dispensation of them is attended, not only with imperfection, but even with much corruption. Thus the Lord appeared to Solomon, when he worshipped in the high place at Gibeon †. But this difference is solely owing to the different degrees in which God communicates himself to his worshippers. When the Holy Spirit of all grace is present in his ordinances, and, by means of them, works savingly upon the hearts of many,—then the blessing upon Zion's Provision is both evident and effective. But when the influences of the Spirit are

withdrawn,

* Isa. liii. 1. compare John xii. 38.

† 1 Kings iii. 5.

withdrawn, *Ichabod* is written upon the church and her solemnities: and the wrath of God may come upon those who attend upon ordinances, as it came upon Israel in the wilderness, while the meat was in their mouths, and slew the fattest of them. This withdrawing of the Holy Spirit may take place, in adorable sovereignty, for various reasons that mortals cannot discover; but seldom, if ever, did it take place, unless when he was provoked by abounding corruption in the church, or abounding sin among her members. Though neither the purity of the church, nor the holiness of individuals within her pale, can procure a blessing upon her provision; yet the prevalence of sin, either personal or public, may justly separate between us and our God, and often is the cause why he withholds that blessing which is here promised upon our spiritual provision.

Now the promise encourages us to expect, not only that we shall have ordinances continued with us, and that the gracious presence of God shall not be wholly withdrawn from them; but also, that such a measure of the influences of the Holy Spirit shall accompany them, as shall make them effectual for the conversion of many sinners, and for the comfort and edification of all the saints that are among us. In trusting this promise, and pleading upon it at the throne of grace,—beware of dealing with God, as if the instruments of the church were with him.—Look for such a measure of divine grace, along with your external privileges; as may correspond to the inexhaustible riches of *his* liberality, who is the author of the promise in our text. Trust him, that he will not only bless your provision, but bless it abundantly.

WE should now conclude with some Improvement of the subject. But, being unwilling to detain you any longer from the main work about which we are this day met,—I shall defer any thing of this kind till that work is over.

THE CHARGE.

I SHALL now endeavour to improve the doctrine you were hearing, in a short Address, First to the Lord's Servant, now the Pastor of this Associate Congregation, and then to the People committed to his Charge. As to you,

MY REVEREND AND DEAR FATHER,

I cannot but be sensible, how unfit I am to give *you* any advice, either in regard to your public administration, or to your private conduct. But, as John the Baptist declined not to perform the duty of his office, even to Christ his Master and ours, when put in mind that so it became them both to fulfil all righteousness; so neither dare I, being thus called to it in providence, decline to put you and myself in mind of some of those duties, that are incumbent upon us, and upon all others who are honoured to bear the same office in the church.

The chief part of our work is to set before the children of Zion—that provision, which God, in my text, has promised to bless. And surely we had need to be careful, that we set nothing before them but wholesome food. If we preach false doctrine, if we pervert
the

the scriptures of truth, or corrupt any ordinance of divine institution, we take the ready method to poison the souls of our people : and their blood will God require at our hand.

That this danger may be avoided, let us always bear in mind, that we are stewards of the mystery of God. As we have nothing of our own to distribute among them, we must faithfully set that before them, and that only, which we *have received of the Lord*. All that he has appointed for the provision of his family, is contained in his blessed word. Our bibles therefore, must be our constant companions and instructors. The study and teach of the scriptures must be our main employment : all our doctrines and administrations must be regulated by that unerring standard. We, as well as our people, are in danger of erring, in the interpretation and application of scripture : and therefore we never will be capable of rightly dividing the word of truth,—without the assistance of that Spirit, by whom the scriptures were dictated.—Let us therefore make constant application to the throne of grace, for the illuminating influences of that Spirit ; that our understandings may be opened to know the scriptures. As we act by God's commission, let us always depend upon him for direction, both what we should set before his people, and how. And never let us venture, either to prepare, or to deliver a sermon, without making application to him, by faith and prayer, for that effect.

As the flesh and blood of a crucified Redeemer— are the only provision, by which the souls of sinful men can be nourished,—let it ever be the main scope and tendency of all our ministrations, to set *these* before our hearers, in a manner adapted to their circumstances

stances and to their capacities. Let us neither perplex our discourses with obscure scholastic phrases—or terms of art,—nor strive to adorn them with airy flourishes of human eloquence. Let us neither entertain our hearers with insipid harangues of Pagan morality, nor with the sapless productions of philosophy or mere reason. Even the principles of natural religion should be explained, and duties of moral obligation inculcated, only as the word of God has connected them with, and ingrafted them into the *ministry of reconciliation*. In imitation of the renowned Apostle of the Gentiles, every faithful minister of Christ will *determine to know nothing among his hearers, save Jesus Christ and him crucified*.

The feast that God makes, in the mountain of the gospel church, is a feast unto all people: and all people indiscriminately must be invited to it. Let us therefore beware of restricting or limiting the call and offer of the gospel,—and thereby excluding any sinner from God's provision. As the successors of Christ's apostles, we must, *preach the gospel to every human creature*. As the maidens of infinite Wisdom, we must cry, in her name, *upon the highest places of the city; who so is simple let him turn in hither: and us for him that wanteth understanding*, we must say to him,—*come eat of the glorious Redeemer's bread, and drink of the wine which he hath mingled*. It is true, and a comfortable truth it is, that the weary and heavy laden are invited to come to Christ: persons sensible of the burden of their sin and guilt, and weary of spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. But to restrain the gospel call to these, or to any other class of men,—to require any kind of qualifications, as the condi-

tion of a sinner's access to God's provision, is to render the gospel of none effect. The great King, our Master, having made a marriage for his Son, hath sent us forth, with an express charge, that as many as we find we are to bid to the marriage. Even the robber that infests the high-ways, is not excluded, nor the thief that lurks among the hedges. Our commission is to compel them all to come in.

Yes, we must compel them to come in:—not by brutal force, by corporal penalties, or by doing violence, in any respect, to their wills. Such methods of compulsion neither are nor ought to be in our power: and if they were, they have no fitness for such a purpose. We are to compel them by earnest and continual urging, by affectionate intreaties, and by cogent arguments.—We must not only set this spiritual provision before all,—we must use every habile mean to prevail with them, to take and use it.—Sometimes we must endeavour to persuade them by the terrors of the law, and sometimes to allure them with the sweet promises of the gospel. We must press them with scripture arguments, and we must strive to catch them with holy guile. Commands, intreaties, invitations, reproofs, persuasions, threatenings, soothing, encouragements, and exhortations, must all be used in their turns. In season and out of season, must we ply them, that, if possible, God's house may be filled with guests, and Zion's poor ones satisfied with bread.

But though all people must be invited to the provision on the gospel table; yet, surely, *it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.* Of this we will be guilty, if we do or say any thing, to encourage sinners to expect any benefit by this provision, in a way of continuing in sin. And we will be

chargeable with the same abuse, if we admit to the sealing ordinances of the church, those who walk so, as to prove themselves enemies to the cross of Christ. —To this provision, as served up on the sacramental table, none can be truly welcome but the genuine children of Zion: And we profane that ordinance, if we admit any to it, whom we have not reason, in charity, to look upon as friends of Christ. Unless we are careful in this respect, to take forth the precious from the vile, we prove ourselves unfit, as well as unworthy to be as the mouth of God to his people.

In the mean time, let us beware, lest, by our private walk, we cause the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred; and so defeat the whole design of our public ministry. A man's stomach will turn at the most wholesome food, when he sees it presented with unclean hands: So the hearers of the gospel will be ready to despise the most salutary doctrines, and the most wholesome exhortations, if they are seen to have no effect upon the life of the preacher.—Let it therefore be our constant endeavour to set an example of gospel holiness in all its branches;—and to banish all sinful and offensive practices, from our persons and families.—For this purpose, let us daily make use of the same provision that we are called to set before others; that, being nourished by it, we may continually grow in grace, in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and in conformity to his image, and to his example.

But, as nothing that we can do, either in our public ministrations, or in our private walk, can have any saving effect upon our people, without that blessing which is promised in the text,—let us embrace every opportunity of wrestling at the throne of grace, that it may not be wanting.—Let us never venture to the
pulpit,

pulpit, without previously looking up to God, both for his gracious assistance to ourselves, that we may give to every one his portion of meat in due season; and also for our people, that they may not receive the grace of God in vain. From the pulpit, let us return to the closet,—and, before indulging ourselves in any other employment, let us renew our pleadings with God, for that blessing upon our endeavours in his service, without which, we must always labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought.

A B

AS to you who are the Members of this Congregation,—the Lord has again taken up his residence among you, and made provision for you, by restoring a fixed administration of gospel ordinances among you. But beware of resting in what you have attained, or becoming proud of your privileges,—saying, as Israel of old, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these*. Beware of expecting, either from those talents with which the Head of the church has distinguished your minister, or from those ordinances which he is called to dispense, that spiritual profit, which can only be derived from the blessing of God upon both. By so doing, you should put your minister, or his ministrations, into the place of God,—and so be chargeable with idolatry: and there should be reason to fear, that he who has threatened to cast the carcases of idolaters upon the carcases of their idols, might cause the effects of his just displeasure to be severely felt, both by you and your minister, on that account.

Be, therefore, denied to all ordinances, and to all
E e 2
instruments;

instruments; and look to God alone for all the success of a gospel dispensation among you. Pray earnestly, this day, and on all after occasions, that the gracious presence of God may be with his servant, in all his ministrations,—that he may be abundantly furnished, for the great work with which he is entrusted, and that his labours may be made successful, to the salvation of many souls. Pray for yourselves, for your brethren, and for all sorts of persons about the place,—that an abundant blessing upon Zion's provision—may bring many to eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord: that so the pleasure of the Lord may prosper among you, in the hand of Christ, and in the hand of his servant under him.

Be careful to guard against every thing, that may tend to mar the success of the gospel among you: to extinguish or obscure the lamp that God has ordained for his anointed. We say nothing of your making a decent provision for your minister in temporals; though the neglect of this duty must prove very hurtful to the interests of religion among you: being well assured, that if you enjoy the divine blessing upon the spiritual provision which he is instrumental in dispensing to you, you will not be backward to communicate with him in your carnal things. But we would chiefly warn you against all such untender and incautious behaviour as may grieve the heart of your minister, discredit the profession you make, bring reproach upon the ordinances dispensed among you, and cause the good ways of God to be evil spoken of. In a special manner, be exhorted to cultivate peace, harmony, and brotherly love, among yourselves. Your own experience may convince you, on the one hand, that it is *a good and a pleasant thing*
for

for brethren to dwell together in unity, and, on the other hand, that *where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.* Beware of uncharitableness towards those of a different communion; but esteem and honour them as brethren, if there is any appearance of the image of Christ about them; though you dare not symbolize with them in any thing that appears to you contrary to the law of God, or to sound doctrine. Keep always at an equal distance from blind and intemperate zeal, on the one extreme,—and from lukewarmness and indifference in the cause of God, on the other.

While you ask of God the promised blessing upon your provision, beware of every thing that may provoke him to deny your request: and to make you *know his breach of promise.* *If you do not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to his name,* he has threatened to *curse your blessings:* and the blessing of a gospel ministry may be cursed among the rest. If you lothe your spiritual provision, and by your unbelief, despise the gospel, and God's unspeakable gift therein exhibited,—you have reason to fear, either that your table shall be drawn, and you visited with cleanness of teeth,—or else that the curse of God shall so blast the gospel to you that its only effect shall be to *make your hearts fat, and your ears dull of hearing; lest you should see with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and understand with your hearts, and convert and be healed* *.

That this dreadful issue of matters may be prevented, be concerned, by faith to receive, and to feed upon that wonderful provision which was made for you by the death of Christ, and is set before you in the
glorious

* Isa. vi. 10.

glorious gospel. Let nothing excuse you from coming, at God's invitation, to *the marriage supper of the Lamb*. Behold, the bread of God, that cometh down from heaven,—all the fatness of God's house, is, at this moment, set before you. You have the promise of infinite faithfulness, in my text, that he *will abundantly bless your provision*. *Hearken diligently*, both to his call and to his promise,—*eat ye that which is good, let your soul delight herself in fatness*: And *prove him herewith*, if he *will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, till there be not room enough to receive it*.

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

The Foundation of the Christian's Hope.

ROM. viii. 32.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not also with him, freely give us all things?

WE know but of one instance of a conversation between glorified saints and persons in a state of mortality; and because there was no subject more worthy of their attention, *they spake of the decease which Christ was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*—Both in the church militant and in the church triumphant, this will ever be considered, as a pleasing theme of contemplation, and as a ground of endless joy and praise.—It is highly proper that it should be so,—on various accounts.—In its own nature, this is the most wonderful of all events. That the Lord of life should die,—that he whom angels worship, should be crucified between two thieves,—that God's eternal Son should be subject to his Father's severest wrath, without ever having offended him, and without ceasing to be the prime object of his love,—the records of time afford no event deserving a comparison with it.—It contains the most glorious display of the love of God, to sinners of our family: both of the love of the Father, *who spared not his own Son, but deliver-*

ed

ed him up for us all, and of the love of the Son, who gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice, of a sweet smelling savour unto God.—It shews the strictness and severity of divine justice, in a clearer light than all the punishments do, that ever were inflicted, or through all eternity will be inflicted upon sinful creatures.—It affords the clearest discovery of the wretched condition that all mankind are in by nature; as being exposed to the same tremendous wrath that brought *him* to the dust of death.—And it lays a sure foundation for that sentence of justification, by which all the sins of believers in Christ are freely pardoned, and they obtain a legal title to all the blessings of grace and glory.

Besides all these, another consideration is suggested in this text, which renders it highly worthy of our constant and most grateful remembrance. This event contains an incontestible security, that there is nothing that the most high God; the Possessor of heaven and earth, can give, which he is disposed to withhold from any of those, who, by faith have obtained an interest in Christ, and in his death.

Though these words are express in the form of a question, it is not because Paul had any doubt, about that which is here the subject of enquiry; nor because the Spirit of God, by whose inspiration he wrote, intended that such a doubt should be entertained, by any who reads them: But because he would have us all assured, that no rational ground can be suggested for such a doubt. The Holy Ghost condescends to appeal to every person, into whose hands the Bible comes, if, after what is mentioned in the first part of the verse, there can be any reason to hesitate, about the truth of what is suggested in the latter part of it.

The question, therefore, like many others in scripture, has the force of a strong affirmation: And the doctrine contained in the text, may, without a question, be express in the following paraphrase.

‘God, in that he spared not his own Son, but, of his own free and voluntary motion, delivered him up for all the elect seed,—hath given the most convincing evidence, that there is nothing which he will withhold from them; but that, along with Christ himself, he will freely give them all things.’

To explain the words a little more particularly, and then to endeavour some application of them, is all that is proposed at this time.

In general, the text contains two things; an assertion, and an inference drawn from it.

I. WE have something asserted, in the first part of the verse: perhaps I should rather have said, something taken for granted; *viz.* that God *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.* Paul does not speak to the Romans, as if they had been ignorant of this before; but he mentions it as a truth in which they had been instructed already, with which they were all acquainted, and in which they were all agreed. Indeed, it is a truth so essential to the Christian system, that I see not how any man can be a real disciple of Christ, who either impugns it, or is ignorant of it. He lays it down, as a principle received by all to whom he wrote, and therefore fit, according to the rules of sound reasoning, to be the foundation of an argument, that might have a convincing influence up-

on all their minds. In this part of the verse, more particularly, we may notice the five following things.

1. The glorious Being, who is the subject of this proposition, in the pronoun *he*. This little word must always have a reference to some person who had been spoken of before. Who is he, then, of whom the apostle had been speaking, and here continues to speak? We have heard of some who burnt their sons and daughters in sacrifice to devils: That was a dreadful instance of the power of superstition over the minds of corrupt men. There have been a few, who voluntarily gave up their sons to public justice, to be punished for their crimes: this, though a noble triumph of justice over natural affection, was still no more than their duty. We have heard of one man, and but one, who withheld not his son, his only son, from God: This was, indeed, a heroic instance, of the power of faith; yet it was no more than his reasonable service: and, in refusing it, Abraham would have been guilty both of ingratitude and rebellion.—But who is he that, contrary to all the dictates of human wisdom, and against all human expectation, delivered up his own Son, for such wretches as we are? It can be no other than he whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. The context informs us, it was that God, who being for us, none can be against us. It was he who, from all eternity, *foreknew*, and *predestinated us to be conformable to the image of his Son*: who, in time, calls us effectually, and justifies us freely: and who will glorify us in the world to come.—None but God would,—none but he could have done it. It is something above all created agents, and every way worthy of God. The word must be understood, immediately and directly, of God the Father, acting
in

in his œconomical character, as the representative of Deity in the covenant of grace. The delivering up of Christ for us—was an act, in which all the persons of the godhead were concerned; but, more immediately, it was the act of the Father only; for to him alone did Christ stand related, as *his own Son*.

2. Another illustrious person is here mentioned, as nearly related to the former, even *his own Son*. The denomination of sons of God—is given, in scripture, to various sorts of persons. Adam was called the son of God, as being created by him after his own image.—Angels are called sons of God, for the purity and spirituality of their nature.—Kings and earthly magistrates are called sons of God; yea, they are called gods, as well as sons of the Highest, on account of that dominion which they have over their fellow-creatures,—bearing a distant resemblance to that which God has over the whole creation. Believers in Christ are called sons of God, on a more endearing account; as being adopted into his family, and created anew after his image.—But none of all these are here intended. Had God delivered up all these, and all the rest of his creatures, to everlasting destruction, it would not have been half so wonderful. He of whom this text speaks—is the Son of God,—*his own Son*, in a far more excellent sense. This is he whom God has made his *first-born, higher than the kings of the earth*. In all things, he has,—and it well becomes him to have, the pre-eminence among all the sons of the family. The sonship of all the rest depends upon a positive act of the will of God; but this is his Son by nature: his eternal and only begotten Son: a Son, in every respect, equal with the Father; yea, of the same individual essence with himself.

I know there are some in our day, and some who are called masters in Israel, that are not ashamed to deny the Supreme Deity of Christ, and his equality with the Father. But I know no truth more plainly asserted in the word of God. To prove it, no more is necessary than a bare recital of a few passages from the sacred oracles: The incommunicable name JEHOVAH is often given to him. *This is the name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah, our righteousness* *. Though he is a *Man*, and God's *Shepherd*; yet the Father acknowledges him as his *fellow* †. He is that eternal *Word*, who was, in the beginning, with God, and himself was God ‡. He it was, who being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God §. He is over all God blessed for ever ||. In a word, He is one of the adorable three that bear record in heaven, which three are one ¶. I know that the adversaries of this doctrine have fallen upon methods to explain away the plain and obvious sense of some of these, and many other scriptures, where the same thing is asserted of him. And those passages which they cannot so easily pervert, they have attempted to expunge from the sacred canon. By this method, if allowed, it may be easy to explode one article of the Christian religion after another; till there is nothing left to distinguish it from plain deism: and this, I am afraid, is what some of these men are really driving at. But, of this you may be assured, that if Jesus Christ is a mere man,—or if he is not the supreme God,—he cannot be your Redeemer: and your faith is vain.

The generation or Sonship of Christ is a mystery, that no creature can ever fully understand; and therefore

* Jer. xxiii. 6. † Zech. xiii. 7. ‡ John i. 1. § Phil. xi. 6. || Rom. ix. 9.
¶ 1 John v. 7.

fore, no wise man will ever attempt to explain it, or to reduce it within the comprehension of human reason. Many such attempts, indeed, have been made; but all who ever made them, have either been constrained to desist, taking shame to themselves for their presumption; or else have been led into errors, subversive of the foundations of the Christian faith.—We are bound to believe that he is the Son of God by eternal generation; because this is plainly asserted in scripture. In the second Psalm, Christ himself is introduced, publishing God's eternal decree, concerning the enlargement of his kingdom in New Testament days. And this decree is prefaced with the Father's declaration to him, in these words, *thou art mine only Son, this day have I begotten thee*. The word *this day* can refer to no other period than that in which the decree was made,—the beginningless day of eternity.—But while we believe this doctrine, on the footing of this divine testimony, let us beware of any thing that may amount to a blasphemous acceptance of that challenge, which the Spirit of God gives to all mankind, in these words, *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation**?

This is he whom his eternal Father *spared not; but delivered him for us all*. And was it possible for him to do more, to manifest the greatness of his love? Is it possible to conceive any thing, that he might be supposed less willing to do? Or, supposing him ready to do all for us, that ever he could do for any creature, or for any rank of creatures,—is not this the very last thing, that we could have expected him to do?

3. We have something, with regard to this his Son, that God did not: he did not *spare* him. This word, in

* Isa. liii. 8

in scripture, bears a twofold sense. Sometimes it signifies a persons keeping a thing back, when there might be occasion to use it, because he wishes to preserve it safe and entire. Thus it is used in *Nathan's* parable, —*He spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him.*—In this sense, *God spared not his own Son.* —Even all the love that he had for him, and unchangeably will have, from eternity to eternity, did not prevail with him, to withhold, or keep him back from us. The man, in the parable, is represented as having numerous flocks and herds; yet he spared to take one lamb for his friend's entertainment: and such instances of avarice are not rare in the world. God had but one,—his only begotten, and well-beloved Son: and yet even him he spared not, when our necessity required—that he should deliver him up. He spared not, from all eternity, to appoint him to be the ransom of our souls: and when the fulness of the appointed time was come, he had not changed his mind: he then spared not actually to send him into our world, and subject him to all that he had appointed him to bear, in our stead, and for our good.

Sometimes the word signifies to refrain from punishing; or to mitigate somewhat of that severity, which might have been exercised toward any person. In this sense it is used, in *Abraham's* intercession for Sodom. *Peradventure, says the patriarch, there shall be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the place, for the fifty righteous that are therein? And the Lord said, if I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will spare all the place for their sakes: i. e. I will preserve them alive, and refrain from destroying them or their city. Nei-*

ther

ther in this sense did God spare his own Son.—When he found him sustaining the character of our Surety, clothed with our guilt, and standing in our room and place in law,—he did not refrain from inflicting upon him all the punishment that our sin deserved. All the love that he bare to him could not influence him, either to delay that punishment a moment beyond the appointed time, or to mitigate it in the smallest degree, when the time came. He saw that the end could not be gained, for which he was substituted in our room, unless he paid our criminal debt, even to the uttermost farthing. It was exacted, therefore, and he answered. The penalty of the broken law was, in no respect, modified to him. He suffered all that the curse condemned us to suffer: and infinitely more than we could have suffered, though we had borne the punishment of our own sin—through all eternity.

4. We have, in the words, something positive, that God is said to have done, with regard to his Son; he *delivered him up*. Here two things fall naturally to be enquired into, for ascertaining the sense of the expression: To whom was he delivered up? and to what?

To the first enquiry we answer in the following particulars.

(1.) He delivered him up into the hands of sinful men: hence his own words to his disciples in the garden,—*It is enough, the hour is come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners* *. No sooner was he come into our world, than the kings of the earth set themselves against him, and the princes took counsel together. All the time of his continuance in the world, his malicious countrymen sought his destruction:

* Mark xiv. 41.

struction: more especially after he entered upon his public work. For a time their malice was restrained, and they could not lay their hands upon him. He could easily have avoided them still: or, even when they had him most in their power, he could easily have delivered himself, had he only had men to deal with.—But, when the appointed hour was come,—his God and Father delivered him into their hands. Then was he betrayed by one that ate his bread: he was seized, like a malefactor, by a band of armed ruffians: and judged and condemned by a crew of hypocritical Pharisees, and atheistical Sadducees. He was impiously rejected by a deluded populace, inhumanly abused by licentious soldiery, and mocked and insulted by all bye-standers.—What he said to Pilate, was equally true concerning them all. None of them could ever have had any power over him, if it had not been given them from above. This was no alleviation of their sin: for though God acted agreeably to all his glorious perfections in permitting it; yet, in every thing that they did, in consequence of that permission, they acted in diametrical opposition to God's holy law.

(2.) He *delivered him up*, even to Satan, and the powers of hell. When about to enter upon his public ministry, the Spirit of God led him into the wilderness,—and purposely detained him in it forty days, to be tempted of the devil. And at last, in the dismal *hour of the power of darkness*, the prince of this world was permitted to come against him, at the head of all his infernal forces. And, though Satan had nothing in him—to take part with the temptation,—yet neither had Christ any to help or uphold him, in the dreadful conflict. As the first Adam was left to the freedom of his own will, without any supernatural assistance

sistance, when assaulted with the first temptation; that whether he resisted or complied with it, it might be wholly his own act;—so the second Adam was left to struggle with the same enemy,—to resist all his temptations, and to repel all his fiery darts—alone; that all the honour of the victory might be exclusively his own. Satan cunningly chose to make his grand attack, at the time when he knew that Christ was pennially forsaken of his Father. And God purposely gave him this advantage; that the shame of his defeat might be the greater, and the glory of his illustrious antagonist. For even Satan, that old serpent, could never have bruised the heel of Christ,—unless God had delivered him up into his hand. But,

(3.) All this had been comparatively little. Christ, being an infinite person, was more than a match for all the powers both of hell and earth. In the hands of devils and men combined, he would have been like Sampson among the Philistines, when his dastardly countrymen delivered him bound into their hands at Ramath-lehi,—or when his treacherous mistress bound him for them with green withs. But he had something infinitely more dreadful to conflict with; for God delivered him up into the hands of unrelenting justice. And divine justice did its utmost against him, as well as devils and men did. In the severest punishments that God inflicts upon creatures, either in this or in the other world, he stirs not up all his wrath, nor gives full scope to revenging justice; because the finite object could not bear it: but here, God's bow was made quite naked, all the arrows in his quiver were exhausted,—the vials of divine wrath were poured out upon Christ without reserve: and even the

power of Almighty God could inflict nothing to which he was not delivered up.

To crown all, he was delivered up to all these, at one and the same time. Had one enemy been defeated before another came up,—had they set upon him one after another, the conflict might have been longer, but the victory had been more easy. But in the very same hour when he bare all the fury of divine wrath, all the rage of men, and all the malice of devils were also let loose upon him: as if heaven itself had been combined with earth and hell, for his destruction. No wonder that his *soul* was *exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*.—No wonder that, *being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground* *.

To the second enquiry our answer shall be short; as we have elsewhere taken a brief view of what Christ suffered for us †. He delivered him up to poverty, and more than ordinary abasement. Even in his own city, the paternal inheritance of his family, the holy Child Jesus could have no lodging but a stable: no cradle but a manger.—Nor was he ever richer in this world's goods; for all his days, the Son of Man had not where to lay his head.—He delivered him up to toil and weariness. Till he was thirty years of age, he was constrained to eat his bread in the sweat of his face, according to what was denounced upon mankind after the fall: working with his supposed father, at the business of a carpenter, or common wright. He delivered him up to contempt and ignominy,—to the most painful bodily sufferings and to the bitterest agonies

* Matth. xxvi. 38. Luke xxii. 44.

† See Sermons formerly published. Vol. I. p. 108.

gonies in his soul: to cruel persecution, to strong temptation, to penal desertion,—and to the cursed death of the cross. The death that he suffered was not the same that his followers must undergo: it was the same that the broken law denounces, and that divine justice inflicts upon those who continue enemies to God. In one word, He delivered him up to all that punishment that was due to all his elect seed, and that they must eternally have suffered, if he had not borne it in their name. As all the creatures together could never have borne what he suffered;—as no creature, can fully or comprehensively know the power of God's wrath; so neither is it possible for any creature, nor for all creatures together, sufficiently to declare what it was to which God *delivered him up*.

5. We have, in the words, the persons, for whose sake God thus delivered up his Son: He did it, says our Apostle, *for us all*. The extent of this expression must be determined by the context. It was not for all mankind: the greatest part of them are left finally to perish in their sin; and it is impious to suppose, that any person shall perish for whom Christ died. But it was for all those who are characterized in the other parts of this chapter: for Paul, who wrote this epistle, for the believing Romans—to whom he wrote,—and for all who become followers of him and them, as they also were of Christ.—It was for all who, being in Christ Jesus, are secured against condemnation, ver. 1. for all who *have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*, ver. 15. for all who, having been foreknown and predestinated, from all eternity, *to be conformed to the image of Christ*,—are, in due time, *justified*, effectually called and sanctified, and shall, at length be *glorified*, as in ver. 30.

In a word, it was for all *God's elect*, mentioned ver. 33, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, Barbarians, Scythians, bond or free.

But in what sense was it *for us* that Christ was delivered up?—Was it for our sakes? Yes, the love that God bare to us from all eternity—was the true spring of that wonderful transaction. Behold how he loved us! Christ himself is, and from eternity to eternity, was and will continue to be,—the supreme object of his Father's love. It is impossible for any tongue to tell, or any finite heart to conceive how, or to what degree he loved him. Yet such was his love to us, that he suspended the egress of his love to Christ in human nature, and delivered him up to his severest wrath,—in order to pave the way for the communications of his love to us.—Was it for our good? Yes; the greatest good was to result to us, from this transaction. God's design was to raise us up, from the depths of sin and misery—into which we had sunk ourselves, to the height of happiness and glory, in the enjoyment of himself. And, as this could not be done at a less expence, he chose to deliver up his own Son, rather than it should remain undone. It was *for us*, in another, and still higher sense: it was in our room and stead. The justice of God had been offended and provoked by our sin. We were condemned, by a sentence of the Court of Heaven, to undergo the severest punishment that our nature was capable of suffering: and the revenging hand of justice was ready to put the sentence in execution. But Christ, by his Father's appointment, and yet by his own voluntary engagement, stepped in between us and the dreadful stroke: and thus bare all that punishment, which we behoved otherwise

otherwise

otherwise to have borne—in a state of everlasting separation from God, and under all the misery of that dismal place, *where their worm dieth not, and their fire shall never be quenched.* Though his sufferings were not eternal, they received a value from the infinitude of his person, by virtue of which they were more than equivalent to all that creatures could have suffered, world without end.

A very strange argument is used by some, against this doctrine. 'If Christ,' say they, 'suffered all that we behoved otherwise to have suffered,—and so gave a proper satisfaction to divine justice in our room, then the pardon of our sin, and our whole salvation, are matter of just debt: and there is no room left for the exercise of grace in the kindness of God towards us, through Christ Jesus.'—We allow that all is matter of debt to Christ,—who paid the ransom of our souls, and the price of our redemption to the full: But is it therefore of debt also to us? Is God under any obligation to impute what Christ did and suffered—to us? When he freely imputes this righteousness to us without works, is it not the same thing as bestowing upon us all the fruits of this righteousness, without money and without price? Is there not an equal display of sovereign and free grace—in bestowing all things upon us along with Christ, as in bestowing all other things without him? Surely, if Christ himself, and the gift of righteousness through him, are things of any value, the reign of divine grace in this way must be proportionably more glorious. Had it been possible to bestow pardon and eternal life upon us, without any satisfaction to justice, grace would have been highly glorified in so doing. But this being impossible, God has graciously provided a satisfaction for

us: and he gives us life and happiness, in a way of giving up his own Son to misery and death, that the way might be paved for our enjoying them. Is there less grace displayed in God's giving us a salvation which himself has purchased for us, by the blood of his only begotten Son, than there would have been, in bestowing upon us a salvation that cost him nothing?

And who were we,—or what were we, in whose stead God delivered up his own Son to justice? Not persons capable of being profitable to him, as one man may be profitable to another. His infinite blessedness is incapable either of addition or diminution.—We were not persons possessed of excellencies or qualifications, fit to recommend us to his love or to his notice: we were *altogether as an unclean thing; and all our righteousnesses were as filthy rags.*—We were not persons capable of being truly useful even to fellow-creatures; for, by nature we are hateful and hating one another. For a man that is barely righteous, it is scarcely to be expected that any one should die: for a man remarkably beneficent or *good, some* might perhaps *dare to die.* But we were neither righteous nor good. We were neither friends to God nor worthy of his friendship. We were enemies to him in our minds; rebels against his government, and objects of loathing and abhorrence in his sight. And is not the love of God towards us magnified, beyond all comparison,—yea, beyond all conception, in that, while we were such monsters of guilt and deformity,—he *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all?*

II. IN the last part of the verse we have an inference drawn from the assertion above explained, and express

expressed in the form of a question. Here, more particularly, there are two things deserving our attention: what God may be expected to do for us,—and what security we have that he will do it.

1st, We have what God may be expected to do for us, in consequence of his having made Christ a sacrifice for us; and that in two particulars.

1. He will give his own Son to us, as he hath already delivered him up for us. This is not expressed in so many words; but it is plainly implied in what is said. If God gives us all things *with him*, he must give him along with all other things: yea, he must give him, as his prime and leading gift, before he can give all things, or any thing *with him*. It is manifest that these two little words must have a reference to a gift made to us of Christ, previous to the gift of all things with him: and they cannot refer to God's delivering him up, as mentioned in the foregoing words; for then the apostle's argument would be a sophism,—as there would be something in the conclusion that was not in the premisses. The only conclusion that he could have drawn in that case, would have been this, How shall he not with him also deliver up all things for us. And we can have no doubt, that, if all created things could have answered the purpose, he would have delivered them up, rather than his own Son. And after having given Christ for us, it would be unreasonable to doubt of his willingness to give any thing or even all things for us, if it could either be necessary for us, or profitable to us. Hence that remarkable declaration, which he makes by the prophet, *I gave Egypt for thy ransom; Ethiopia, and Sheba for thee. Ever since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable:*

nourable: therefore I will give men for thee, and people for thy life *.

But this is not what this text refers to. God does not, nor will he give all things *for us*, as he delivered up Christ.—He gives all things *to us*. And if he gives them *with him*, it is manifest that he also must be given to us, as well as delivered up for us. This our apostle plainly insinuates: and accordingly draws a twofold conclusion from the proposition in the first part of the verse. The first is, That seeing God spared not to deliver up his Son *for us*, we cannot doubt of his willingness to give him *to us*, as he actually does in the dispensation of the gospel. The second is, That if he has thus given his Son *to us*, in consequence of his giving him *for us*, we can have no reasonable doubt of his willingness to give us all things along with him.

Yes, Christian, God has actually given his own Son to you, to be your Mediator, your Saviour and Redeemer; your Prophet, your Priest, and your King; your Head, your Husband, your All in all. In giving you Christ, he gives you that righteousness which he wrought out when he was delivered up for you. He gives it in exchange for all the guilt that lay upon you in your natural estate. He gives it as the ground of your claim and title to all other things. In giving Christ to you, he has given you all that fulness, which dwells in him bodily; so that you may freely use it as your own, daily receiving out of it, even grace for grace.

Now, this gift is bestowed in the following manner: God sends the gospel into every place, where any of the elect seed have their lot cast. In the gos-

his

* Isa. xliii. 3, 4.

pel, he makes a free and unconditional offer of Christ, his righteousness and fulness, to all that hear it, without exception or reservation. Thus, in point of offer, Christ is given to all sorts of persons indiscriminately, and every sinner made equally welcome to receive him. The elect have no other warrant, nor invitation than the rest of mankind have. None, who was willing to accept the offer, was ever rejected because he had not been elected: and none was ever the more welcome to receive it because he was of the number of the elect. This offer, alas! the greatest part of mankind refuse; thereby pouring contempt upon God's unspeakable gift: because, indeed, they cannot do otherwise, without supernatural assistance. But all those whom God had predestinated thereunto, he graciously enables, by a day of Almighty power, to embrace the offer made them: and that moment they are put in actual possession of what had been in their offer before. An intimate union, legal and vital, commences between Christ and them: they are betrothed to him for ever; and so are fully warranted in saying, *My beloved is mine, and I am his.*

2. He will give us *all things*. And what can he give more? It is not said that he will give us all at once: nor that ever he will put us in full personal possession of all, while we continue in this world. But the moment that he gives us his Son, he gives us a right of interest in all things: and he will give us possession of one thing after another, till, at last, we be filled with all the fulness of God. Christian, you are but a minor, while in this estate of mortality and imperfection. Your estate is in the hand of your Guardian: and you may think your allowances oftentimes poor and scanty. Assuredly they shall never be adequate to your desires, in this world. But you are heirs

of God, and joint heirs with Christ, who is constituted heir of all things. And it is but a little when you shall arrive at the stature of a perfect man in Christ: and then you shall enter upon immediate possession. Then every desire shall be fully satisfied: and you shall, in the fullest sense, enjoy more than heart can wish. In the enjoyment of the little that you possess here, you may find yourself much disturbed by the inroads of spiritual enemies: against whom you have a continual warfare to maintain. But well may you fight without fear or weariness, seeing the glorious Captain of your salvation has assured you, not only that you shall overcome at the last; but also that *he that overcometh shall inherit all things* *.

All things! Surely this is an inheritance sufficiently large. No addition can be made to it. No inventory can be taken of it. We shall not, therefore, attempt to number up the particulars contained in it. But, for your encouragement and comfort, till you come to the possession of it, we must tell you, that the promise secures you the following things in general.

(1.) That when your allowances are shortest, you shall want nothing that is necessary, or even convenient for you. This matter, indeed, is not to be referred to your judgment: and happy is it for you that it is not. While you continue in childhood, you will be ready to imagine that every thing is proper for you, upon which your childish desires are set: and if every such thing were given you, it would tend to your unspeakable hurt. Look around you in the natural world, and observe those children, who, through the mistaken fondness of their parents, are habituated to get all their own will. Alas! you will see too many instances of that kind. Are not these children quite spoiled

spoiled by such indulgence? Are not their foolish desires increased in proportion as they are gratified, till they become a burden to themselves, and to all around them? Do they not become peevish, obstinate, haughty and untractable, often to such a degree, that, instead of being useful, they become a nuisance in society. Such habits, contracted in childhood, continue with them, and grow upon them through life. They are shunned and despised of all: and no man is their friend. When they meet with disappointments, and disappointments every one will meet with in this world, they fret and struggle, and torture themselves, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; without being able, in the smallest degree, to help themselves. When they obtain their desires, however eager they were in the pursuit, they often find themselves hurt by the possession: and they are ten times more miserable than those who have been early habituated to contradiction, and submission to the will of their parents.—The same would be the case with you, if your heavenly Father were to indulge you with the gratification of all your desires, while in this world. And it is to prevent this that your inclinations are so often crossed.—But his infinite wisdom, influenced by unchangeable love, judges for you: and he will never suffer you to want any thing, that he knows to be for your advantage. *The young lions may lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing* *.

(2.) All things that happen to you, in the course of Providence, being appointed for you by God, shall be so over-ruled, as finally to issue in your advantage. Even the apparent evils of life are, to you, the fruits

of the same love, by which your God was influenced when *he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for you*: and they shall all contribute to promote the designs of that love. You, doubtless, meet with many things, that bear hard upon flesh and blood. And, like Jacob of old, you may often be disposed to say that *all these things are against you*. But Jacob lived to see his mistake, and perhaps so may you. If you see it not in this world, you shall not fail to see it in the world to come. This apostle, in another passage, when assuring you that all things are yours, by virtue of your union to Christ, numbers up *things present*, as well as *things to come*, and even *death* as well as *life*, among the articles of the inventory *. Consequently all the lesser evils, which are so many harbingers of death, are likewise comprehended among the things that God gives to you along with Christ. And even the worst things that you now suffer will add a note to your song, and a jewel to your crown through eternity. You see it asserted, in the 28th verse of this chapter, and the text is intended as a proof of the assertion,—that *all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and are called according to his purpose*.

(3.) There is nothing in all the creation of God, in which you have not an interest: nor any thing that he will not improve for your advantage, as far as it is capable of being so improved.—You often possess but little of the good things of this life; yet you shall never want a competency: and even what you do not possess is yours in point of interest. One thing that may serve to reconcile you to the plenty and prosperity enjoyed by wicked men is, that all is given them

for

* 1 Cor. iii. 22

for the behoof of you and your brethren. They are but the stewards: yours is the real property: and, however unwilling they be to part with it, or even to communicate with you in it, God can fall upon a thousand methods to oblige them to deburse, whenever he pleases. *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just* *. Not only things on earth, but all things in heaven are yours by the gift of God. Even the glorious and holy angels are not ashamed to minister unto you: and many essential services they do you, when you little think of it. In a word, there is nothing that God himself possesses, which he has not given to you. And whatever he has given, himself will manage it in the best manner, for your spiritual advantage:—and for your temporal advantage too, as far as it is consistent with the other.

(4.) To crown all, he gives himself to you. You have an interest in all that he is, as well as in all that he possesses. When this apostle quotes that passage in which the Psalmist speaks of God's putting all things under the feet of Christ, he says, *it is manifest that he is excepted who put all things under him*. But here there is no such exception; he that gives you all other things, gives you also himself. And lest you should argue here, as Paul does in the other case, he purposely adds a gracious grant of himself to the general promise of all things, in the passage quoted a little ago; *He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son*. Intending, from the beginning, that man's chief happiness should consist in the enjoyment of himself, God formed the human soul in such a manner, that nothing

below

* Prov. xiii. 22.

below himself can yield it satisfaction. But surely nothing can be wanting to those who are blessed with the immediate and complete fruition of an infinite and all-sufficient God. *This is the portion of your inheritance, and of your cup:* and surely you have reason to say, as Christ himself said before you, *The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage* *.

If it should be asked—how, in what manner, or upon what terms God will give us all things? The text affords an answer in two particulars.

(1.) He will give us all things freely, without money and without price: without condition, restriction, qualification, or reservation. This comprehensive gift is offered to all that hear the gospel: none is required, nor even permitted to bring a price in his hand, when he comes to receive it: nor will any sinner receive it, till he is convinced that he has no price to bring; and willing to be indebted to sovereign grace for the whole. Such a gift is too precious to be bought: in the nature of things, it must be given freely. If God gives us all things, where shall we find any thing to give him in exchange? Or how can he reasonably require an impossibility? He requires not repentance; for that is one of the things that he gives. He *bath exalted Christ, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel*, as well as *the forgiveness of sins* †. He requires not holiness, or sincere obedience; for this also is part of what he gives, and has secured by promise: *I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me* ‡. Even faith itself cannot be the condition of this gift; for, though we can never be possessed of it without faith, because no man can pos-

sess

* Psal. xvi. 5, 6.

† Acts v. 31.

‡ Jer. xxxii. 40.

sees any gift unless he receives it,—yet the *faith* by which we receive it,—*is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God* *. Repentance and holiness are necessary to salvation, as well as faith: so are justification and adoption; and these last are necessary in the same sense as the other;—not as conditions, upon which our title to salvation depends, but as so many parts of that salvation which is freely and unconditionally bestowed. He who freely gives us all things, is the God of order; and therefore cannot give any thing out of its own place. He, therefore, will never give complete salvation to any, till he has prepared them for it, by giving them faith, repentance, justification, holiness, and all the other gifts that are connected with these in this life. But it is his express design, that all things that we enjoy in this life, or in the life to come, should be given *freely*, without the smallest pretension to merit on our part; that *grace* may reign,—as it *shall reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord*.

(2.) He gives us all things *with Christ*. He does not first give us Christ; and then give us all things, as a distinct and separate gift: but, as one complex gift, he gives us all things *with him*. Without him God gives nothing of a saving nature: and where he gives him, there is nothing that he will withhold. The person that receives him receives all things: and they who reject him cut themselves off from receiving any thing that is good. Christ is, by his Father, appointed heir of all things: and he gives himself to us, as a spiritual husband. You all know that a woman obtains an interest in all her husband's possessions, the moment that she is united to himself: and so it is here. When
Abraham's

* Eph. ii. 8.

Abraham's servant would recommend his young master, as a husband to Rebekah,—he tells her and her friends; that his father had given him all that he had. In the same manner might we speak, in recommending our glorious Master—as the Husband of souls. *God the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.* I know that Christ needs nothing without himself to recommend him: nor will any person ever receive him, till they love him for himself, more than for all his possessions,—and are willing, for his sake, to suffer the loss of all things. But we know that there are many selfish and interested persons among those to whom we must offer Christ: and God has furnished us with arguments, by which even they may be compelled to come in.—Yes, sinner, God has given all that he hath to Christ: and he is giving Christ to you, and all things with him. Whether this may induce you to receive him or not, this we are sure of,—that to every one who knows Christ, every other gift will be much enhanced, by the consideration, that it is to be enjoyed along with him: and that they shall have fellowship with him in the enjoyment of it. Yes, believer, Christ and you, continuing eternally and indissolubly united, and dwelling together, in the chambers of immediate communion, in the upper house, shall for ever continue to have a joint possession and enjoyment of all things.

2dly, In this part of the verse, we have the security which God has given us, for the final enjoyment of all things with Christ. This is the thing plainly intended to be pointed out in the question, *How shall he not, with him, freely give us all things?* After God has delivered up his own Son for us, can any reason be

be assigned why he should not give us all things with him? Or can any person, who believes that he did the first, find any difficulty in trusting to his word of grace, that he will do the other also? The force of this reasoning will appear, if we attend to the following considerations:

1. God's delivering up his Son for us, was an event more wonderful, than his giving him to us, and all things with him. He gave all things in this lower world to Adam, in his innocent estate. He even gave him himself—in that he afforded him communion with himself. But this was nothing in comparison of his giving his Son for us. To have given us Christ, and all things with him, in our sinful state, had been impossible, if the way had not been paved for it, by his first being delivered up to death and misery for us. But by doing this, God has removed all legal impediments out of the way of his doing the other: and therefore, his giving us Christ and all things in consequence of that, is only something analogous to what he did, before sin had laid any bar in his way.—And surely after he has given the most wonderful proof of his love, that he possibly could give, we can have no room to doubt of his willingness to give any other.

2. There can be nothing to render it difficult or improbable, that he should give Christ and all things to us,—which did not render it much more improbable that he should have delivered him up for us. Indeed, there were so many difficulties in the way of Christ's being made a sacrifice for our sin, and so many reasons against it, which, to any other but God, would have been invincible,—that no creature would ever have believed it possible, if we had not been as-

fured of it, by the testimony of God himself. So incredible does it appear, that our modern rationalists find it necessary to explode this doctrine, of Christ's atonement, from the system of religion, in order to reduce it within the comprehension of human reason. And others, finding that this doctrine cannot be expunged, without overturning the foundations of the Christian system, choose to reject the whole and hold it up to ridicule, rather than admit a doctrine, which appears to them so incredible. But now, by delivering up Christ for us, God has removed every difficulty that stood in the way of his giving us all things together with him: and if we really believe that he has done the first, we can have no pretence for doubting the truth of that promise, by which he has graciously bound himself to do the other.

3. That love, which was the original spring of that wonderful transaction of delivering up Christ for us, is, and must be sufficiently powerful—to induce him to give his Son to us, and all things with him. It is the nature—and known tendency of true love, not only to sympathize with its objects under misery, and, as far as possible, to deliver them from it,—but also to make them positively happy, to the utmost of its power. Now, if the love of God has prevailed, to procure our deliverance from misery, at the expence of laying that misery upon his own eternal and only begotten Son, is it credible that the same love should not take the only possible method of making us positively happy, by giving us Christ, and all things with him;—more especially, when this can be done without any further expence; and when this tends, at the same time, to reward Christ for his suffering work,—and to set

set upon his head a crown of mediatory glory, proportioned to all the shame and ignominy of the cross?

4. The same inviolable faithfulness, by which God condescended to bind himself to deliver up Christ for us in due time,—is still engaged to give him to us, and all things with him. Both these were agreed upon in that everlasting covenant, which was made between God the Father and his own Son from eternity, and confirmed by the oath of both parties. Now, when we see one part of the covenant fulfilled, is it not a strong encouragement, to expect the fulfilment of all the rest? Besides, in his being delivered up for us, Christ fulfilled the whole condition of the covenant: the giving of all things to us belongs to the promissary part of it; and surely the fulfilment of the condition is the strongest security for the accomplishment of the promise: in regard that, by this means, the justice of God, as well as his faithfulness, comes to be engaged for that behoof. Before the actual coming of Christ in the flesh, his being delivered up for us was the subject of the great and leading promise upon which the faith of the saints rested. We have seen that promise exactly fulfilled: and what stronger encouragement can we have, to expect a similar fulfilment of all the rest; and particularly of that which we have in the latter part of this verse?

5. In one word, God *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*, for this very end,—that along with Christ himself, he might *freely give us all things*. It was God's purpose, from all eternity, not only to deliver us from sin and misery; but also to make us completely happy, in the possession of all things; and, because this could not be done, till divine justice was satisfied; therefore Christ was deli-

vered up to justice, that every obstruction might be removed out of the way of the full accomplishment of the gracious design. Now, can it be supposed that God would persist in that design, till the most difficult part of the work was accomplished, and all obstructions removed out of the way of the accomplishment of the rest, and then suffer the whole design to drop? Can it be thought, that, after paying the ransom of our souls,—the redemption price of our inheritance, he would leave us under the forfeiture still, and never put us in possession? Could he give up his own Son to death and unparalleled sufferings for nothing? The thought would be, in the highest degree, blasphemous. Vain, foolish, and changeable men may do much, in the prosecution of a design, and yet give it up when almost accomplished: they may do things the most difficult without answering any good end; but that the unchangeable God should do so, is altogether impossible. Upon the whole, we have not only encouragement to hope,—we have all ground of assurance, from the power, the love, the faithfulness, the justice, and the unchangeableness of God, that *he who spared not his own Son; but delivered him up for us all,—will also with him freely give us all things.*

WE are now to conclude with some Improvement of the subject. But, being unwilling to consume too much of your time, we shall confine ourselves to a short Address:

I. To all that are present in general.—What think you, gospel hearer, of the glorious transaction mentioned in the first part of the text? What think you of the precious gift mentioned in the last part of it? Do you not wish to have an interest in both? Would it

not

not be matter of inexpressible comfort if you knew yourself to be interested in them? This knowledge is attainable. You are called to *give all diligence to make your calling and election sure*. If your effectual calling is sure, your election is also sure. If you have received Christ, as offered to you in the gospel, you have now an interest in him, and in all things with him: and, in that case, you may be assured, that when God spared not his own Son, he delivered him up for you in particular. Examine yourself, therefore, whether you have received him or not. The subject of which you have been hearing will afford various marks, by which you may try yourself.

If you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, and all things with him,—then you have seen the necessity of Christ's being delivered up to justice in your stead; and are sensible that your sin is too great to have been expiated by any other sacrifice.—You are deeply affected, with wonder, gratitude and love, when you reflect upon the glorious display that God made of his love to mankind sinners, in delivering up his Son for them, and upon the love of Christ, appearing in that he gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice, of a sweet smelling favour unto God: you have seen in this love a breadth, a length, a height and depth, that passeth all created knowledge: and you are grieved that your love to God, and to the Son of God, is still so weak and feeble.—You have a brotherly affection for all that are interested in the same gift with yourselves, and have been redeemed by the same blood. Instead of envying any the participation of your happiness, your universal benevolence would wish all the human race to have the same interest in Christ, his righteousness and fulness, that you desire
yourself

yourself to enjoy.—Reflecting upon those sufferings to which the Son of God was delivered up for you,—you will be ashamed to murmur or repine at any of those little sufferings, to which you may be delivered up in holy providence: and rather will you choose to suffer all that devils or men can inflict, than do the smallest thing that tends to his dishonour.—You are pleased with the security that God has given you, for the enjoyment of all things with Christ; and can depend, in some measure, upon it: When you find unbelief, discontentment and diffidence, ready to prevail in your soul,—and all taking part with flesh and blood, in arguing against the promise, and against the providence of God,—you find a ready and satisfying answer in the words of this text.—Of all that God has given you along with Christ, you allow nothing to stand in competition with himself: and rather than part with him, or provoke him to withdraw from you, you will cheerfully resolve to suffer the loss of all things. Next to Christ himself, you will value those spiritual blessings, that can only be enjoyed with him: while others busy themselves, in the vain pursuit of sublunary good, the language of your soul will be,—*Lord, lift thou on us the light of thy countenance.* In a word, you will be anxious to make proper returns to God, *for his unspeakable gift.* It is not enough to you, that your happiness is secured, by what God has done for you, and given to you; you will be disposed, like the royal Psalmist, to say, *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?* And, knowing that you have nothing else to give, you will cheerfully devote yourself, and all your talents, and all your possessions, and all your services, to him, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, *holy and acceptable through Jesus Christ.*—If these things be in you
and

and abound, you have all reason to be assured, that you are one of those for whom Christ was delivered up; and that, along with him, God has freely given you all things.

2. We would address ourselves, in a few words, to those happy persons who are in such a case: who having received Christ himself, have been made heirs of all things with him. Think, Christian,—O think much of the love of God to you, which seemed, for a time, to prevail, even over his love for his own eternal Son; so that he was delivered up to wrath, that you might enjoy the happy fruits and emanations of love.—Forget not the love of Christ, which is, and ever was equal to that of his Father;—that love which engaged him cheerfully to consent to his Father's will, and to submit to the stroke of divine justice in your room; saying, as he said to the band who apprehended him in the garden,—*if ye seek me, let these go their way.* Think much of that dreadful punishment, you must have borne through eternity, if Christ had not borne it for you. How should you have endured that wrath, which made the Son of God to sweat great drops of blood, and even brought him to the dust of death? And what do you owe to him, who delivered you from it, at such an expence? Reflect, with sorrow, on that evil and bitter thing, which not only provoked a God of infinite beneficence, to pursue his own creatures to death and misery, but even made it necessary, that he should not spare his own Son, when found clothed with their guilt. How was God dishonoured by sin, when nothing could wash out the stain, but the blood of his own Son? And how deep should be your shame and sorrow, when you reflect upon the numberless multitude of your sins; every one of which carried a mortal wound

to the heart of him who so loved you.—Think how little you deserved that ever such love should terminate upon you, how little return you can make for it, and how shamefully you requite such unequalled beneficence. Maintain a grateful impression of what God has already given you in possession, when he gave you an interest in Christ; and look forward to what you may hope to enjoy through eternity, with him. Think of the curse of the law abolished, and of righteousness imputed to you without works: of your adoption into the family of God, your sealing with the Holy Spirit of promise, your sanctification begun, and the perfection of it secured. Think of your enemies subdued, and your warfare accomplished: of Satan's head bruised, of the world overcome, of death unsting-ed, and of a crown of victory laid up for you with Christ. Think of the favour of God restored to you, of his protecting arm about you, of his gracious presence always with you, of the blessings of goodness with which he is every day preventing you now, and of the large and fair inheritance reserved for you in a better world.—These are but a very few things; but when God made a gift of his own Son to you, he gave you all things with him. Look around you in this material world,—look above you, to heaven itself,—look abroad through all the creation of God,—and look,—as far as created eyes can look, into the infinite nature of God himself: you shall see nothing that is not your own; by virtue of your happy relation to the Son of God.—If you can think of all this, without having your souls filled with raptures of joy, gratitude, and love, your exercise is unworthy of the name you bear. But if these things affect you in a proper manner, you will need no other motives to excite you to a careful

careful and constant endeavour, to glorify God in your bodies, and in your spirits, which are his.

3. I shall conclude with a few words to those who have never yet received this gift of God; but continue strangers to Christ,—and exposed to all that wrath, to which he was delivered up.—You have heard, sinner, what the Son of God endured, in order to expiate sin; and what was the consequence of his taking the room and place of such persons as you are.—Can you drink of the cup that he drank; or be baptized with the bloody baptism wherewith he was baptized? What will you do, if God deliver you up to that vengeance, which pursued him to the death?—Many of those for whom he suffered were, indeed, the chief of sinners; but none of them deserved punishment more justly than you do. And if God *spared not his own Son*, when their guilt was imputed to him, how shall he spare you, if you are found equally guilty as they were?—You dream, perhaps, of having to do with a God all goodness: and you cannot think that a being of such beneficence will ever damn any of his creatures. But how did he condemn and punish *his own Son*? If all his love to Christ could not prevail with him to spare him, What goodness or beneficence can influence him to let you escape?—Perhaps you flatter yourself, that you will expiate your sin by repentance,—and make amends for what is past, by living a better life in time to come. But how are you to attain this repentance, and this amendment of life? How often, in time past, have you resolved to repent and reform? And yet you are the same man still. If you were capable to repent, and to obey God's law perfectly from this moment, what reparation does that make for past offences? Or who told you that God

would pardon your sin, on account of your repentance or reformation? There is not one of all the true followers of Christ, who has not sincerely repented of his sin, nor one who does not sincerely endeavour to keep all God's commandments: yet this does not supercede the necessity of Christ's being *delivered up for them all*. And though you could perform all the obedience, that ever the best of them performed, it will not prevent the necessity of your being punished for your own sin, unless you are found in Christ. Be not deceived; *by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified*: I repeat the very words of the Spirit of God *. If our own righteousness could have satisfied,—doubtless God would have spared his own Son.—Perhaps you take the whole gospel to be but a cunningly devised fable; and persuade yourself that God is not that rigid and austere master, that the scriptures represent him to be. You see that judgment is not speedily executed against every evil work, and therefore you conclude, that it never will. You see men thriving in wickedness, and enjoying the smiles of Providence, while they visibly trample upon all the laws of God: therefore you fondly imagine,—either that the Most High has no knowledge of things below, and pays no attention to them; or else, that he is such an one as yourself, and approves your sin. Thus that which affords a convincing proof that there must be a time of after reckoning, you consider as an evidence that there will be none. The long suffering and forbearance of God, that ought to lead you to repentance, only encourages your impenitent heart to harden itself more and more against him.—But, sooner or later, he will reprove you sharply, and set your sins in order before

* Gal. ii. 16.

before you.—He now laughs in heaven at your folly, and in a little, he will speak to you in wrath, and vex you in his fore displeasure.—He speaks to you now, in the still small voice of the gospel, and you despise his advice; but then he will speak from his throne of judgment, and his voice will be more dreadful to you, than ten thousand thunderbolts. Then, if mercy prevent not, you shall be delivered up to the same punishment that Christ suffered: and *he will not spare in the day of vengeance.*

Yet there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. *The wages of sin is death,*—and that you richly deserve; *but the gift of God is eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord,*—and that gift is presently in your offer. In consequence of God's having delivered up his own Son, as a sacrifice to justice, we have a commission, both from the Father and the Son, to make a free and unlimited offer of Christ, and of all things with him, to every one of you. In the name of God we call, we beseech, we obtest you, as you love your own souls, to receive it. God himself condescends to beseech you by us, and it is in Christ's stead, that we pray you to accept this unspeakable gift.—Surely you will find something included in it suited to your appetite, and capable to gratify all your desires. If God himself, and all that he possesses, can satisfy you, he gives you all with Christ. Receive Christ, and you receive all things with him. But if you continue to reject him, you have no legal right, even to the air you breathe: nor can you finally inherit any thing, but *snakes, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest, which pertain to you as the portion of your cup.*—I dare not promise you a repetition of this offer to-morrow; perhaps this hour shall be the last of the day of your merciful visi-

tation: but now is the accepted time. I take all your consciences to witness, that such an offer has now been made you. The transaction is recorded in heaven: and in that great day, when the judgment shall be set, and the books opened, it shall be found written, both in the book of conscience, and in the records of heaven —if the gracious offer is rejected, and God is provoked to take you at your word, Sodom and Gomorrha shall have tolerable misery in comparison of you.—Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, we conclude repeating the offer, and assuring you, that *God having raised up his Son Jesus,—after having delivered him up to death for us, hath sent him to bless you,* by betrothing you to himself; which he is presently willing to do: and *with himself, freely to give you all things.*

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

The Blast of the Gospel-trumpet, the Leading Mean by which Perishing Sinners are gathered into the Church of Christ.

ISAIAH XXVII. 13.

And it shall come to pass, in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown: and they shall come that were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt: and shall worship the Lord, in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

TO blow the trumpet at the time appointed, on the solemn feast-day—was, long ago, a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. This statute is still in force, in a spiritual sense: and we have reason to bless God that we have an opportunity to observe it. Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; and we are called habitually to keep the feast, by daily eating his flesh and drinking his blood. This continual feast is, and ought to be accompanied with the blowing of God's great trumpet. May the Spirit of God himself render it effectual, for gathering many perishing outcasts to Christ,—and so bringing them to worship God in an acceptable manner. There is reason to hope that it will be so; for the promise in this text is still running. We see it accomplished in part, by the preaching of the gospel among us: and this we may view as a pledge of the accomplishment of the other part; for we have no reason to think that
ever

ever God continues the gospel with any people, without any other design, than to make it *the savour of death unto death*. As we come, by God's commission, to blow the *great trumpet*, among you, we trust that some shall be gathered by *the joyful sound*,—and that they, in conjunction with those in the assembly who have already been gathered, shall *worship the Lord* acceptably, in his *holy mount at the spiritual Jerusalem*.

In the first six verses of this chapter, the Holy Ghost, by this evangelical prophet, informs us of God's care of his church,—in punishing her enemies,—in watching over her, and watering her by the influences of his Spirit, as a husbandman does his vineyard,—in admitting even her barren and noxious members to take hold of his strength, and so to make peace with him,—and in causing all her genuine seed to take root in Christ by faith, and to blossom and bud, and be fruitful.

In the next five verses he condescends to vindicate himself, from a charge of undue severity, in those chastisements, which he sees proper to inflict upon his church and people; by shewing,—that there is no proportion between those chastisements, and the more terrible judgments which he brings upon their enemies,—that he only corrects them in measure, so restraining his hand, and so communicating his gracious assistance to them, that there is still a proportion between their afflictions and the strength by which they are to be borne,—that all their afflictions are intended for their spiritual advantage, and shall finally promote it, particularly in the purging away of their sin,—and that this shall be the case, even when judgments are inflicted upon them to such a height, that *the defend*
ced

ced city is left like a wilderness, while it would seem, from external appearances, that he that made them has no mercy upon them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.

In the two last verses which make the third general division of the chapter, he foretells the manner in which the church of Christ should be spread abroad in New Testament days, and his kingdom propogated, both among Jews and Gentiles.

As to the Jews, God would *beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt,—and they should be gathered one by one.* It was promised to Abraham, that God would give unto his posterity the whole land, *from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates* *. This promise was literally accomplished by David's instrumentality: and in the days of Solomon,—that whole extent of country was under subjection to Israel. In allusion to this the prophet here speaks, putting the country for the people to whom it was promised. The word which we render to *beat off*—signifies the action of the husband-man, in beating off from the trees that part of the fruit which cannot be reached with the hand: still he seems to have in his eye the similitude of a vineyard, which he had made use of in the beginning of the chapter. And the meaning of the passage seems to be, that 'as the husband-man goes through his vineyard, in the gleaning season, beating off, with a rod, the few clusters that remain, after the vintage is past;—so will the Lord go through all the tribes of Israel, whom he hath settled between the river of Egypt and the great river Euphrates,—gathering a few, whom he will bring to be genuine members of the
' New

* Gen. xv. 18.

‘ New Testament church ; so that, while the body of
 ‘ that people shall be rejected for their unbelief, as well
 ‘ as cast out of their own land,—there shall be a few
 ‘ gleanings among them to Christ, and these shall be
 ‘ gathered one by one.’

With regard to the Gentiles, he speaks in this last verse of the chapter;—foretelling that the gospel should be sent abroad among the nations, south and north,—and should be made successful, for gathering sinners to Christ: so that, instead of continuing to worship false gods, as they did in Isaiah’s day, they should join together in worshipping the true God, according to his own appointment.

Some, indeed, understand this verse also as relating to the Jews, and that at a period anterior to the setting up of the New Testament dispensation. Assyria was the country to which the ten tribes were carried captive: and into Egypt the remnant of Judah went down, after the murder of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. When the decree of Cyrus for the restoration of the captivity was published, multitudes of the Jews sojourned in both these countries. The publication of that decree, like the sound of a great trumpet, collected them out of these, and all other parts of the Persian empire,—they returned to their own land, and again worshipped *the Lord, in the holy mount, at Jerusalem.*

I will not say, that the Spirit of God had no eye to this event, in this text. But, if this was, at all, intended, it was only as a type of something better. The gathering of Gentile sinners to Christ, by means of a clear and extensive publication of the gospel, in New Testament days, is the thing ultimately intended in the words: as I hope will plainly appear, in the progress

progress of this discourse; in which it is only proposed to explain the words of the text, and apply them.

IN order to explain them, it will be proper to speak a few words concerning each of the following particulars.

I. The period, to which this promise or prophecy refers.

II. The mean, that God will make use of, in that period, for accomplishing his design,—the blowing of *the great trumpet*.

III. The persons upon whom it should take effect.

IV. The places, where these persons should have their residence: And,

V. The end to be gained, or the exercise to which they should be brought, by the blowing of this Trumpet among them.

I. THE period, to which this text refers—is intimated in the first words of it, *It shall come to pass in that day*. It has been observed by some, that—in the prophetic parts of scripture, particularly in the prophecy of this book, this phrase is often to be understood of New Testament times. In this happy period, the light of divine revelation shines so much more clearly than ever it did before, that it deserves to be called, by way of eminence, *that day*. Of this, various instances might be produced, were it necessary.—But it is so plain from the context and connection, that this is the sense of the expression here, that all other arguments for proving it must be superfluous. The relative *that* must have an antecedent: and *that day* men-

tioned in the text must be the same period, of which the Holy Ghost had been speaking in the preceding parts of this prophecy, and particularly in the preceding verses of this chapter. It must be the same day, in which God would keep and water his vineyard, as in verses 2d and 3d. And the same day, in which he would *punish Leviathan the crooked serpent, and slay the dragon in the sea*, as in ver. 1st. Now this last mentioned passage is so manifestly parallel to the first promise *, that we cannot understand it of any thing else than that victory over Satan and his abettors, which Christ, the great Seed of the woman was to gain, when he laid the foundation of the New Testament church in his own blood. It must be the same day when that song shall be sung in the church, which is contained in the preceding chapter: many parts of which will apply to no other period with propriety; and of which one part manifestly refers to the conclusion of the New Testament œconomy, at the general resurrection. Then only can these words be accomplished, *Thy dead men shall live, my dead body they shall arise, awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs* †. In a word, it must be the same day that is referred to in the twenty-fifth chapter: in which God *makes unto all people, in the mountain of gospel ordinances, a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees,—well refined*: and when, by a clear revelation of himself, accompanied with the enlightning influences of his Holy Spirit, he *will destroy the covering of face cast upon all people, and the vail that was formerly spread over all the Gentile nations.*—Thus it is evident, that neither in the return of the Babylonish captivity,

nor

* Gen. iii. 3.

† Isa. xxvi. 19.

nor in any other event antecedent to the coming of Christ, could this promise have its accomplishment. It looks to this period, in which our lot has happily fallen. We see it accomplished in part: and we are warranted to plead, and to hope, for the accomplishment of all the parts of it, in this assembly, this day.

II. THE great mean that God promises to employ, in New Testament days, for accomplishing his design among the Gentiles, and which he is making use of at this day, is mentioned in these words, *The great trumpet shall be blown*. Under the Mosaic dispensation, it is well known, that much use was made of trumpets, even in matters of divine worship. An order was given to Moses, to make two trumpets of silver *; which were to be used, not only for gathering the congregation, when a solemn assembly was to be held,—for directing their march, when the camp was to be removed,—and for summoning the people together in the time of war, and directing the motions of their armies;—they were likewise to be sounded over the burnt-offerings, at the new moons and solemn feasts,—and they were to be blown through the land, to proclaim liberty to every Hebrew, at the year of Jubilee. These trumpets, and the uses in which they were employed, were typical of the publication of the gospel under the New Testament. Of this the Spirit of God here speaks, in language adapted to the type by which it was prefigured. And the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles—may be compared to the sounding of these trumpets among the Jews, on the following accounts.

L 1 2

1: The

* Numb. x. 15—16.

1. The gospel intimates to all that hear it, the offering of a great sacrifice. As, under the law, the people were not permitted to enter into the court of the priests, where the altar stood,—and yet were deeply interested in the sacrifices which were offered upon it,—the priests were commanded to blow with the trumpets while the sacrifices were offered; that the people might be apprized of what was going forward.—Agreeably to this, the leading design of the gospel is to intimate, to all that hear it, the great atoning sacrifice, that Christ our High-priest has offered, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. This the Apostle Paul kept always in his view, as the main scope of his preaching; for he *determined not to know any thing among his hearers, save Jesus Christ and him crucified* *. The doctrine of Christ's satisfaction for sin, is the cardinal article of the Christian faith. If that is taken out of the system, with all that depends upon it,—all that remains is nothing better than the religion of *Socrates*, or of *Confucius*. They who neglect this in their sermons, however many good things they deliver, about virtue and morality, preach not the gospel of Christ: and therefore, tho' such preaching may be calculated to promote the benefit of society in this world,—it can have no tendency to bring men to salvation in the world to come. And whoever they be that go about to deny or impugn this doctrine, it is the same thing as if they denied the whole of revealed religion †.

2. The

* 1 Cor. ii. 2.

† Here I cannot deny myself the pleasure of transcribing a few sentences expressed by the late EARL of KINNOUL, a short while before his death, and thereby contributing my mite, to keep such a respectable name in everlasting remembrance. His words are—' I have always considered the atone-

2. The gospel contains an indiction of a joyful and solemn feast. The silver trumpets were likewise to be used to proclaim the day of gladness, and the solemn feasts in Israel. And, as on these occasions the principal sacrifices were offered,—the same blast of the trumpet might serve to intimate the sacrifice, and to call the people to the celebration of the feast.—In like manner, the gospel is designed to intimate, that *Christ our passover* being sacrificed for us, God is making a feast for all people, upon the flesh of this slain sacrifice. We come, therefore, to blow the great trumpet among you; and to invite every person present, in the name of God, to eat of Wisdom's bread, and to drink of the wine which she hath mingled. Eat your spiritual bread with gladness, and drink your wine with a merry heart, as becomes them that keep holiday. Let all that hear me *eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord.*

3. The gospel is the appointed mean of gathering a solemn assembly, even *the general assembly of the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.* The church of Christ is a society gathered *out of all nations, and peoples, and kindreds, and tongues, and languages.* And, as the silver trumpets were used for gathering the assemblies in Israel,—so the gospel is employed,

‘meat of Christ to be characteristical of the gospel, as a system of religion.
 ‘Strip it of that doctrine, and you reduce it to a scheme of morality, excellent indeed, and such as the world never saw,—but to man, in the present state of his faculties, absolutely impracticable.—*For my own part,*
 ‘—with truth I can declare, that in midst of all my past afflictions, my heart was supported and comforted, by a firm reliance upon the merits and atonement of my Saviour: and now, in the near prospect of entering upon an eternal world, this is the foundation, and the only foundation, of my confidence and hope.’ Such I am persuaded, will be the exercise of every genuine Christian: and what cruelty are they guilty of, toward the souls of men, who would attempt to rob them of the sole foundation of their hope! See the Scotch Preacher, vol. iv. p. 305.

employed, according to Christ's appointment, for gathering a church to himself. By it were Gentile sinners gathered into the church visible, wherever a visible church has been erected. And by it are all the elect gathered into one church invisible, under Christ their head: for though many of us, in places where the gospel has long continued, are born members of the visible church,—yet none become members of the church invisible, till, at their conversion, they are enabled, not only to hear, but also to *know* this joyful sound. By the same means are they gradually trained up, till they are made meet to possess the inheritance,—to appear among the number, and to join unweariedly in the employment of the saints in light.

4. The gospel is the great mean of directing the march of the armies of the spiritual Israel, through the wilderness of this world. When the priests sounded an alarm with the trumpets, the tribes of Israel were to decamp, and set forward in their journies, in that order which God had appointed. We also, are on a journey, travelling, as they did, *toward the place of which the Lord hath said I will give it you*. Like them, too, we ought to follow God's direction, in every step we take. At the commandment of the Lord we must rest in our tents: and at the commandment of the Lord should we journey. This commandment is intimated to us by the gospel, as it was to them by the sound of the trumpet. By the gospel I would not be understood as meaning the preaching of the word only,—though that is chiefly signified by the blowing of the trumpet, and is a principal mean of direction to Christians;—but the whole administration of the will of God, in the gospel church. The written word of God is the touchstone of all preaching: and is itself a
light

light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths. Nor is any divine ordinance without its use, in this respect. And this caution I would have you attentive to in all that may be said on this subject. By the gospel, in this comprehensive sense of the word, you may expect to receive intimations of the will of God, concerning every step of your daily walk. And by the Holy Spirit of God, rendering the gospel effectual for this purpose, you may trust that he will *guide you with his counsel*, till afterwards he receive you to his glory.

5. The gospel is the great mean of calling forth the armies of the living God, to that spiritual warfare in which they are engaged under Christ,—of directing their motion in the day of battle,—and of animating them to continue the combat, amidst all the dangers and terrors, with which they often find themselves surrounded. The silver trumpets were also to be used, to blow an alarm when Israel was called to go to war, against any enemy that should oppress them in their land. Accordingly, when Moses sent Joshua to make war upon the Midianites, he sent *Eleazar the priest* along with the army, *with the trumpets to blow in his hand* *. And afterwards, in the days of Gideon, of Barak, of Saul, and of David, Israel was summoned to follow the standard of their generals—by sound of trumpet. Indeed it has ever been common, in all civilized countries, to use trumpets and other martial instruments of music, for animating their troops, directing their motions, and preventing them from being intimidated, by the shouts of the enemy, by the cries of wounded men, and the other horrors of the field of battle. For this purpose also, is this *great trumpet blown* in the church of Christ. In paradise itself our

Lord

Lord proclaimed a deadly war, against Satan and all his seed: which he has been prosecuting from that day to this: and will continue to prosecute, to the end of the world. Every genuine Christian is enlisted under his banner, and lays his account daily with fighting in his cause, even against principalities and against powers. In this army, the sound of the gospel trumpet is of singular use. By it volunteers are gathered to his standard: by it the motions of the army, and of every individual in it are directed: by it they are animated to stand in the day of battle, *and having done all to stand*. Though a thousand fall at their side, and ten thousand lie dead at their right hand;—though an host be encamped against an individual; yea, though the enemy has already prevailed so far, that, in all human appearance, there is but one step between them and utter destruction,—this joyful sound encourages them to continue the conflict; assured, that however many troops may overcome them, and however oft,—they shall overcome at the last.

6. The gospel proclaims an universal jubilee to all that hear it. You know that, under the law, every seventh year was a year of release, when every Hebrew servant was to be set at liberty without ransom, and every debt due from a Hebrew was to be remitted. And every fiftieth year was a jubilee; when every inheritance that had been sold—was to return to its former owner, or to his legal heir. The periodical return of both these years was to be intimated by the sounding of trumpets, through all the land*. We are all by nature, bond slaves to sin and Satan. Christ, by subduing these enemies, has procured our liberty: and he comes in the dispensation of the gospel, to proclaim

* Lev. xxv. 9.

claim it. We had all forfeited our inheritance: our very lives were forfeited to divine justice. Christ, by paying our ransom, has paved the way for our release, and the restoration of our inheritance. And now, an universal jubilee is proclaimed, by the sound of the gospel trumpet. Every sinner is invited to go free, and to enter, by faith, upon the inheritance of eternal life. No person is excluded from the benefit of this glorious release, unless they, who, by unbelief, exclude themselves: being so much in love with their tyrannical master and his service, that they refuse to go out free.—Of this, our Lord Christ is introduced as speaking, and that in a plain allusion to the custom above mentioned *, *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me—to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;—to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*

If any should ask why the epithet *great* is here added;—or why the gospel is called the *great trumpet*? We answer, it may be so, chiefly on a twofold account.

I. Because of the great importance of the business, in which it is employed. The silver trumpets, of old, were blown over sacrifices of slain beasts, that could never take away sin; but the sound of this trumpet intimates a sacrifice of infinite value, by which Christ hath ever perfected all them that are sanctified.—*They* proclaimed feasts, wherein the bodies of men might be nourished with perishing food, which could not prevent their dying; but *this* proclaims a feast for souls, —in which they may be fed with the bread of God, which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.—By *them* was gathered a con-

*

M m

gregation

* Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

gregation of stiff-necked Jews, who were soon to return, every man to his tent; but by *this* are assembled a willing people, who shall no more be separated from Christ, nor from one another; but shall continue, thro' all eternity, to sing in concert, the praises of him that hath called them together: while Christ himself shall be the matter of the music, in the great congregation. Those trumpets proclaimed a release from temporal bondage,—and the restoration of a corruptible inheritance; but this great trumpet is employed to publish a release from spiritual slavery, an offer of the glorious liberty of the sons of God,—and of an *inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. That was a jubilee that lasted but during one revolution of the planet which we inhabit,—but this *acceptable* year of the Lord shall never come to an end.

2. Because of the loudness, and extent of its sound. It is manifest that a strong sound, capable of being heard at a great distance, can only proceed from a large instrument: and the greatness of the trumpet must be in proportion to the distance, to which the sound is to be carried. It is said that Alexander the Great had a trumpet of a peculiar construction, which he used for assembling his army, that could be heard at the distance of an hundred furlongs: but God's great trumpet has still a stronger sound. Of it may be said, what the Psalmist says of the works of God in the world of nature, *Its line is gone through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world* *. So an inspired apostle accommodates the words. It was enough if the silver trumpets made by Moses were heard by the tribes of Israel in their encampments: even the jubilee trumpet was only sounded through
the

* Psal. xix. 5. comp. Rom. x. 18.

the coasts of the land of Canaan. But this trumpet is to be blown throughout all lands : it must be heard from pole to pole. As early as the days of the apostles, there were few nations, if any, in the known world, who did not hear it : and we hope for a stronger blast of it still, in the latter days which are now approaching,—by which the renowned fame of Christ will be spread—from the rising to the setting sun : and there shall be gathered after him a great multitude, whom no man can number,—out of every people, and nation, and kindred, and tongue, and language.

III. THE persons upon whom the sound of this great trumpet shall take effect—are described, in the text, by two circumstances.

1. They are persons *ready to perish*. The original word is still more emphatical,—*there shall come THE PERISHING in the land of Assyria*. All mankind are, by nature, in a perishing condition. Situated in a desert land, which affords no provision but empty husks, we faint for spiritual thirst and hunger, and are ready to perish for want. Led captive by a cruel enemy, we are ready to perish by the weight of our chains. Enslaved by a tyrannical master, and employed in the vilest drudgery, we are ready to perish through fatigue and weariness. Sunk into a *fearful pit*, and struggling, without a possibility of extricating ourselves, in *the miry clay*, we must quickly perish without supernatural help. Above all being condemned to death, by a just sentence of the Court of Heaven,—we are every moment in danger of perishing by the hand of justice. Neither is it in respect of our natural life only, that we are ready to perish : even our immortal souls are in a perishing state. The God

of love and grace observing our dismal situation, his bowels were turned within him; and he sent his own eternal Son to preserve our life, and to redeem it from destruction. In his name we come, to proclaim this unexpected and unsolicited relief, by the sound of the great trumpet, to every human creature.

2. They are *outcasts*. There seems to be here an allusion to the situation of the Hebrew children in Egypt, who, by Pharaoh's inhuman decree, were all to be cast out into the river. Moses floating on the Nile, in a vessel of bulrushes, was not in greater danger of drowning, than every sinner is, while in a natural estate, of falling under eternal death. Not only are we cast out of God's presence,—and cast into the open field, to the lothing of our persons;—we justly deserve to be so, on account of our natural vileness, and the lothsome disease with which we are infected. Some observe, that the word here used signifies a person cast out of the camp, on account of some abominable uncleanness. There is nothing, in the whole creation, so hateful in the sight of God as a sinner. Indeed, there is nothing else that he hates, but sin and sinners. They cannot stand in his sight, nor be admitted into his presence, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon evil. They are an abhorrence to all that bear the image of God; and as soon as their eyes are opened, they will abhor themselves, as Job did, and repent in dust and ashes. There is none of all the children of pride, who does not appear more lothsome before God, than the most wretched leper, dying of that plague without the camp of Israel. Yet there is no outcast so vile, nor so near to perish, if he continues within reach of the joyful sound
of

of the Gospel Trumpet, but he may consider himself as invited by it, to *come and worship the Lord in his holy mount at Jerusalem.*

IV. THE places from which these persons were to be gathered, by the sound of the great trumpet, are also two, *The land of Assyria, and the land of Egypt.* Assyria was a country that lay to the north of the land of Israel. The Assyrians had often invaded the land of Canaan, and distressed the people of God: It was by them that the ten tribes were carried captive, soon after this prophecy was delivered. Egypt lay southward from the land of Canaan. You all know, that it was the country where Israel had been a long time kept in bondage—in a furnace of iron. And as often as they afterwards depended upon the friendship of the Egyptians, Egypt had proved to them the staff of a broken reed. The Assyrians and Egyptians, though equally hostile to the people of God, were often at war with one another. Both nations were gross idolaters; though their idolatry was of different kinds. And though these two countries lay at a great distance from one another, and in different quarters of the globe,—Assyria being situate in the heart of Asia, and Egypt being the most famous part of Africa; yet many of the Jews were dispersed in both these countries, after the Babylonish captivity: and continue to be so to this day. We may add, that though the gospel was early published in both,—both are now subject to the Turkish government. In both, the deluded people adhere to the religion of Mahommed, and Christianity is almost extinct.

These two countries are not here mentioned, as if in them only were the gospel trumpet to be blown: or

as if perishing outcasts were to be gathered from these only. They are mentioned as examples: and what is here said of them,—has been verified, and will again be verified in all other countries resembling them in the circumstances above mentioned. The gospel began to be preached in Jerusalem. From thence it was sent abroad, through the various parts of Asia, of Africa and of Europe;—to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west. Those nations were visited with it—that had been most deeply sunk in idolatry, and those that had shewed the greatest enmity against the true God, against his instituted worship, and against his chosen people. By the gospel—they have been,—are, and shall be,—called to Christ, that are afar off, as well as they that are near: They who have formerly been the rod of God's anger, against his professing people;—and they who have been so far besotted with superstition, as to worship calves and crocodiles, and leeks and onions. The posterity of Ham are called, notwithstanding the curse that was early denounced against them, as well as the seed of Shem and Japheth. The swarthy Egyptian, the black African is not excluded, more than the fair inhabitants of Asia and of Europe. In a word, the sound of this great trumpet has reached, and hereafter shall reach, in a yet more extensive manner, to every part of the world. Perishing sinners have been gathered from every quarter: *and all the ends of the earth,*—even as far as these isles of the sea where our lot is cast, *have seen the salvation of our God.*

V. THE last thing observed in the words, and the only thing that now remains to be explained, was what those persons, gathered out of all these places, by
the

the sound of the Gospel Trumpet, should be induced to do: And this also is set before us in two particulars. They shall *come* and they shall *worship*.

1. They shall come. But whither shall they come? In general they shall come to the joyful sound of the trumpet: they shall come wherever the great trumpet calls them. The meaning of this word is clearly determined by what follows. More particularly,

(1.) They shall come to Christ by faith. This is no forced interpretation of the text. Christ is the sole medium of friendly communication between God and man. As He can bestow upon us no fruits of his favour but through Christ, so neither can he accept any worship from us, unless in the same channel. If, therefore, we come to worship God acceptably, we must come to Christ, that we may offer all our worship upon the gospel altar. By the sound of this trumpet, all sinners are invited to Christ's sacrifice; and they that come improve his atonement, as the sole ground of their acceptance with God. It proclaims Christ as *made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption*: and they who know that joyful sound, and follow it, improve him for all the purposes of a full and complete salvation.

(2.) They come to *the holy mount at Jerusalem*. Jerusalem was, of old, the place of God's solemn worship. Mount Zion, whither the ark was brought up, in the days of David, and adjacent to which the temple was built by Solomon,—was dignified by the residence of the more immediate symbols of God's presence; being the place which he had chosen—to put his name there. On this account it was necessary, that all, who wished to join in God's solemn worship, should come to Jerusalem, and present themselves in
the

the courts of the Lord's house, upon the holy mount. Jerusalem was a type of the gospel church: and the coming of the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem prefigured the gathering of sinners into the church of Christ, by means of the gospel. When this trumpet was first blown among the Gentiles, all who believed joined themselves to the disciples: and there were daily added to the church such as should be saved.—Wherever the gospel comes, to this day, this is the case: and it will be so wherever it shall be sent, to the end of the world. For, as under the law, the solemn worship of God could not be regularly performed out of Jerusalem; so neither is he worshipped, in an acceptable manner now, without the church. Without the visible church he is not worshipped at all. And even they who are members of the visible church, cannot worship him acceptably without joining themselves to the church invisible. The same faith by which we come to Christ, unites us with his mystical body as well as with himself: and this is the first acceptable worship, that any sinner can pay to God; for without faith it is impossible to please him.—Hence every person who feels the efficacy of the gospel, becomes a genuine citizen of the New Jerusalem. And from that time forth he takes pleasure in attending upon God's ordinances: accounting a day in his courts better than a thousand.

(3.) They come to God himself, who dwells *in the holy mount*. When David resolved to go to the altar of God, he adds, *I will go to God my exceeding joy* *: All who come to Christ must also come to the Father; as *he that hath seen him hath seen the Father*. As God dwells in the church, all that come into the church,

* Psa. xliii. 4.

church, so as to be her genuine members, must also come to God who dwells in her. Absalom dwelt some years at Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face; so, many continue long in the visible church, without ever truly coming either to Christ or to his Father by him. But, as the church invisible is the spouse of Christ, every one that is joined to her—is united also to him; and so comes to the Father. Every person, therefore, upon whom the gospel takes effect, comes to God by faith, and takes up the rest of his soul in him, as the only person that can make him happy, either in time or through eternity. He comes to God, in a way of sincere repentance: forsaking all sin, humbled for all his backsliding courses, and saying, *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* He enters upon a course of sincere obedience to the law of God,—and so comes nearer and nearer to him every day. Daily employed in self-sanctification, he makes progress in conformity to the image of God. And in the same proportion he makes progress in communion with him. He is continually with God, even in this world; as he is never without his gracious presence. And he is still coming forward, influenced and animated by the sound of this trumpet,—towards that place where *he shall abide before God for ever.*

2. As they come, they worship:—they *worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.* This imports the following things.

(1.) Their cordial renunciation of all idolatry and false worship.—God will not share his worship with idols: neither will he admit any worship that himself has not instituted and required. *In vain do they worship him, who teach for doctrines the commandments of*

men. They who worshipped at Jerusalem were not only required to forsake the worship of all false gods,—but also the worship of the high places. And they who would follow the sound of this great trumpet, must renounce both idolatry and all will-worship. However zealous the Gentiles had been, in the worship of their respective idols, before the gospel was sent among them, they no sooner felt its efficacy than they cheerfully turned their backs upon them: and chose to suffer all that men could inflict upon them, rather than take the smallest part, afterwards, in any of the ceremonies of their worship. And all that obey the gospel, are still careful to keep themselves from idols. We may be guilty of idolatry, by giving to any creature—that room in our heart which is due to God,—as really as by falling down to the stock of a tree. And the idolatry of the heart, as well as gross outward idolatry must be renounced, and held in abhorrence, by all who would be accounted worshippers of the living and true God.

(3.) Their careful and diligent observance of all those ordinances by which God has required himself to be worshipped. When Christ sent out his apostles to blow the gospel trumpet among the nations, he commanded them to teach all who should be made his disciples by their means, *to observe all things, whatsoever* he had commanded. And, as every faithful preacher of the gospel will make conscience of fulfilling his commission; so every one that obeys the gospel will be careful to comply, in this respect, with its design.—There are too many professed Christians in our day, who not only neglect divine ordinances themselves, but also despise others, who take pleasure in attending upon them. These men prove themselves

selves to be strangers to the efficacy of the gospel. If they really knew the joyful sound, they would be careful to observe every divine ordinance, in its proper season; not only from respect to the command of God enjoining it; but also from the desire and hope of enjoying communion with God in it: for the same ordinances, by which God is worshipped, are also the means by which Christians have *fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*.

(3.) It implies their carefulness to perform every act of worship in the manner that the word of God has prescribed. Not only the external matter of God's worship, but likewise every circumstance relative to the manner of performing it—is regulated by divine institution: and in this respect, as well as in the other, true Christians endeavour to adhere to the rule. If any person from Egypt or Assyria, had forsaken idolatry, and professed to worship the true God, while the law of Moses stood in force; it would not have been sufficient for every one to have offered sacrifices to God in his own country, and in the same manner as he had offered them to idols before: they behoved to have performed all their solemn worship at Jerusalem, —and according to the rites established in the temple. In New Testament days, we are not required to observe so many external ceremonies in the worship of God: But it is still necessary to pay the strictest attention to the manner in which our hearts are exercised, during our attendance upon his worship. We must worship him in spirit and in truth: while our own souls are sincerely engaged in his worship, as well as our outward man, we should have all our dependence upon the assistance of the divine Spirit; without whom we can do nothing acceptably. We should

worship in the exercise of that holy fear and reverence, which is due to God in all the meetings of his saints. That levity of mind, so apparent in the irreverent gestures of many, in this and every other worshipping assembly, is a sad evidence how few among us have felt the power of divine grace accompanying the gospel.—We must worship in the beauty of holiness. No Christian is perfectly holy in this world: but he is no real Christian who is not studious of holiness at all times, especially when approaching to God in acts of worship. And the more solemn the act of worship is, the more careful should we be to prepare ourselves for it; by purging out all the remainders of the leaven of corruption; that we may be holy, as the God whom we worship is infinitely holy.—In this manner it is, that all who come, at the sound of this great trumpet, *worship the Lord in the holy mount, at Jerusalem.*

WE are now to conclude with some Improvement of the subject. And it may afford us the following pieces of information.

I. It shews how wretched and miserable is the condition of all mankind by nature. The description in the text is not of any particular sort of men, more vile, or in a more dangerous state than others. It is applicable to the whole human race. We are all perishing outcasts, till the sound of this great trumpet gather us to Christ.—You are so vile, in your natural estate, that God cannot look upon you; but hath cast you out of his sight. A menstruous cloth, a putrid carcase, or any thing more vile than any of these, is less an object of loathing to you, than you are to God. You are an outcast from all happiness: not only just-
ly

ly deprived of it for your crimes,—but rendered incapable of it, by the very constitution of your nature. You are justly doomed to perish, by the sentence of God's holy law; and you are liable, every moment to the full and final execution of that sentence: Yea, such is the malignity of that spiritual disease with which you are infected, that you behoved necessarily to die of that disease; though you were not to perish by the hand of justice; if the gospel had not discovered a cure. Our condition is fully represented, by the Spirit of God himself, under the emblem of an infant *cast out into the open field, in the day when it was born, not washed in water,—nor salted at all, nor swaddled at all,—*wallowing in its own blood, and perishing for want of assistance: None to pity, and none to help it*.

2. What we are to think of the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Long has it been *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*. Still it appears foolishness to those, who, like the conceited Greeks in Paul's day, value themselves upon their supposed wisdom, and acquaintance with reason's light. But it always has been, and ever will be, *the wisdom of God, and the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth*. It is the great trumpet of God, sounded by his own appointment, for gathering perishing outcast sinners to Christ. We go not about to commend ourselves. Ministers of the gospel are men of like passions with others. Some of us are, in many respects inferior to most others. But our message is the message of God: and it is the power of God that makes it effectual. It is, therefore, a matter of no consequence, in this respect, who the bearer of the message

* Ezek. xvi. 4, 5.

message be. The rams' horns were as effectual, for casting down the walls of Jericho, as ever the silver trumpets were in any other expedition. If we have God's commission, and speak what is agreeable to his written word, however contemptible we may seem, in point of personal qualifications, we are God's heralds, and it must be at your peril, if you hear the sound of the trumpet, and take not warning. It is God himself who summons you by us,—to escape from the slavery of sin and Satan, to take possession of the glorious liberty of the children of God,—to come, by faith, to Christ, as the only comfortable meeting place between God and man, and to worship God in his holy mount, at Jerusalem.

3. What matter of praise and thankfulness to God we have, in that the great trumpet continues to be blown among us. We may say of this text, as our Lord once said to his countrymen concerning another, much parallel to this; *To-day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.* Many, indeed, the far greatest part of the human species, even in this enlightened age, are left by adorable sovereignty, in their perishing and outcast state, without any knowledge of the only way of relief. You are, by nature, no better than they: and you deserve no better at the hand of God. Yet, in the riches of his mercy, he has sent the gospel among you. You have enjoyed it since your infancy, and this day it is continued with you. Indeed, your having enjoyed it without interruption hitherto, and its being common to all with whom you are conversant, may be the occasion of its being despised and neglected by you: for such is the depravity of human nature, that the most valuable blessings, if common, are most overlooked, forgotten, and despised. But, if
you

you know the value of your immortal souls,—if you have any relish for true happiness,—you will consider it as matter of eternal praise, that Christ is come among you, in a gospel dispensation, *to proclaim, by sound of trumpet, the acceptable year of the Lord.*

4. The shameful and egregious folly of unbelief, in refusing to come to Christ, at the sound of the gospel trumpet. It amounts to a choosing of bondage in preference to liberty;—of death rather than life. It refuses a place among the sons of God, through a mad attachment to the state of a perishing outcast. Perhaps you are not yet convinced, that such is indeed your estate: but such the Spirit of God represents it to be; and sooner or later, you shall find the representation to be just. You are really cast out from the presence of God, as you come into the world, and ready to perish eternally. Out of that estate no created power can help you: neither will God himself help you—in any other way than that which the gospel reveals. There is not another name, by which you can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ. To Jesus you are called, and invited by sound of trumpet: and if you are so mad as to refuse God's invitation, yourselves will be the only losers; and, through all eternity will you curse your own folly.

This subject may assist us in the important duty of self-examination. You have heard the sound of the great trumpet, and you are come, by profession, to worship God in the gospel-church: but, after all this, you may be an enemy to God in your heart, and a stranger to acceptable worship. If you are truly a member of the church invisible, and are accepted of God, in your worship, you may know it by the following marks.—You have seen yourself to be, by
nature,

nature, a perishing outcast,—and have come to God in Christ, because you saw there was no other way to avoid perishing.—The gospel of Christ is indeed a joyful sound to you. They who never saw their need of Christ, will have the same views of the doctrine of the cross of Christ, as the unbelieving Jews had of himself: it will be to them as a root springing out of a dry ground.—But to you the news of free justification and salvation by the blood of Christ, is like the news of liberty to a galley-slave, or the king's pardon to a criminal on the scaffold.—You are still disposed to come to Christ, and to God in Christ, as invited by the sound of the great trumpet.—That faith by which we come to him is no transient act,—it is a fixed disposition, a permanent habit of the soul. That man never truly came to Christ, who satisfies himself with coming once. The Apostle Peter speaks of it as the Christian's habitual exercise. *To whom coming, as unto a living stone,—ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house* *.—Your business in this place, today, is to worship God in the holy mount, according to the call of the gospel, and according to the promise in the text. You have heard the sound of the great trumpet; and, in compliance with its summons, you are come,—to offer a solemn sacrifice to God, of your soul, your body, and all your services, holy and acceptable, through Jesus Christ;—to celebrate a solemn feast upon the flesh of our New Testament passover which is sacrificed for us, and resolving to keep it, through grace, with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth;—to enlist yourself under the banner of Christ, to declare before God, angels, and men, that his cause shall ever be your cause, his enemies your enemies,

* 1 Pet. ii 4.

enemies, and that you will prosecute the war against them, at the expence of all that is dear to you in this world, and even of life itself;—to celebrate the great jubilee, praising God for the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free;—and to testify your gratitude for this and all your other privileges, by observing all things that Christ hath commanded, and so worshipping God, *in his holy mount at Jerusalem*.—Your fixed resolution is, to persist in following the found of the trumpet, to cleave to Christ, and follow him through good report and bad report,—to employ yourself in his service, in time, and through all eternity.—And in this, and every other good resolution that you form, knowing your own weakness and instability, your dependence is wholly upon the strength of that grace that is in Christ Jesus. *You go in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only.*

The subject speaks consolation to all those who have followed the found of the trumpet, and are really come to worship God in Christ, in the spiritual Jerusalem. You are come out, Christian, from the world that lieth in wickedness. You are come out of the family of Satan,—from his slavery, and from following his banner. You are come without the flood-mark of divine wrath, and God can no more be wroth with you, nor rebuke you. And what are you come to? An inspired apostle tells you *; *Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, &c.* You have nothing to do with the terrors of the legal dispensation;—with a covenant that may be broken, and that is armed with a terrible penal sanction. It is not mount Sinai, that

*

O o

gendreth

* Heb. xii. 18,—24

gendreth to bondage, to which you are come,—nor have you any reason to be afraid of its thunders, or the found of its trumpet.—But *you are come to mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*; this is the holy mount, and this the city, in which you are come to worship. You are come to reside in the place where God himself desires to dwell, and will dwell for ever. You are become a citizen of no mean city,—a member of that happy community, in which Christ himself is King: and have an interest in all the rights, immunities, and privileges of that society.—You are come—to *an innumerable company of angels*: with whom you have communion, in your religious exercises. They serve the same Master,—they worship the same Lord as you do: they contemplate the same events, and meditate with pleasure upon the same salutary truths, though they have not the same concern in them; for these *things the angels desire to look into*. You are come *to the general assembly of the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven*. It is not only said you *shall* come to that blessed assembly, you *are* come to it already. You are really joined to the church invisible,—that happy society, whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life, before the foundation of the world. In reflecting upon what you now enjoy,—and comparing it with the word of God, upon which your faith rests, you may, if rightly exercised, read your own name in that book; and enjoy a foretaste of what you shall enjoy, when joined to the glorious assembly in the upper world.—You are come *even to God the Judge of all*. You know that you are to appear before his judgment seat in a little,—and perhaps you are afraid of that solemn appearance: but why should you? You stand in the
presence

presence of that Judge already: and does his terror make you afraid? you shall be in no more danger from him then, than now: You shall find him the same that day, as he is this day.—You are come—to *the spirits of just men made perfect*. You are soon to enter into a world of spirits, and it may be, you are afraid to go into a world with which you are so little acquainted: but you have no reason;—even then you shall not change your company. The saints in glory belong to the same society as you do: they live upon the same provision; they are employed in the same work, though in a more perfect manner: and when you come actually to take your place among them, you will find that the change is far from being so great as you apprehended. To account for all this,—you are come to *Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant*. That union to him which you already enjoy—is the spring of all your communion, whether in grace or in glory,—with himself, with his Father, with his holy angels, or with the redeemed about his throne.—In a word,—you are come to *the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel*. The blood of Jesus Christ, with which your conscience—and your whole man is sprinkled, speaketh better things than Abel's own blood: that cried for vengeance against his murderer; this cries aloud for mercy—even to the chief of sinners. It speaks better things than the blood of Abel's sacrifice: that could only make a typical—, this makes a real and effectual atonement: that could only cleanse to the purifying of the flesh, but this purgeth from all filthiness, both of the flesh and spirit, and gradually brings to perfect holiness in the fear of God.—To all this is every person come, who has been enabled to hearken to the sound of the

gospel trumpet. And to all this we wish to bring you, sinner, when we blow the great trumpet in your hearing.

Let me then conclude, by setting this great trumpet to my mouth; and calling every person within hearing, to come, and worship God in Christ, in the holy mount, the spiritual Jerusalem. Come to the great sacrifice that Christ has offered,—and by him you shall receive the atonement: All your sins shall be freely forgiven,—and you shall be completely secured against all future condemnation. Come to the great feast that God is making in this mountain, to all people. *Eternal Wisdom hath killed her beasts, She hath mingled her wine, She hath also furnished her table.* We are honoured to be her maidens, sent forth to invite the simple, and him that wanteth understanding—the outcast, and him that is ready to perish. We are warranted to assure you, that all things are ready: and it shall be your own fault if you go from this place, without being satisfied with the fatness of God's house, even of his holy temple.—Come to the standard of the Captain of salvation, and enter yourselves among his soldiers. You must either be with him or against him; for there can be no neutrals in this cause. It is hopeless to continue among his enemies; for God has engaged finally to make them all his footstool. And therefore your only safety is in being on his side.—Come to the spiritual jubilee: we proclaim *the acceptable year of the Lord.* Come and share of that glorious liberty that belongs to the sons of God. Come and enter into possession of the inheritance, which, by your sin, you had mortgaged and lost: *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* Come and obtain an interest in God himself, as the portion of your inheritance and of your cup: and, in
this

this way you shall, this very day, enter upon the enjoyment of a happiness, that you may search for in vain among all the objects that are under the sun.

Oh! that I could blow the trumpet so loudly as to be heard in all the habitable parts of God's earth. There is not a son nor a daughter of Adam, in a state of mortality, whom I would not consider myself as warranted to invite and compel to come. Come all ye that are *ready to perish*; and see yourselves every moment in danger of the full execution of the curse under which you lie. Christ is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God through him.—Come all ye vile outcasts, who feel yourselves so filthy, that you dare not hope for admittance into the presence of God: he is willing to receive even you, and to make you accepted in the beloved.—Come—ye that have hitherto been wandering on the mountains of vanity, foolishly hoping to find happiness among the creatures. Wherefore will ye continue to spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently to this joyful sound, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness. In God you will find that happiness, concerning which all created things say, with an uniform voice, *it is not in me*.—Come—ye that heretofore have trusted in your own righteousness, and who still fondly expect to procure the favour of God by your own merit. That bed is too short to stretch yourselves upon,—the covering is narrower than that you should wrap yourselves in it. But in the way of coming to Christ, you shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of your salvation.—Come—ye that trust to
your

your own attainments; and, like the proud Pharisee, thank God that you are not like other men. God views you with a very different eye, from that with which you look upon yourselves. All that upon which you value yourselves will go for nothing before the tribunal of God. But in Christ you may obtain all that is necessary to bring you among the excellent ones of the earth, with whom is all his delight.—Come—ye that have long refused the invitation, and are so wedded to your idols, that you cannot think of forsaking them. Even your unbelief has not yet provoked God to exclude you. All the day long he stretches out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people.—Come—ye who are sensible that you cannot come. This is the case with all mankind, whether they are sensible of it or not: and if you are made sensible that this is the case with you, it is a token for good.—God has promised that you *shall come*: and he is ready to accomplish his promise, by enabling you presently to come. The sound of this trumpet is the mean, by which the promise is accomplished: and it is our business to call even such impotent sinners as you are, in hopes that drawing power shall accompany the call, and make it effectual. In like manner it is your duty to mint at complying with the call, as the poor man once stretched out the withered hand, trusting for the success of your endeavour, to him who has said,—*they shall come, and they shall declare his righteousness, unto a people that shall be born, and that he hath done this.*

By what arguments may I hope to prevail with you to consult your interest, by complying with this exhortation?—Consider, that unless you comply you must perish. There is no other way of salvation but that

that which the gospel reveals. No creature can deliver you: and while you refuse to come to Christ, God will not.—Consider that you are not called to come at a venture. If you had only a probability of salvation by Christ, it would be folly to sit still and perish: much more when you have all possible security for it. There can be none so near to perish, that Christ cannot save them; and none can be so worthless that he will not. His own words are, *him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.*—God can have no interested motives in calling you to come. If you perish, it is no loss to him: if you are saved, he gains nothing. Nothing but free love, and condescension worthy of himself—could have influence with him, in this matter.—The gospel trumpet will not always continue to sound in your ears. The door of access to God that is now set open before you, will be finally shut in a little: how soon we know not;—perhaps before to-morrow. To-day, therefore, if ever you resolve to hear God's voice,—to-day—harden not your hearts. Another trumpet will sound in a little, to summon you before the tribunal of Christ: that summons you will not be able to sit, before that tribunal you must answer for your disobedience to the call of God by the gospel trumpet: and the present call, if finally rejected, will afford eternal nourishment to the worm that dieth not, and everlasting fuel to the fire that shall not be quenched. That this may not be the case, let every perishing outcast in this assembly *come, and worship God through Jesus Christ, in the holy mount at Jerusalem.*

S E R M O N VIII.

The Mourners in Zion Characterized.

A FAST-DAY SERMON.

ISAIAH lxi. 3.

—*To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*—

THERE is no man, in this world, who has not some experience both of joy and sorrow. Even they who have been gathered to Christ, by the sound of the gospel trumpet, and worship God acceptably in his holy mount,—have frequent occasions of mourning, as well as the rest of mankind, while they pass through this valley of weeping: but their sorrow is alleviated, by a prospect of everlasting joy. Hence, when their situation here is most mournful, they have the art of mixing joy with their grief: as, on the other hand, in their best condition, they never give themselves up to unmixed joy, but always, when acting like themselves, *rejoice with trembling*. Unmixed sorrow they shall never suffer: nor shall ever their joy be without a mixture of heaviness, till the words of Christ in this text be fully accomplished in another world.

As the sorrow which they feel, during this life, is, through the efficacious working of the Spirit of God, a mean

a mean of preparing them for that fulness of joy which they shall attain hereafter; so for every joyful event that they meet with here, God usually prepares them, by some previous occasion of sorrow. Thus Abraham mourned long for Sarah's barrenness, before he received the promised seed: and David, before he came to the possession of the kingdom, was subject, for a considerable time, to Saul's persecution. Accordingly, when they have a prospect of a season of more than ordinary joy, it is their duty to prepare themselves for it, by the previous exercise of godly sorrow. Thus, before the feast of tabernacles, which was the most joyful of all the solemn feasts under the law, God required every Israelite to afflict his soul on the day of atonement. And it is not without reason, that, in view of keeping the Christian feast of the Lord's supper, we usually keep a day of solemn humiliation; as we are now professing to do.

In the two first verses of this chapter, the prophet personates Christ: and shews what is the business of his mediatory office, and how he was to be qualified, in the fulness of the time appointed, for the discharge of that office in human nature. What was then foretold is now fully accomplished. *The Spirit of the Lord God* was upon Christ, even in his humbled estate: and he is *anointed* with the same Spirit above all measure, in his estate of exaltation, by which means he is abundantly qualified to execute the commission that his Father hath given him; by *preaching good tidings to the poor, healing the broken hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.* It is the main business of that dispensation of the grace of God which we enjoy, to declare, that, in the execution of Christ's prophetic

office, an universal jubilee is proclaimed, through all nations,—that the execution of his priestly office has afforded a glorious display of the justice and vengeance of God,—and that, in the execution of his Kingly office, an inexhaustible fund of comfort is set open to every mourner.—This we take to be the substance of what is contained in the two preceding verses.

In this verse, our Lord is represented as informing us, what shall be the final result of all that he does, in the exercise of these saving offices, with regard to all who obtain an interest in him. He will change that state of sin and misery, in which they are by nature, into a state of perfect holiness and happiness: and instead of the multiplied evils, to which they are subject in the present life, will fill their hearts with joy, and their mouths with praise. Yea, he will so confirm and establish them in that blessed state; that they may be called *trees of righteousness,—the planting of the Lord that he may be glorified.*

We propose only to speak of the first part of the verse, at this time. And in it we have the following things deserving our attention.

1. The character of those persons, that have a present interest in the mediation of Christ; they are such as *mourn in Zion*. There is a manifest difference, between the mourners spoken of in the preceding verse, and those that are mentioned in this. In the second verse, our Lord declares, that, in the dispensation of the gospel, he brings, offers,—exhibits, and is ready actually to administer comfort to every one that mourns, without exception of any. But here he declares what he has in commission, from his Father, to do for them that *mourn in Zion*: i. e. for those persons, who, being citizens of the spiritual Zion,—genuine

nuine members of the church invisible, and still subject to many causes of sorrow, are enabled to mourn after a godly sort. The mourners here intended—are the same, of whom our Lord spake, in his memorable sermon on the mount; when he said,—*blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted**.

2. The condition that these persons are in, for the most part, while in this world,—intimated in three different expressions. (1.) They are in *ashes*. Of old it was usual for mourners to put ashes on their heads: or, if their grief was extreme, to sit down, or even to roll themselves among ashes. Thus Tamar *put ashes on her head, and went on crying* †: and Job, in the extremity of his trouble, *sat down among the ashes* ‡. (2.) They have *mourning*. If they have learned to mourn in a different manner from the rest of the world,—that talent has no occasion to lie unoccupied: they have many causes of mourning, from which none but Christ can deliver them. (3.) They are under the influence of *the spirit of heaviness*. Their spirits are sunk and depressed with grief; as if they were actuated, in a preternatural manner, by some spirit inspiring them with grief and sorrow.

3. The condition to which Christ is appointed to bring them, and will bring them accordingly. This also is intimated in three expressions, corresponding to those, in which their present condition is set forth. (1.) Instead of *ashes*, he will give them *beauty*.—The original word here used, signifies properly that part of dress, with which, in those eastern countries, they still adorn their heads, usually called a Tiara, or Turban. It is used by the prophet Ezekiel, to signify that ornament of the head which was worn by the priests,

* Matth. v. 4

† 2 Sam. xiii. 9.

‡ Job ii. 8.

and which we render a *bonnet* *. These being considered as highly ornamental, the word is sometimes used to signify beauty. Here the meaning of the phrase is, Christ will take off the ashes, with which they had covered their heads; and, in their stead, will put upon them a beautiful crown, or bonnet, such as is appointed to be worn by the priests of the Most High God. (2.) Instead of mourning, he will give them the oil of joy. On joyous occasions, they used to anoint themselves with perfumed oil, which made their countenance to shine, and spread a fragrant odour around them. To this the Spirit of God here alludes: and the meaning is, that Christ will so deliver the inhabitants of Zion from all causes of mourning, that they shall again anoint themselves, in token of joy: and the joy of their heart shall have the same effect with *oil that makes the face to shine*. (3.) Instead of the *spirit of heaviness*, they shall be clothed with the *garment of praise*. The word which we translate garment—signifies properly that long loose robe, which they wore above their other garments: and without which it was accounted shameful to go abroad. These robes it was usual to rend, or tear asunder, when overtaken with sudden grief: and when their grief was asswaged, the rent garment was either sewed up again, or changed for another. Now, Christ meets Zion's mourners with their garments rent, under the influence of the spirit of heaviness; but he clothes them with change of raiment: He strips them of the garments which they had torn, and puts upon them the *garment of praise*. Concerning the meaning of this phrase, there are different opinions. Some think it means a glorious robe, or a garment deserving of

* Ezek. xlv. 18.

of praise: and this sense is very agreeable to the Hebrew idiom. But others think, that the exercise of praising God is here compared to a robe: and that this is the garment here promised to Zion's mourners.

4. The manner in which Christ will bring about this happy change: and this also is set forth in two different expressions. (1.) He is commissioned to appoint these things for them. The word signifies to ordain by a judicial sentence. Christ as King in Zion, is invested with the highest authority: God has committed to him all judgment. All the inhabitants of Zion are his subjects: and he passes a sentence in their favours, adjudging them to have their ashes removed, and a beautiful crown put upon their heads,—appointing them to cease from their mourning, and to be anointed with fresh oil—and discerning that they shall be set free from the spirit of heaviness, and arrayed with the garment of praise. (2.) He is sent to give unto them—what he has thus appointed for them. As all judicial authority is committed to Christ, so he has all fulness lodged in his hand,—and has sufficient power to put in execution every sentence that he pronounces. Every branch of the government, in this spiritual kingdom, is laid upon his shoulders.

Some further enlargement upon each of these particulars, is all that we intend on this subject. And, at this time, all that we can hope to overtake will only be some short illustration of the first, with a few Inferences for Improvement.

For illustrating the character of those mourners who are inhabitants of Zion, and who have an interest
in

in the mediation of Christ, all that we propose, is only to mention a few things in which their mourning differs from that of others. This world, ever since the entry of sin, is full of mourners—*Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.* There is no man who has not his share of it; though some have a far larger share than others. And the children of Zion are not less exposed to it than other men. They, as well as others, are born crying, live complaining, and die groaning. To all the common miseries of life, they are as much exposed as others. Many things are matter of sorrow to them, by which the rest of mankind are not affected. They do not expect to enter the kingdom but through manifold tribulations. And neither the degree of outward trouble that they suffer, nor the degree of sorrow arising from it, can distinguish them from those who still dwell in the city of destruction. But there is an essential and specific difference between their mourning and that of others. By attending to this difference, you may both learn how you should be exercised if you wish to keep such a fast as God has chosen,—and may have an opportunity of trying whether you are genuine children of Zion or not.

Now, the mourners here spoken of differ from all others, in the following respects.

1. In respect of the spring or principle of their mourning. All men have natural affections, capable of being excited by natural means. Those things that are agreeable to our appetites and desires—naturally excite in us joy and delight; as naturally is sorrow excited, and mourning produced by what is hurtful or disagreeable. But the mourning by which the children of Zion are distinguished is wholly supernatural.

tural. No natural cause can produce;—no natural motive can excite it. They mourn, as others do, in a natural way, for what is contrary to their natures, and is considered as hurtful to them. But they likewise mourn for what is most agreeable to their nature, in its present corrupt state. Yea the corruption of their nature is itself a principal cause of their mourning: and therefore, it can proceed from no principle inherent in corrupt nature. It is the fruit of *the Spirit of grace, and of supplication*; which God pours out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, according to his promise. And, like all the other graces of the Spirit, it is exercised or not,—it is exercised in a greater, or in a less degree, not merely according to the cause that the person has to mourn,—but according to the measure of the working of the Spirit of God upon the soul. David had surely never more cause to mourn, than after he had slain Uriah the Hittite, and debauched his wife: yet even for this he did not mourn, till the Lord spake to his heart, by the instrumentality of the prophet Nathan: and then, a plain intimation of forgiveness did not prevent his mourning very deeply. If you find yourself always alike disposed to the mourning exercise;—if you can mourn when you please,—or if you always mourn most deeply when you have most to mourn for,—then your mourning is still but natural: and you are none of the persons characterized in the text. It is otherwise if you have felt the natural hardness of your heart, rendering you incapable of that mourning which is your duty,—even when you are sensible that you have much cause: and if, when enabled to mourn, you have found yourself powerfully drawn to that exercise, by means of a believing view of Christ, as pierced for your sin, and pierced

pierced by it. As the look of faith is necessarily connected, in the promise of God, with evangelical mourning,—so it is only he who implants the grace of faith, that can enable any sinner to mourn, after a godly sort.

2. In respect of the objects for whom they mourn. Self is always the reigning principle, with unrenewed men: and they can never mourn sincerely, but for themselves. The inhabitant of **Zion** mourns also for himself: and, while actuated by a principle of self-preservation, it must be so. When he finds himself in trouble, or exposed to danger,—when he is deprived of what he loved, or kept short of what he desired,—when his hopes are disappointed—or his fears realized,—he cannot chuse but mourn: for the Christian is not divested of human nature, when endued with supernatural grace. But so long as we mourn for ourselves only, our mourning cannot be acceptable to God. The true Christian mourns also,

(1.) For his brethren: for every fellow-creature whom he sees in misery,—and even for his enemies, if any evil befall them. It is the express command of God to *rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep* *. But this command the sons of **Zion** only can obey. There may be much appearance of humanity in a wicked man; but it is an appearance only. He loves others, as far as they are subservient to his self-love. And he can sympathize with them, or mourn for them, as far as their sufferings tend to mar his own gratification. But how little disinterested humanity is natural to men in their fallen state, is plain from the examples of the most refined Pagans;—who not only indulged themselves

in

* Rom. xii. 15.

in revenge, and other malignant passions towards their supposed enemies,—but also took the greatest pleasure in seeing those fellow-creatures who had given them no offence, destroying and butchering one another: But the child of God has learned to love his neighbour as himself: and therefore, he rejoices in his neighbour's happiness, as in his own; and he grieves for his neighbour's sufferings, as having a fellow-feeling with him. Though that neighbour be an enemy, he pities him, prays for him to God, and contributes all that he can for his relief. He can even mourn for the sufferings of an irrational animal; for *the righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel* *. The prophet Jeremiah was himself preserved, amidst the calamities that befel the Jewish nation in his day: yet he says,—*Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people* †.

(2.) He mourns for Zion, for the church of God. So the words of the text are, by some, translated: *to appoint unto them that mourn for Zion*. Every true member of the mystical body of Christ—is affected with all the concerns of the body. And he is but a false son of the church, who is not as much grieved for her sufferings as for his own. The captives in Babylon could not chuse but feel their own sufferings; but these were swallowed up in the consideration—that Jerusalem was desolate, and the interest of religion and the church of God—so low. They sat down and *wept by the rivers of Babylon, when they remembered Zion*: and it was for this that they *banged their harps upon the willows* ‡. In New Testament days,

*

Qq

the

* Prov. xii. 10.

† Jer. ix. 1.

‡ Psal. cxxxvii. 1, 2.

the solemn worship of God is not confined to one city : nor is the church limited to one people. And therefore religion cannot now be so much affected by the desolation of any city, nor by the public calamities that befall any particular nation. But they are strangers in our Israel who are not convinced, that in our day, there is much cause of mourning, on account of the state of the church, and of religion. The prerogatives of Christ's crown are alienated,—and usurped by the princes and great men of the earth. The privileges of his subjects are wrest from them, and their complaints and remonstrances on that account are disregarded,—even by those who should be the guardians of these privileges. The propagators of the grossest errors, who, in the purer times of our church would have been subjected to the severest censures, are now dismissed by her judicatories, without any censure at all; and even continued in the office of public teachers. The heritage of God is oppressed; and every attempt to seek relief for her, is discountenanced and discouraged. The ordinances of Christ are corrupted, and prostituted by the admission of infidels, of scandalous and profane persons to a participation in the seals of God's covenant.—The church is rent by numberless divisions, and the life of religion wormed out, by controversies and mutual animosities. The power of godliness is little known, and, with many, who yet call themselves Christians, the form of it is scarcely retained. Ignorance and indifference about spiritual things,—profanity and dissipation, uncleanness, fraud, and every other vice abound among church members: nor are the proper means used to purge out the *old leaven*. On all these accounts, the gracious presence of God, is, in a sad measure withdrawn: and they
who

who are truly exercised to godliness—go mourning without the Sun. Are not these things matter of sorrow, to every lover of Zion? Or is it possible for any friend of Zion's King, to stand by unconcerned, and see him so grievously wounded in the house of his friends. If these things are not matter of grief to you,—you are none of the persons spoken of in the text. All the true mourners in Zion are persons who *sigh and cry for all the abominations, that are done in the midst thereof* *.

(3.) He mourns for Christ. This is the true fruit of such an out-pouring of the Spirit of grace and supplication as God hath promised: and this is the grand criterion of evangelical mourning: Christ is now beyond the reach of all sorrow and misery; so that we can have no occasion to mourn on account of any thing in his present personal estate.—But he was once *despised and rejected of men,—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. He was subject to all the misery that the rage of men and the malice of devils,—yea, to all that his Father's wrath could inflict. And all this was owing to the sins of his people, imputed to him. Never will any person be duly affected with sin, till he see it in this light, and mourn for it on this account. The true mourners in Zion have got a believing view of their own sin, as laid upon Christ, and punished in his person: and therefore they consider every sin that they have committed, as a mortal wound given to him. They consider themselves as not less guilty of his death, than they who actually drove the nails into his hands and his feet. The dishonour done to God, by the sins of the chosen seed of Christ, could no otherwise be wiped off, than by *his* submitting to be wounded and bruised by divine justice

tice on that account. And its being the procuring cause of Christ's sufferings, is that, which, above all other considerations, wrings the heart of a true penitent, and causes him to *mourn* for sin, *as one mourneth for an only Son*: he is *in bitterness for him, as one is in bitterness for a first-born* *.

3. These mourners differ from all others, in respect of the subject of their grief, or the things for which they mourn: as will appear from the following instances:

(1.) They mourn for sin, as well as for suffering;—for the grounds and causes of God's controversy, as well as for the severest pleadings of it. Let a wicked man escape punishment, and he will never be truly grieved on account of his sin. Sin is still the object of his love and choice: and he mourns, not because he has sinned; but because he cannot be allowed to sin with impunity. It is not properly his own sin, but the justice and holiness of God,—the strictness and extent of his law, and the inexorable severity of its penalty,—that are the true causes of his mourning. The child of God, on the contrary, is filled with love to the beauty of holiness,—he is perfectly reconciled to the severity of divine justice: he esteems the law of God to be holy, and just, and good. Sin he considers as indeed an abominable thing;—hated of God, and hateful in itself. He sees himself wholly defiled by it: he lothes himself; and repents;—mourning, as Job did, in dust and ashes.

(2.) They mourn for the filthiness, as well as the guilt of sin. Many, I fear, apprehend that they mourn for sin, when the real cause of their mourning is only the misery that sin brings upon them, or the connection

* Zech. xii. 10

tion that God has established between sin and misery. —Do you mourn only for sin, as tending to draw down misery upon your head; or do you also mourn for it, as tending to deface the image of God upon you,—to render you loathsome and abominable in his sight,—and to exclude you from all comfortable fellowship, and communion with him? If you are a true son of Zion, there is nothing that you so much desire, as to be like God, and to see him as he is: You know that nothing but sin can prevent the gratification of this desire. You therefore hate sin above all vile things, and mourn deeply for the spiritual pollution which you have contracted by it.

(3.) They mourn for the sin of their nature, as well as for the sin of their life and conversation. A natural conscience may be affected with such actual sins as the person may have committed: and under its influence, an unregenerate person may, in a sort, mourn for these; especially if they have exposed him to shame or misery in the sight of men. But if you mourn in an acceptable manner, you will be humbled for your most secret sins, to which God and your own conscience, have alone been privy, as well as for those that are known to all the world. You will know, and be grieved for the plagues of your heart, as well as for the irregularities of your outward life. Yea, you will trace the streams of actual sin, to the fountain of original sin in your corrupt nature; and, in the bitterness of your heart, you will cry out with David, *Behold I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me* *.

(4.) They mourn for sins against Christ and the gospel, as well as for those against God and the law.

I do

* Psa. li. 5.

I do not mean to insinuate that there is any sin against Christ and the gospel, that does not also transgress the law of God, and ultimately terminate against himself. Neither is there any sin against the law, committed by those who enjoy the gospel, which does not also tend to dishonour the gospel, and imply contempt of the authority of Christ.—But as the covenant of works admitted of no Mediator; so the law, as given to Adam, in its covenant form, could not point out the duties that we now owe to Christ, in his mediatory character, nor forbid those sins directly, that terminate against the gospel revelation. Consequently, they who are still under that covenant, and are influenced by the spirit of it,—though they may be affected with those sins, that terminate more immediately against the law in that form,—they seldom, or never, are touched with a sense of their unbelief, or their natural enmity against Christ, and the way of salvation thro' his imputed righteousness. They go about to repair the broken covenant of works, and mourn because they find it impossible to succeed: but they do not mourn for their want of an interest in the covenant of grace, nor for their unwillingness to enter within the bond of that covenant.—The evangelical mourner, on the contrary, will be humbled for his remaining attachment to the covenant of works; and for that legal disposition, which still inclines him to seek righteousness, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. His unbelief he will consider as the greatest of all his sins, and that which binds the guilt of all his other sins upon his back. His enmity against Christ and the covenant of grace, will affect him more deeply than all his transgressions of the law of works. And he will mourn for all his sin,—not so much because

cause it is against the law as a covenant,—as because it is against the law of Christ, and implies contempt of his mediatory authority.

(5.) They mourn for the sins of others, as well as for their own. So long as a person is actuated only by self, and his fear of wrath is the principal source of his mourning,—he will think of those sins only, which he apprehends may be punished in his own person: and seldom has he any trouble, unless about his own personal acts of sin. In so far he acts a foolish part, even upon his own principles; for there are many cases, in which a man may justly be punished for sins committed by others. The Lord has threatened to *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him.* And we expose ourselves to this threatening, if we know the sins of our progenitors, and do not mourn for them. The sins of public bodies God often punishes by public judgments: and every member of a church or nation has contributed as much to the general provocation, as will justify the Judge of all the earth, in laying upon him a share of the public calamity. Hence, even they whose highest aim is to escape punishment, may see it their interest to be humbled for the sins of others, in many cases, as well as for their own.—In all cases, the genuine children of Zion consider it as their duty to mourn for all the sin that they are acquainted with. The dishonour done to God by sin—is a principal thing that affects them: and this is the same whether the sin was committed by themselves or by others. They cannot see *transgressors*, without being *grieved*, because they keep not God's law. The sins of past generations, as far as he knows them,—the sins of the church and nation to
which

which he belongs,—the sins of private persons, to which he is a witness,—and all the sin that he hears of in the world, will be considered as matter of deep humiliation, by every real Christian.

4. The Mourners in Zion differ from all other mourners, in respect of the fruits, and effects of their sorrow. Of this difference an inspired apostle takes particular notice *. *Godly sorrow, says he, worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For, behold, this self-same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves,—yea, what indignation,—yea, what fear,—yea, what vehement desire,—yea, what zeal,—yea, what revenge.* We cannot take particular notice of all these effects of godly sorrow, at this time; tho' a proper explication of such a passage, could time allow, might be of singular use. You may take the general sense of it in the following paraphrase:

‘ Instead of being dissatisfied with myself, because I
 ‘ made you sorry, by those reproofs which I tendered
 ‘ to you in my former letter, I have reason to rejoice,
 ‘ when I consider the happy effects that your sorrow
 ‘ has produced. It may be considered as a general
 ‘ maxim, that godly sorrow, wherever it obtains, pro-
 ‘ duces that repentance, that change of heart and life,
 ‘ which is necessarily connected with salvation, and of
 ‘ which no man has cause to repent: whereas that sor-
 ‘ row which the men of the world feel, whatever be
 ‘ the cause of it, tends to sink their spirits, to hasten
 ‘ their death, and even to aggravate their eternal mi-
 ‘ sery. This maxim has been clearly verified in you.
 ‘ Your sorrow has been of a godly sort: and it is ma-
 ‘ nifest, that it hath produced in you a wonderful de-
 ‘ gree

‘ gree of care and diligence, both in reforming what
 ‘ had been amiss, and in guarding against the like,
 ‘ since that time: and a surprising concern to vindicate
 ‘ yourselves, as far as you were conscious of innocence.
 ‘ It has produced a laudible indignation against those
 ‘ sinful and scandalous practices that were formerly
 ‘ tolerated among you,—and a holy caution, jealousy,
 ‘ and circumspection, lest any thing of that kind
 ‘ should be repeated. It has inflamed you with earnest
 ‘ desire after a thorough reformation, and with ardent
 ‘ zeal in endeavouring to attain it. Yea, tho’ you
 ‘ know that Christians are neither required nor allowed
 ‘ to harbour, or to execute revenge against those
 ‘ who have offended or injured them; yet, your zeal
 ‘ for the honour of religion has been manifested in
 ‘ your inflicting due censure upon the offender; nor
 ‘ can you be satisfied with yourselves, for having
 ‘ connived at him so long. And you give up to destruction
 ‘ those lusts, from which the offence proceeded.’

Agreeably to this instance among the Corinthians, the difference between the effects of evangelical mourning, and those of every species of worldly sorrow, will appear in the following particulars:

(1.) Whereas the sorrow of the world excites men to take methods of their own devising, to still the clamours of conscience;—the mourning here intended leads to that remedy which God himself hath provided. An awakened conscience is a misery from which every person who feels it must wish to be delivered. To be comfortably delivered, there is but one method: and that no person will make trial of, till the power of divine grace determine him to it. Hence some, under the horrors of remorse, betake themselves to the hurry

of worldly business: like Cain, who endeavoured to divert the clamours of conscience, by building a city. Others have recourse to a method still more preposterous: thinking to drown the voice of conscience, in their cups,—they employ their minds in a continued round of guilty pleasures;—and thus, to avoid the trouble of present thinking, they lay up for themselves a copious fund of future remorse.—Some pursue methods more refined, though alike ineffectual; they have recourse to vows, and resolutions, and perhaps to external and temporary reformation; as if any future amendment could make atonement for past crimes, or procure the remission of former sins. By such methods, the conscience is often lulled asleep for a time, but it must have a more dreadful awakening another day: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. But true evangelical mourning leads to the blood of sprinkling, as the only thing that can purge the conscience from dead works. The same blessed Spirit, that discovers to the person the plague of his heart, discovers also the remedy. He determines him to rely upon the righteousness of Christ, as revealed from faith to faith, and upon the gracious promise of God, through Christ, for pardon and peace. As the fruit of his peace with God, peace is infused into his conscience: and as he saw the exceeding sinfulness of sin, in the glass of the sufferings of Christ,—so in these sufferings he finds a sovereign remedy for a conscience wounded by sin.

(2) Whereas the sorrow of the world worketh death, crucifies the false hopes that the man had entertained, of safety in the way of sin, and, when rising to excess, tends to drive him to despair; so that, under an apprehension of the impossibility of his being saved,

saved, he, it may be, puts an end to his wretched life, and casts himself, with his own hand, into that hell which he feared.—The Christian's mourning, on the contrary, is a happy mean of his being begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ—Convinced of his absolute need of Christ, despairing of salvation in any other,—he casts the anchor of his hope within the veil: and, assured that that ground can never fail him,—he is enabled, without ceasing to mourn, and be ashamed before God, on account of his sin,—to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

(3.) The sorrow of the world inflames the person's enmity against God, and drives him headlong upon the thick bosses of *his* buckler. He sees God to be his enemy, armed with the flaming sword of avenging justice against him, and ready to inflict upon him the punishment that his sin deserves. By this fight, his natural enmity against God is irritated. Instead of taking hold of *his* strength, that he may make peace with him, the sinner hardens himself against him more and more,—till his enmity rises to an infernal perfection. Hence, even in this world, the most abandoned sinners are often those who have sometime had sharp convictions: and hence, in the world to come, where this kind of sorrow shall have risen to the greatest possible height, every sinner will be a very devil, for malice and enmity against God. But the Christian's mourning has a quite contrary effect. It stirs him up to embrace, with cheerfulness, the offers of peace and reconciliation with God. Being accompanied with hatred of sin, it serves to increase his love to God, to his holy law, and to his service. It fills him with holy jealousy, lest he return, as the dog to his vomit, to those sinful courses that have cost him so

much grief. It even works in him a holy revenge, as Paul expresses it, against those lusts and corruptions, which formerly led him astray. And nothing will satisfy that revenge, but their being used like Agag, whom Samuel brought forth, and bewed in pieces, before the Lord in Gilgal.

(4.) In a word, that sorrow, or mourning for sin, that may be found in an unrenewed man, leaves him the same that it found him. The fountain of sin in his nature is never dried up. The corrupt habits and dispositions of his soul are never changed. And therefore, though the streams of actual sin may be stopt for a time, or diverted into another channel,—they can only be as a brook dammed up, that rises by degrees, till it breaks over all mounds, and cuts a new channel for itself. As the principle of corruption remains unsubdued, he is the same impenitent sinner still.—That godly sorrow, on the contrary, which is to be found in those that mourn in Zion, worketh *repentance not to be repented of*. The person, convinced both of the evil and folly of those sinful courses, in which he was formerly engaged,—and encouraged by a heart-affecting view of the mercy of God in Christ, turns from sin, with loathing and abhorrence of it,—he turns to God with full purpose of heart, and from that time forth, persists in a constant and habitual endeavour to walk with him, in all the ways of new obedience. Whereas, formerly he run on in sin, as all wicked men do, and did not keep God's law,—now he runs the way of God's commandments, with cheerfulness and enlargement of heart.

WE shall conclude, for the time, with two or three inferences from what has been said.

1. The inhabitants of Zion have no reason to be disappointed or discouraged, at finding much cause of mourning in their lot. All that ever were genuine children of Zion were mourners. And why should not you? The King of Zion himself, while in this world, was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And surely the servant is not greater than his Lord, nor the disciple than his Master. You was never enticed into the service of Christ, by any delusive promises of exemption from those evils that you now feel. You was faithfully warned, that through much tribulation you must enter into the kingdom. You have been told, that Satan would assault you, both with his wiles and his fiery darts; and that you would find it necessary to wrestle, even against principalities and powers. With his own mouth, your blessed Lord has informed you, that the world would hate and persecute you. Yea, God himself has assured you, that he would visit your iniquities with rods, and your sins with chastisements: and this is an article of that covenant that he has made with you in Christ. Why then should you think it strange concerning the fiery trial, that is come to try you, as if some uncommon thing had happened to you? Do you not see the same afflictions daily accomplished in your brethren that are in the world?—It was never exemption from any of these things, that was promised you; but support under them, and final deliverance from them. How is it then, that you dare entertain a thought, prejudicial to the faithfulness of God; or harbour a doubt of the truth of his word of promise, on account of such things in your lot? Rather, these are a partial accomplishment of his word: and a pledge of the fulfilment of the other part, in God's good time and way.

And

And what loss do you sustain by your present sufferings? Is it not better to suffer these light afflictions here, than to suffer eternal wrath and misery hereafter? You deserve the one, as richly as the other. And God has appointed these for you, as means of preventing that. Is it not worth while to wear ashes for a season, in order to have them changed for the diadem of beauty, in the issue! Who would grudge to shed a few tears, if it were but for the honour,—for the exquisite pleasure of having Christ to wipe them away? Is not sin a greater evil than suffering? Do you not mourn more deeply for the one than for the other? And has not God himself promised to make the one a mean of delivering you from the other? *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged: and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin* *.

Methinks I hear some disconsolate mourner reply, 'Alas! this is the principal ground of my discouragement.' I know that God has promised to make afflictions useful, as means of subduing corruption, and of promoting holiness; but it is not so with me. My afflictions have been various, lasting, and severe; and yet my sin is not purged away. My corruptions seem to gather strength under my sufferings, and the more I am chastised, the more vile I appear.'—But even this does not warrant you to mourn, as they that have no hope. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Few know exactly when, or how the Lord begins to work savingly in their souls: much less is every Christian sensible of every step that he takes, in carrying on his work in them. The cleansing of the soul proceeds usually by slow and imperceptible degrees. And it is never perfect in this life.

The

* Isa. xxvii. 9

The man according to God's heart confessed, that *iniquities prevailed against him* *. And that apostle who laboured more abundantly than all the rest, found still *a law in his members, not only warring against the law of his mind, but also bringing him into captivity to the law of sin and death*. He groaned under the remainder of corruption in him, as under a body of death, accounting himself a wretched man, till he was delivered from it †. If this was the case with him, why should you be discouraged to find it so with you? You cannot be perfectly free from sin in this life. And you may consider it as an infallible rule, that the more progress the Spirit of God makes, in purging away your sin,—the more sensible will you be of what remains; and the more deeply will you be disposed to mourn on account of it. Hence, your growing sense of sin, if accompanied with a growing hatred of it, and sorrow for it, instead of being any evidence that your afflictions are, in no degree blessed, as means of purging away your sin,—may be viewed as a certain and comfortable evidence that they are.

2. The exercise of humiliation, and mourning for sin, however unpleasant to flesh and blood, is far from being either a needless or unprofitable exercise. It is disagreeable to flesh and blood; for sorrow and mourning must always be so. No disagreeable affection can be excited in the mind, without being accompanied with painful feelings. Hence, there is no other religious exercise, to which men have generally more aversion, nor any that Christians themselves often set about with greater reluctance. But it is no unnecessary exercise: for we have always much sin to mourn for, and to mourn for sin is always a duty. When
iniquity

* Psal. lxx. 3.

† Rom. vii. 23, 24.

iniquity of all kinds abounds so much, as it does in our day, among all sorts of persons, it cannot be improper to set some time apart, whether publicly or in private, to lament over it. Neither is it an unprofitable exercise. It may be a mean of impressing upon our minds a deeper sense of the evil and bitterness of sin, of bringing us to Christ for renewed intimations of pardon and peace,—and of preparing us for future, and eternal rejoicing. It may, through the divine blessing, be a mean of averting from ourselves, and even from a guilty church or nation, those judgments that sin has deserved: or, at least, of obtaining for ourselves a hiding in the day of the Lord's anger. But let us beware of resting in outward forms, or in empty professions. If ours is such a fast as God has chosen, we must mourn in the manner that has been described; and this day's work must be continued through all the rest of our lives. Constantly and habitually must we sigh and cry, for all the abominations, that are done in the midst of us.

3. There can be no acceptable mourning in Zion, that is not accompanied with the other graces, which are the fruits of the same Spirit. It must be accompanied with faith: for unless we look to Christ, and see him, in the glass of God's word, as wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, we can never mourn for having pierced him. It must also be the fruit of the renewed influence of the Spirit of grace; and faith must draw supplies for it, from the fulness of grace that is in Christ. It must be accompanied with love to God; for unless we love him we can never be grieved for his dishonour; nor truly sorry for what we have done against him. It must be accompanied with repentance: or rather, this mourning is a necessary

sary ingredient in true repentance ; and where this is, no other ingredient of it can be wanting. There can be no sincere mourning for sin without turning from it to God.—It must be accompanied with some degree of resignation to the will of God, whatever testimonies of his displeasure we labour under ; for we never can be duly sensible that we deserve eternal misery, and yet indulge ourselves in murmuring at the little sufferings of the present life. Yea, it must be accompanied with some degree of holy joy and rejoicing. However mysterious and unnatural the mixture may seem, to those who are strangers to the life of godliness,—all genuine Christians know, by experience, that it is very possible to be *sorrowful and yet always rejoicing*. A sight of the mercy of God in Christ is necessary to evangelical mourning : And no person who is duly sensible of his sin and danger without Christ,—can ever see that mercy without vehemently rejoicing in it. While the children of Zion mourn for the guilt of sin, they rejoice in Christ's atonement, and in God's promise of forgiveness. They mourn for their own vileness and pollution ; but they rejoice in the Lord who sanctifieth them. They mourn and groan under the weight of indwelling corruption, as they would under a dead carcase fixed upon their back ; but in the assured prospect of deliverance from it, they rejoice, and *thank God, through Jesus Christ their Lord*. In a word, They mourn on account of the suffering lot that is cast into their lap in this world ; but, at the same time, they *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*.

4. It must be the interest, not only of all the genuine sons of Zion, but likewise of all the sinners in Zion, to mourn, and that after a godly sort. Sin is

*

S f

necessarily

necessarily connected with sorrow : and it must produce mourning, either sooner or later. You were all born sinners: though, perhaps, some of you may laugh at the doctrine. All of you that are capable to understand what you hear, have committed much actual sin, as, I am sure, your conscience, if it is silent now, will one day testify. You all feel that you are born to misery : and this is a demonstrative proof that you are born sinners;—for a God of infinite justice cannot punish the innocent: nor can it be supposed that he, who is the Fountain of all love and beneficence, will render any of his creatures miserable without cause. You will find it easy to mourn for the miseries you suffer: indeed it is not easy to keep such mourning within proper bounds.—But it will avail you nothing to mourn for these,—unless you mourn also for the cause of them. Neither will it avail to mourn for sin as the cause of misery, unless you mourn for it, at the same time, as having debased your nature dishonoured the Author of your being, and rendered you incapable of happiness. If you either harden yourself in sin; so as not to mourn for it at all, or satisfy yourself with mourning, without turning from it,—or rest in your repentance, as if nothing else was necessary to make an atonement for it,—and finally abide in any of these dispositions;—you may be assured that everlasting mourning awaits you: yea, *weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*—But if you are enabled, by uniting with Christ the King of Zion, to enter yourselves among Zion's genuine children,—as you are all her children by external privilege and profession;—if you are determined now to mourn, in the manner that you have heard described

in much weakness,—then you may firmly hope to be delivered from all cause of mourning in a little: and brought home to that land, where *death* being *swallowed up in victory*, the Lord himself will wipe away the tears from off all faces. Let me then conclude, exhorting you, in the words of the Spirit of God, by an inspired apostle *. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: cleanse your hands, ye sinners,—and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your carnal joy into heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

* James iv. 8, 9, 10.

S E R M O N IX.

The Mourners in Zion Comforted.

ISAIAH lxi. 3.

—*To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*—

IN the words immediately preceding this text, our Lord is introduced declaring, that it is a part of his commission from the Father, *to comfort all that mourn.* And in the dispensation of the gospel, he sets open a fund of comfort, sufficient for all mourners, and suitable to the case of every one. All mourners are welcome to it, whatever be the cause of their mourning, and whatever be the manner in which they mourn.—The greatest part of the hearers of the gospel continue to reject Christ himself, and therefore can never share of that consolation that he brings. But all who join themselves to him by faith, and so become the genuine children of Zion, the mystical city in which he reigns,—are enabled to mourn in a different manner from the rest of mankind, and on a different account. This sort of mourning is a certain prelude of future comfort. For Christ, according to the commission that he still bears, will not merely *appoint* for them, but also *give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil*
of

of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

In the preceding discourse, we gave you some general exposition of the text: and observed *four* things in it, of which we proposed to speak more particularly. Of the first of them we have spoken at large: and shall study more brevity in speaking of the other three: which shall, through Divine aid, be the business of this discourse.

THE FIRST of the three is the condition in which the inhabitants of Zion often, or always are, while they continue in this world. They are covered with *ashes*,—employed in *mourning*, and under the prevailing influence of *the spirit of heaviness*. It is manifest that this is an emphatical description of a sorrowful and afflicted state. And that this is the state of the children of Zion in this world, if it needed any proof, would appear from the following considerations:

1. They are subject to all the ordinary miseries of this life, in common with other men. As they come into the world sinners,—and as the remainders of sin hang about them as long as they continue here,—God continues to testify his displeasure against it, by leaving them under subjection to all those temporal evils that are the native consequences of sin,—and even to death itself. They are, indeed, set free from the curse of God: and nothing that they suffer is the fruit of that sentence. From divine wrath they are also delivered; so that none of their afflictions are embittered with that dreadful ingredient. But the wrath and curse of God are invisible things: and therefore are not sensibly felt in this world, by those that continue under them. And no man can know who is under them,

them, or who is not, by any thing in the external course of providence: for *love and hatred are not known, by any thing that is before our eyes*. If there is any difference, in this respect,—the people of God have the largest share of outward afflictions: and hence are often tempted to envy the wicked, on account of their prosperity in this world: a memorable instance of which we have in the case of holy Asaph, as it is recorded by himself *. Nor is this inconsistent, either with the justice or goodness of God. For, though Christ has suffered all the legal punishment of their sin,—so that nothing penal can touch them;—yet they stand in need of fatherly chastisement, to reclaim them from sinful courses, and to accomplish those other gracious designs that God has in view by them. Neither are they less sensible of the miseries of life than other men.—Tho' they have earned to suffer without repining, they neither suffer without feeling nor feel without pain, more than they who complain most loudly against God. Under sickness or other bodily trouble, their constitutions are wasted: by losses and disappointments their spirits are broken: and by all the evils of life they are as deeply affected, as any of those who have all their portion in this present world, and all their attention fixed upon it.

2. They are affected, to a great depth of sorrow and mourning, by many things, which are no afflictions to the rest of mankind. Wicked men, being dead in trespasses and sins, may be sensible of outward afflictions; but in a spiritual sense, they are past feeling: and therefore spiritual diseases, though they actually lie under them, add nothing to their present sufferings. Their insensibility, indeed, renders them greater objects of sympathy; but they are as cheerful and merry,

* Psal. lxxiii.

ry, as if there were no such diseases upon them. Sin itself,—though it must issue in eternal death, unless cured by divine grace, gives them no pain. And those spiritual judgments which are manifest symptoms of the approach of that death, make no impression upon their minds. But the children of Zion, being made alive in Christ Jesus, are affected with spiritual, as well as with temporal evils. Sin is their heaviest burden: and they grieve—not for their own sin only, but for all that abounds in the world. When God hides his face they are troubled, in proportion to that gladness which they enjoy when favoured with the light of his countenance. The low state of the church, and of religion, will give pleasure to those who are still on the enemy's side; but to them who are genuine members of the church, this is a real cause of mourning. Even the divisions among church members occasion them deep thoughts of heart. Spiritual judgments they feel more severely than those of a temporal nature. And the grounds of their sharpest grief are things which others do not feel at all.

3. They are subject to many causes of mourning, that either fall not upon others, or befall them only in a small degree. They live in a foreign land while others consider themselves as at home. This world is a wilderness to them; to others it appears as a place of rest. They run, and agonize, and strain themselves, in the race that is set before them, while others sit still and are at ease. They labour, and toil, and sweat, in working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, while most others care for none of these things. They have a warfare to accomplish, in which others are not engaged: and they suffer much from enemies by whom others are not annoyed. Satan cannot be a
friend

friend to wicked men; but he conceals his enmity; while they continue under his power: as while the strong man armed keeps the house, his goods are at rest. But the moment that a person becomes a real Christian, Satan begins to ply him, both with temptations and fiery darts: nor does he desist, till the man is brought home to glory. The world cannot but love his own; and therefore wicked men do not reproach and slander, and persecute one another: but those whom Christ hath chosen out of the world, the world, of course, hateth: and the best usage that they can expect from it, is the same that it gave to their Master before them. Yea, God himself often lays upon them many causes of mourning, from which the rest of mankind are exempted. Wicked men he often suffers to prosper at their will, reserving all their punishment to another world. But *if his own children forsake his law, and keep not his commandments, he is even bound by covenant, and urged by his unchangeable love, to visit their iniquities with rods, and their sins with chastisements* *.

4. Besides all these just causes of mourning, they are often subject to groundless discouragements and down-castings, through the prevalence of temptation, and of unbelief. We know how much imagination contributes to the pleasures, as well as to the pains of life. If a man, under the influence of disease,—imagines himself subject to any evil,—though his apprehension may be so manifestly absurd, as to render him an object of ridicule to all around him,—it really makes him as miserable as if his imagination was realized. And, much as the people of God excel the rest of mankind, it must not be dissembled, that they

are

* Psa. lxxxix. 30, 31, 32.

are liable to various miseries of this kind. They are absolutely secured against falling under condemnation, —against being conquered by their spiritual enemies, against being subject to the sting of death, against being totally forsaken of God, or being left totally or finally to forsake him. None of all these can take place with regard to any of them, without a direct violation of the faithfulness of God. And yet, how many of them are all their life time subject to bondage, through fear of death? How often are they ready to say of their spiritual enemies, as David said of Saul,—*one day I shall fall by their hand?* How often are they affected, almost to distraction, with fears of divine wrath and eternal condemnation? How often are they tormented with fears lest they become a disgrace to their profession, and the name of God be blasphemed through them? I have even seen a Christian trembling in every joint, from an apprehension that he would one day be left to commit a sin, the very thought of which filled his soul with horror. How often has Zion said, *the Lord hath forsaken me,—and my God hath forgotten me?* My God, and yet forgotten me! A plain contradiction in terms! They even come the length, as Asaph did, to call in question the faithfulness and grace of God, and to say, *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for ever more? Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? Hath he, in anger, shut up his tender mercies *?*

Such speeches, it is true, are as groundless as the ravings of a lunatic. Unbelief, assisted and promoted by the suggestions of the devil,—produces the same

*

T t

effect,

* Psa. lxxvii. 7, 8, 9.

effect, in relation to spiritual things, as a crazy imagination does, with regard to the objects of sense. Indeed the enemy frequently takes occasion, when disease has perverted the imagination, to harass the soul with such fears: And I know not but sometimes persons have indulged such unbelieving fears, till their brain has been turned by that means. But, though the things of which the person is persuaded—cannot possibly be true, he is as miserable, while his persuasion continues, as if they were true indeed. And thus, as if the real evils to which we are subject were not enough, we frequently mourn for things that can have no existence, unless in our own imagination.

Such are the grounds and occasions of the Christian's mourning: and is it any wonder that he is oft seen covered with ashes, and oppressed with the spirit of heaviness? Of the four causes of mourning that have been mentioned, only the first is common to him with the rest of mankind: and troubles of that kind are the lightest that they suffer. Is it not truly said, that *if in this life only we had hope, we were of all men most miserable* * ?

II. WITH regard to that happy condition, to which these mourners shall be brought, it may be viewed as including the following things:

1. Even while the causes of their mourning continue, they are supported, encouraged, and comforted in such a manner as to afford them a happiness, superior to what others enjoy in their best times. The carnal man, when under temporal affliction, is touched in his tenderest part: and he has nothing to balance what he suffers. But the true Christian has chosen a better portion,

* 1 Cor. xv. 19.

portion, that cannot be affected by any thing that takes place in the material world. His main interests are, therefore, in perfect security: and he has an inexhaustible fund of comfort, under his heaviest sufferings. The Holy Ghost dwells in him, as a Comforter. He brings the word of God to his remembrance, in a suitableness to his condition, enables him to receive all the consolation there exhibited; and so comforts him on every side. Hence Christians, even when *in heaviness*, through manifold temptations, are enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory *. I have seen a person, whom the world neglected and despised, oppressed with poverty, and wasted with a mortal disease,—lying, destitute and solitary, in a corner of the house-top, with scarce as many rags as might cover his nakedness, and as much of the most homely food as might hang soul and body together; so that, judging by outward appearance, you could scarcely set your eyes upon a more miserable object. But the happy man,—for happy he was, even in that condition, scarcely attended to any of these ingredients of his afflicted state. His eyes were carried beyond the verge of time: and he looked at the things which are not seen and are eternal. His faith rested upon the promise of God in Christ: this he considered as an un-failing security for the possession of these unseen things in a little: and, encouraged by that hope, he expressed more true and solid joy, in his countenance, and in his conversation, than ever a wicked man was capable of, in midst of his prosperity and dissipation. He felt himself, in all these things, a conqueror, and more than a conqueror, through him that loved him, and gave himself for him: and could sing his triumph, even

T t 2

before

* 1 Pet. i. 6, 8.

before the battle was ended. To such a man, the words of Christ in the text were already accomplished. He had received *beauty* in the midst of *ashes*;—*the oil of joy* was mixed with his *mourning*: and he wore the garment of praise, while one would have expected to find him influenced solely by the spirit of heaviness. Though this is not the case with every Christian, in the degree above described, there is no rightly exercised Christian, that may not, at least, adopt the royal Psalmist's declaration, *This word of thine is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me* *.

2. They shall be completely, though gradually, delivered from all their mourning, and from all the causes of it in a little. You have found yourself, Christian, delivered out of one trouble after another—hitherto. And though you may always expect some new trouble, in the place of that from which you have been delivered,—while you continue mortal;—yet these temporary deliverances are all so many pledges of a complete and eternal deliverance at the last. Your mourning shall finally cease, and you shall be girded with everlasting gladness. Then the remembrance of your past troubles shall enhance the value of that happiness which you shall possess: and you shall feel what you have now so much difficulty to believe,—that all your afflictions were intended for your good,—to further your progress in holiness, and to *work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. A mere freedom from pain and suffering does not constitute happiness; but it is a necessary ingredient in it. And it cannot fail to animate a suffering Christian, amidst his present mourning, to be

* Psal. cxix. 50.

be assured, that all *the ransomed of the Lord*, and himself among the rest, *shall* in a very little while, *return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall eternally flee away* *.

3. They shall, at length, enjoy all that positive happiness which their natures are capable of: and thereby shall their hearts be filled with gladness, and their mouths with singing. Every appetite, both of soul and body shall be satisfied;—and not one thing shall be wanting, that they would wish to enjoy. A negative happiness,—O ye mourning sons and daughters of Zion, is not all that your Redeemer has a commission to bring you to. He will put you in full possession of the very portion that you have chosen: and so abundantly will he fill all your treasures, that you shall not be able to form a desire, that you shall not find gratified as soon as formed. To make out a complete inventory of what you shall possess—is more than all the angels in heaven can do. *Eye hath not seen it: No ear has ever heard it all: nor hath it entered into the heart of any mortal,—nay, nor of any glorified man, adequately to conceive it.* Even they who are already in possession of that inheritance, do not know its utmost extent. All that *we* can propose, is only to name a few of its ingredients, which are suggested in the text.

(1.) You shall be advanced to the dignity of kings and priests unto God. It was already observed, that the word here rendered *beauty* properly signifies that ornament of the head, which was first used by the Persian women, and afterwards by kings and priests,—particularly in the land of Israel. When Christ here

* Isa. xxxv. 10.

here speaks of giving you that ornament, he means to raise you to the dignity to which it belongs. *You shall be named the priests of the Lord; men shall call you the ministers of our God* *. Not only shall this be the case when you shall be finally brought home to glory; it is so already. The moment you were united to Christ, you became *a royal priesthood*: and your business is to serve God, in a course of holy obedience; every act of which is a *spiritual sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God thro' Jesus Christ*. As kings possess the highest dignity and authority in the nations which they respectively govern, and are themselves subject to no superior on earth; so you are set free from the dominion of all that formerly held you in subjection: you have dominion given you—over your own unruly spirits, and are heirs of a kingdom that cannot be moved. You have no superior, in spiritual things, but Christ himself: and surely you will not grudge, that, in all things he should have the preheminance. Thus you may all adopt the song of the beloved disciple; *UNTO HIM that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood: and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: To him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen* †.

(2.) You shall be arrayed with the *robe of righteousness*,—a garment every way suited to the dignity to which you are promoted. The different ranks of mankind are usually distinguished by their attire. And, in all ages, mourners have worn a garb corresponding to the state of their mind. During your mourning time, no wonder that you are covered with sackcloth and sit in ashes. But when that season is past, your Redeemer will not fail to clothe you with a robe of praise.

* See verse 6.

† Rev. i. 5, 6.

praise. What is the robe or garment intended in the text, interpreters are not agreed. Some of the most judicious, understand it of the righteousness of Christ, which is put upon every Christian, in the day of his justification. This is the best robe that your Father's house can afford. Christ has not only appointed it for you, he has already given it to you. You wear it in the presence of God now. You shall wear it before his tribunal in a little; and with it you shall be adorned, as a bride for her husband, when he shall finally present you to himself. It may be called a garment of praise,—as deserving, beyond all others, to be praised for its richness, its value, and its curious workmanship;—as affording matter of endless praise to Him who bestows it, from all them that are clothed with it;—as containing a security, that all who wear it shall eternally be employed in the work of praise;—and, as being the robe with which all the praising company shall continue to be adorned, when singing their *Hallelujas* about the throne. That this is the robe meant in the text seems evident, if we compare the words of the church, in ver. 10th, where she plainly alludes, and replies to what Christ says in this verse. *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.*

(3.) You shall be adorned with the beauty of holiness. This is the beauty that Christ will give you instead of ashes. You heard that the word properly signifies the Tiara, which was worn by the priests: and it deserves to be remarked, that upon the Tiara of the high-priest, was placed the golden crown, upon which was inscribed—**HOLINESS TO THE LORD.** As you are

to be made priests unto God, you shall be qualified for the discharge of that office, by being made holy: for without this you could never be permitted to stand, or to minister in the presence of God, who is infinitely holy. Your deficiency in holiness is a principal cause of your present mourning: and your ashes will never be put off, but in proportion as they are exchanged for this beauty. Till your holiness be made perfect, they shall never be wholly laid aside. But it shall be made perfect in a little. Your earnest desire of holiness, and your sincere grief for the remainders of unholiness about you,—are sure evidences, that your Redeemer has already begun to execute this part of his commission with regard to you. And you may well be *confident of this very thing; that he who hath begun such a good work in you, will continue to perform it, until it be finally perfected, in the day of Jesus Christ* *.

(4.) You shall be partakers of the same spiritual unction, by which Christ himself was consecrated to his office, and qualified for it. This *oil of joy*, which Christ will give unto you, is the very same with which God, even his God *hath anointed him above his fellows* †. You and your brethren, the other children of Zion, are the persons dignified with the appellation of his fellows: and his being said to be anointed *above* you, plainly imports that you also shall be anointed with the same oil, though in an inferior degree. What this oil was, the first verse of this chapter informs us. It is *the Spirit of the Lord God that is upon him, because the Lord hath anointed him, with that Holy Spirit above all measure*. Under his influence he finished all the work that the Father gave him to do in his humbled

* Phil. i. 6.

† Psal. xlv. 7.

humbled estate. By virtue of the same anointing he rose from the dead, ascended to the right hand of God, and is now in the midst of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. Now, as he is commissioned to anoint you with the same oil,—this anointing shall have the same effects upon you, according to your measure, as it had upon him. The Holy Spirit, which is already given you, shall continue to be upon you, as a spirit of joy and comfort. By him you shall be assisted in all the work that God has given you to do. By him shall you also be raised up to more and more conformity to Christ, and more and more communion with him; till you come to that place of everlasting joy and gladness, where Christ now is,—that you may be completely happy in beholding his glory, and may exchange all your present mourning for a final participation of his joy.

(5.) You shall, at last, be crowned with immortal glory, and set down upon a throne, beseeming your royal state; even the same throne—upon which Christ himself is now sitting. For thus saith your glorified Redeemer, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne* *. That ornament which is here promised to you, was worn by kings, as well as by priests; and, as you are made both kings and priests, you shall, at length, wear the crown, as well as the mitre. You shall be crowned with glory, as well as beautified with holiness. Indeed, these two are inseparably connected. God himself is glorious in holiness: and holiness shall, through all eternity, be your principal glory. The beginnings of holiness about you now, are the dawns of immortal

*

U u

glory :

* Rev. iii. 21

glory : and the full blaze of glory in heaven will be but the perfection of holiness.—Now you are but kings in minority : and are neither in full possession of the kingdom, nor formally invested with the honours that belong to it. But it shall not be long till you come of age : and the same day that you come to the stature of a perfect man in Christ, shall be the day of your solemn coronation ; when you shall, in the most full and unlimited manner, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world.*

Such is the happy change, that Christ is appointed to make, and assuredly will make, in the condition of all his followers. And surely what has now been said makes it evident, that however deeply they mourn, and however much cause of mourning they have, in consideration of what they now are,—yet none in the world have so much cause of joy as they have in the view of what they shall be. Indeed, while in this life, they are much more attentive to the causes of their mourning, than to the grounds of their joy : and therefore they are much more engaged in the mourning, than in the rejoicing exercise ; but it shall not always be so ; for,

4. They shall, at last, be fully sensible of all the happiness of their condition, and shall express their sense of it in songs of eternal praise. The garment, Christian, that you wear, is the garment of praise : and this robe on your back is a sure pledge, that praise shall be your everlasting employment. Here your spiritual joy is, by far too little exercised. The objects and grounds of your joy, are things not seen : and because you see them not, you will not believe that which is told you concerning them ;—even though it is confirmed by the infallible testimony of God that
cannot

cannot lie. But it shall not be long when your unbelief will be totally rooted out, and you shall not have it in your power to doubt of the truth of any thing that is now spoken to you of the Lord. What is now the object of faith will then be the object of sense and feeling: and there shall not be an ingredient of your happy state, of which you will not be fully apprized. Then your joy shall exactly correspond to the grounds of it: and it will be without any mixture or alloy.— Even here, the little joy that your heart feels, you are disposed to express with your mouth, in songs of praise to God. And when you come to possess your inheritance, your joy shall correspond to your possession, and your praises to both. You will then sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, without a jar in the concert; though you shall be joined in it by all the nations of them that are saved. You shall sing the praises of redeeming love without interruption, without weariness, without disturbance, or distraction, and without ever exhausting the subject, world without end.

Amen.

III. I COME now to speak a little of the manner in which this happy change is brought about. Upon this I mean not to insist. Only, it will be proper that you observe with me the following things:

Nothing of a saving nature is bestowed upon any of Zion's children, but in consequence of a judicial sentence past in their favour, declaring their interest in it, and adjudging them to the possession of it. Among men, it is not usual to inflict punishment, unless where tyranny and despotism prevail, till the criminal has first been tried and condemned by a court of justice. But, in the distribution of favours, no prince is tied to

such a form. He bestows of his royal bounty upon whom he will, without waiting for the decision of any court, to ascertain the person's title to it. In the kingdom of Christ it is otherwise. None of the benefits of his purchase are bestowed upon any, till a sentence of the court of heaven has declared their title to it good and valid in law. One reason of this is,—that we are all, by nature, under a sentence of that court, adjudging us to death and misery. That sentence cannot be reversed, but by the same authority that enacted it; and till it be reversed, we can enjoy no benefit connected with eternal life. But he who has all these blessings to bestow, is the same to whom all judgment is committed. And he who gave him a commission to give beauty for ashes, and to bestow all spiritual blessings upon the mourners in Zion, has likewise invested him with authority to appoint all those blessings for them. He first appoints all for them, by the sentence of their justification, and then gives all to them, in agreeableness to that sentence.

That the passing of this sentence is a part of the business of Christ's kingly office, is manifest. For, although none can forgive sins but God only; yet Christ, being a divine person, had *power*, even when he was *on earth, to forgive sins*. Yea, as this is plainly an act of judgment, it must belong to him; for *the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son* *. It is one principal end, for which *God has exalted him a Prince and a Saviour*, that he might not only *give repentance to Israel*, but also *the forgiveness of sins* †. It is true, there is some difference between the forgiveness of our sins, and the judicial declaration of our title to spiritual benefits; but the two are inseparable,

* John v. 22

† Acts v. 31.

parable,—being only different parts of one and the same sentence. Justification, according to the doctrine of our excellent standards, consists of two parts. By the one our sins are forgiven, and by the other we are accepted as righteous in the sight of God. And the last of these includes our being adjudged to the final possession of all that Christ purchased, when he fulfilled that righteousness, which is imputed to us as the ground of our justification. And, as the two parts of this sentence are inseparable, the same illustrious person who grants the forgiveness of our sin, must also declare and establish our title to all that he will finally bestow.

The execution of this sentence, as well as the passing of it, is the work of Christ. And he begins to execute it the moment that it is past. Indeed his authority to pass such a sentence could avail but little, if, along with the judicial authority, God had not given him the power of execution. When he paid our ransom, in his own precious blood,—it was accepted of God, not only as the full payment of all our criminal debt, but likewise as the price of all that happiness which we shall enjoy, either in time or through eternity. When God raised up Christ from the dead and gave him glory, he delivered into his hand all the benefits that he purchased: to be dispensed by him, as the trustee of the covenant of grace, to all them for whom they were purchased. Thus it was, that when he ascended on high, he received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also,—that God the Lord might dwell among them. And surely, when we know that he gave his own life to purchase these benefits for us, we can have no reason to doubt his willingness—freely
and

and fully to bestow them all upon us, according to his Father's commission.

We may, therefore, assuredly conclude, that whatever is appointed for any of Zion's mourners, by that sentence which Christ hath past in their behalf, will be finally bestowed upon them, without dimunition or embezzlement. Yes, believer, all that is contained in the promise in this text,—and all that is comprehended in all the promises of the covenant of grace is appointed for you by an irreverfible decree of your King. His own hand is to fulfil what his decree has appointed: and he will not defist, till he have communicated to you all that fulness, which the Father hath been pleased to make to dwell in him. It must be communicated gradually: and while you continue in this world, you must content yourself with such a measure of it as your situation and capacity will admit of. But, as there is no authority that can reverse his appointment, nor any power that can hinder him to execute it,—you can have no reason to fear but it shall be completely executed, in due time. It was for men,—even for such rebellious men as you and I, that he received these gifts: and he is faithful in all his Father's house. He had not more pleasure in receiving them, than he has in giving them to you. It would prove a disappointment of his design in purchasing them, and of God's design in lodging them in his hands,—an abatement of that satisfaction which he shall have, in seeing the travel of his soul,—and a counteracting of the unchangeable counsels of his Father's will,—if the weakest or most disconsolate of Zion's mourners should come short of the smallest article of what he has appointed for them.

IV. WE are now to conclude with some Improvement of the subject. And we shall only detain you, till we lay before you the following inferences from what has been said.

1. The enemies of religion have no reason to be prejudiced against it, on account of the afflicted lot of its professors,—or of any morosity and dullness, which they consider as connected with it. If Christians are really dull or morose, it is their mistake: none have such reason to be cheerful as they have, amidst all their mourning. But if what you call dullness and morosity is only the effect of that mourning by which they are distinguished from the rest of the world,—instead of standing at a distance from religion on that account, it furnishes a good reason why you should choose and embrace it. This mourning is connected with everlasting joy: as the mirth and joy in which you take pleasure, are connected with never ending sorrow. Now, the choice lies not between your prosperous and merry state, and the mourning lot of the Christian in this world, merely; but between these two in their respective connections. Whether then would you choose to mourn in ashes for a few days, or call it years,—and then to change your mourning for immortal joy, and your ashes for an unfading crown;—or would you rather dance and carouse, and revel and prosper at your will, the short time you continue here, and then enter upon an eternity of wailing and gnashing of teeth? Surely, though you are so foolish as practically to choose the last, you cannot have the effrontery to avow your choice.

2. On the other hand, the people of God have no reason to be envious, or to grudge, on account of the prosperity of the wicked, or the success that they are permitted

permitted to have, in their sinful courses. They may increase in worldly things, in wealth and riches, till they have more than heart could wish;—while you, Christian, are plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning. But consider that their table, through the curse of God upon them, is a snare, and their prosperity a trap to take them; while your light and momentary afflictions work for you a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory. Snares, and fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest—belong to them, as the portion of their cup; but God himself is the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. Their mourning shall begin, when the days of your mourning shall be ended. And the spirit of heaviness shall eternally possess them, with much better reason than ever it prevailed in you,—when you shall be adorned with the crown of a royal priesthood, and adorned with the garment of praise. Beware, then, of charging God with folly, or speaking, to the offence of the generation of his children, as if there were, in the Highest, no knowledge of things below. Go, with holy Asaph, into the sanctuary, and there you shall see their end. God has set them on a slippery place; and unless he gives them grace to repent, he will suddenly cast them down, into irretrievable destruction.

3. See why it is that Christians are so unlike themselves: or so different, in respect of their frame and exercise, at one time, from what they are at another. Christ, according to his commission, has appointed them beauty for ashes,—and all the good things of his covenant, in exchange for all the evils of their natural estate: And he has begun to execute the appointment; but it is executed only in part,—and the rest must be accomplished by degrees. The oil of joy has
been

been poured out upon them, and they wear the garment of praise; but still they are subject to mourning, under the prevailing influence of the spirit of heaviness. Now, sometimes that part discovers itself, and prevails in their exercise, which Christ has renewed and changed,—and sometimes that which remains in its original state. And there are no two things in nature so unlike to one another, as the child of God is to himself, according as grace or corruption prevails.

4. Hence also it is manifest, how true the apostle's declaration is, that *it doth not yet appear what we shall be*. If there is so much difference between what you are when corruption prevails, and what you are when grace is in exercise,—how immense must be the difference between what you are during the struggle between grace and corruption, and what you shall be, when corruption shall be totally abolished, and grace itself shall be swallowed up in glory. From your present appearance no idea can be formed of what you shall be, when the days of your mourning shall be finally ended; and you shall be made glad, as Christ now is, with God's countenance. We need not speak of the difference between the blossom and the ripened fruit,—between the tree in the seed and the tree at its full growth,—between an infant and a man of full stature. These are fit emblems of the difference between the gracious principle in you now, and what it will become in another world: for all these differences are only gradual, and the things compared—are the same in kind. But here there is neither proportion nor resemblance; but a diametrical opposition between what you are, in your present complex state, and what you shall be hereafter. A covering of ashes is not more unlike to a crown of gold.—When you see

the face of the earth, during the winter, bound with frost, and covered with snow,—you can, from thence, form no judgment of what it will be when warmed by an autumnal sun, and covered with a golden harvest. The darkness of midnight is very unlike the clear shining of the sun at noon day. Not less unlike is the Christian now, to what he will be hereafter. Scarcely is hell itself more unlike to heaven. Now he mourns in sackcloth and ashes, oppressed with poverty, loaded with affliction, groaning under a body of sin and death,—and, in consequence of all this, under the daily and almost constant influence of the spirit of heaviness: but then he shall be completely beautified with God's salvation, anointed with the oil of gladness among his fellows,—and clothed with the garment of unceasing praise. Look not upon us, ye men of the world, because we are black, because the sun of adversity hath looked upon us: nor judge of our future hopes, by what you now see us to be. *It doth not yet appear what we shall be,*—neither to you nor to ourselves. But this *we know,*—and it is all that we wish to know for the time,—*that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is* *.

5. See what ample security the Christian has for the final enjoyment of all that is here promised,—and, indeed, of all that Christ has purchased, and all that is contained in that well ordered covenant, which the Father made with him from eternity. When that covenant was made, the oath of God was interposed, for the fulfilment of all its contents. The obedience and death of Christ, by which the condition of the covenant was fulfilled, contain an additional security for the accomplishment of all its promises. Now all these

* 1 John iii. 2.

these promises are in him *yea and amen*. In view of that decease which he has accomplished, he has bequeathed to you all that his Father originally promised to him: and his Testament is legally confirmed by his death. As if all this had not been enough, he has, by a judicial sentence, declared you entitled to all, and appointed you to be put in full possession of all in due time. To all these forms of security he has set his seal, not only in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper; but likewise by giving you the Holy Spirit of promise. And will you entertain doubts and fears after all? What could have been done more, to encourage and confirm your faith? And how dare unbelief itself presume to question the sufficiency of all these securities united?

6. See in what manner Christians ought to be exercised, on all occasions. You will have causes of mourning, while you continue in this world; but see that your sorrow be always of a godly sort. Mourn especially for Christ, as pierced by your sin. Mourn for the dishonour that your sin has done to God, as well as for the miseries that it brings upon yourself.—But indulge not yourself in any such mourning as includes fretfulness, or repining against any of God's dispensations: even mournful providences shall, in a little, prove causes of joy. Beware of all such mourning as proceeds from unbelief, or mistrust of the promise of God: he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Let nothing induce you to mourn as they that have no hope; but always rejoice amidst your trembling and sorrow: rejoice in the Lord, and let your spirit be glad in God your Saviour. Rejoice in Christ Jesus, while you see that you can have no confidence in the flesh. Rejoice

in the promises of God, while you mourn under the present testimonies of his just displeasure. In a word, rejoice evermore, in consideration that Christ, according to his Father's commission, has already appointed your mourning to be turned into dancing, your sackcloth to be loosed, and you to be girded with gladness: and in the sure prospect that he will come, in a very little while, to execute his own appointment,—by actually giving you *beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*

7. To conclude: You may see here abundant encouragement to sinners of all denominations, to come to Christ by faith, and so to enter themselves among the children of Zion, over whom he reigns, notwithstanding all the mourning that falls to their lot in this world. It would be very foolish to pretend to become followers of Christ, without counting the cost: but I am afraid there are many who are discouraged, and frightened away from the good ways of the Lord, by beginning to count the cost, and stopping short before they have cast up the account. They hear of ashes and mourning, and a spirit of heaviness,—but they forget the beauty, the oil of joy, and the garment of praise. They see that if they will be Christians indeed, they must lay their account with a life of trouble and sorrow, of mortification and contempt; but their views are confined to the present world: and while they hope, by continuing in sin, to avoid temporal sufferings,—they neither attend to the dismal prospect, that sinners have before them, in another world,—nor to the happy change, that Christ shall make, in the condition of his own people. But if you make a proper estimate, taking both worlds into the account,

account, you will find an infinite balance in favours of Christianity. If you were to die like a beast, and have no future existence,—or if you could live always in this world, and never see death,—then it would, undoubtedly, be your wisdom to stand at the greatest distance from Christ and religion. But die you must, and that in a very short time; probably much shorter than you are now dreaming of. And, after death, you must enter upon an estate of unchangeable happiness, or of misery that shall never end. If you will take offence at the cross of Christ, and continue in sin, with a view to avoid suffering—God may permit you to have success for a time; but dreadful are the sufferings, to which you must be exposed, when your prosperity is at an end. Your dwelling must be in *Tophet*, which God hath *ordained of old*,—and hath *prepared for the king*, as well as for sinners of inferior stations: *the pile whereof is fire and much wood*, while *the breath of Almighty God, like a stream of burning brimstone doth kindle it*. Your company shall be devils and damned men, eternally howling around you, and eternally tormenting you and one another. Your incessant employment shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth,—cursing God and yourselves, reflecting, with horror, upon those precious opportunities which you now enjoy, but which will then be irretrievably lost,—and looking forward, with still greater horror, into the dreadful abyss of eternity to come,—which shall not admit the least gleam of hope, that ever your misery shall either be ended or abated.—At an eternity of such misery, humanity may shudder; let this excite you to flee from it, but not to doubt of its reality; for a God of infinite justice and faithfulness has assured

assured us that such shall be the final lot of all his enemies.

But, in the way of taking up your cross and following Christ, you have the fullest assurance, that your weeping shall endure but for a night, and shall be succeeded by an eternity of joy, as soon as the morning ariseth. You may—we need not flatter,—you shall have a suffering lot, while here; but the Spirit of Christ himself shall be your Comforter. The gracious presence of God with you, and the light of his countenance shining on you,—shall make you more glad than the men of the world can be, in their best estate. And when death comes, the days of your mourning shall be ended: Christ himself will wipe away all tears from your eyes: your ashes shall be changed for a glorious crown,—your mourning for the oil of joy, the spirit of heaviness for the garment of uninterrupted and everlasting praise.—After all, you may have your choice. If you will be so foolish, as finally to choose everlasting burnings, for the sake of a few days of imaginary pleasure and happiness,—God will, one day, take you at your word, and confirm your choice for eternity. But, oh! for the sake of these immortal souls of yours, retract, while you are allowed to retract. God makes you more welcome to choose life than death: and the moment you make that choice, which is for your own advantage, he will put it beyond your power to change again. Whatever be your resolution, I trust, there are not a few present, who, after thoroughly weighing both sides, are firmly and unalterably resolved to imitate Moses, in *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*: and therefore saying, with Jobabua, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

S E R M O N X.

God's Great Design in Men's Salvation.

EPH. ii. 7.

That in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.*

GOD, who is infinitely wise, can do nothing in vain. The ends that he has in view—are always worthy of the means he employs,—and worthy of himself. His own glory is the general end of all that he does: but, in every one of his works, he has a peculiar eye to the glory of one or other of the perfections of his adorable nature. Thus his almighty power was displayed in the work of creation: his unsearchable wisdom shines in the works of providence: and the great design of the glorious work of redemption, is the manifestation of his rich and sovereign grace. Of all that he does for his people now, as well as of what he did for the believing Ephesians, and for all their brethren in the primitive times, it is the uniform and unvaried intention, *that in the ages to come,*
he

* What follows from this text is the substance of two discourses, and is published at the desire of several of the hearers. But, as they were not fully written out before delivery, as the author could have wished, owing to a particular interposition of Providence,—he is constrained to satisfy himself with the following abridgement of them.

he may *shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.*

That we may have a proper view of the scope and connection of this passage, it will be necessary to look back to the close of the preceding chapter. Having prayed to God for the saving illumination of his Ephesians, in the knowledge of Christ, ver. 17. Our apostle, in the two next verses, mentions three blessed effects that would follow upon such illumination. They would know, 1st, *What is the hope of God's calling;* 2dly, *What is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;* and, 3dly, *What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us ward who believe.*

Concerning this last, he asserts, that the manifestation and exertion of divine power in believers—corresponds to that display of it which was made in Christ himself, when God raised him from the dead, and exalted him to sit at his own right hand, in the highest heavens. But, having mentioned Christ, he finds it difficult to leave the pleasing theme: and therefore makes a digression in commendation of him, in the three last verses of the chapter. Indeed, it has been observed, that whatever subject he is treating upon, this apostle was so much filled with the love of Christ, that whenever he mentions his name, he dwells with peculiar satisfaction upon that subject, losing sight, for some time, of any other; so that, by this means, the strict connection of his reasoning is frequently obscured, and sometimes would seem to be lost. Any man—for whom Christ has done as much as he did for the Apostle Paul—would be unworthy of the name of a Christian, if he were not affected, even to raptures, upon every remembrance of him, or of his love.

In the beginning of the chapter, he returns to his subject:

subject: and shews that the power of God exerted upon believers, corresponds to what took place in the resurrection of Christ: in regard that he raises them from spiritual death, as he raised his dead body from the literal grave. This he asserts and proves, with regard to Gentile believers, verse 1st and 2d, and then with regard to Jewish converts, among whom he includes himself, verses 3d, 4th, and 5th. And his reasoning, with respect to both, is conclusive: For, if the human soul is a more noble substance than the body, if the creation of a rational soul is a more noble effort of divine power than the creation of a material body, as all must allow,—and if our souls are as really dead in trespasses and sins, while we continue in a natural estate, as the body of Christ was, when it lay in the tomb of Joseph,—then it necessarily follows, that the raising, or quickening of our dead souls requires an exertion of almighty power, equal to that which raised up Christ from the dead.

In the verse immediately preceding our text, he proceeds to prove the second part of his assertion; *viz.* That the same irresistible power works in us, in a manner corresponding to what was done in God's exalting Christ, and setting him at his own right hand, in heavenly places. This is plainly the case,—in regard that all whom God quickens, he raises up, together, and makes them to sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. The raising up here mentioned differs from the quickening insisted upon in the preceding verses, in the same manner as Christ's exaltation differs from his resurrection. Thus Christians are not only raised from the dead as Christ was, but, like him, they are likewise exalted, and made to sit, together

with him, and with one another, in those same *heavenly places*, where he sits at the right hand of God.

There are three different senses, in which these words are understood by different interpreters.

Some understand them of Christ's having been exalted, and sitting in heaven, as our representative. A man is legally possess of an inheritance, when his attorney takes in feoffment in his name. A minor is the true proprietor of his father's estate, as soon as his guardian takes possession of it in his behalf. And every British freeholder may be said, virtually to sit in Parliament, when his representative sits there, and acts in his name. In like manner, all Christians may be said virtually to sit in heaven, even while they sojourn on earth; because Christ sits there, in the public character of their Head and representative. We are even legally invested with the rich and glorious inheritance of the saints, inasmuch as Christ, our spiritual Guardian, is in full possession of it. This is a comfortable truth; but I much doubt if the apostle had this in his eye, as the sense of the expression. The same act of divine power, that exalted Christ himself to God's right hand, made us to sit there virtually in him. But Paul here speaks of a different, though similar act of power exerted upon Christians themselves.

Others consider the words as referring to our actual exaltation, to sit with Christ on his throne; after the resurrection and general judgment. And though the expression is in the past time, they think it spoken in the style of prophecy, to intimate the certainty of the event. Indeed, this happiness every Christian may assuredly hope for. This event will contain a display of divine power in us, similar to that by which Christ was exalted. And never till this take place, will the
power

power of God work in us, in exact conformity to what he wrought in Christ. Yet neither can I think that this was immediately intended by the apostle; in regard, that, in this whole passage, he speaks of what God has already done for all Christians. The quickening mentioned in the preceding verses every believer is already made partaker of. And so he is of that raising up, and sitting together in Christ, which is spoken of in this.

I must therefore think, with a third class of expositors, that the words refer to that conformity to the image of an exalted Redeemer, which, by the power of divine grace, is produced about every Christian. A parallel passage you have, in the epistle to the Romans *. *If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.—If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.—For, in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.* Now all Christians may be said to be raised up to sit with Christ in heavenly places, in regard that—they all, by faith, enter into the same rest into which Christ is actually entered in heaven: and, as faith is *the substance of things hoped for*, they now enjoy an anticipation of that happiness which they shall hereafter possess, when actually set down with him on his throne.—They all have their treasure in heaven: and there, of consequence, their heart is also. There all their desires center. There all their meditations settle. Thither all their hopes aspire. To *mind earthly things* is the characteristic of carnal and earthly men; but they that are Christ's mind the things that are above, where Christ is, at the right hand of God.

Y y 2

And

* Rom. vi. 5, 8, 10.

And, as their heart, so their *conversation is in heaven*. They enjoy a burgesſhip in the New Jeruſalem above. They maintain a ſpiritual trade with that far country. They diſtinguiſh themſelves from the men of the world, among whom they live, by a holy heavenly walk and converſation. All this is the effect of the ſupernatural working of the Holy Ghoſt, and requires the ſame almighty power, that exalted Chriſt, and ſet him at God's right hand, in heavenly places.

IN my text, the inſpired apoſtle ſets before us the great end, that God had in view, in all thoſe exertions of divine power, which he had made in behalf of theſe primitive believers, whether Jews or Gentiles: both in quickening them, and in raiſing them up to fit together in heavenly places. And, as we may be aſſured that he has the ſame end ſtill in view; ſo, in the proſecution of it he does the ſame things for us, in theſe latter days, that he did for them: and we cannot be workers together with him, as we ought, unleſs it is likewiſe our deſign and deſire, *that, in the ages to come, may be ſhewed the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindneſs towards us through Chriſt Jeſus.*

All that we propoſe, in diſcourſing from theſe words, is only—to explain,—and then to apply them.

In order to explain them, we ſhall not make any critical diviſion of the matter contained in them; but ſhall expreſs what we think neceſſary for this purpoſe, in a few doctrinal propoſitions, which we conſider as contained in the text, or founded on it.

Prop. I. God, who quickens dead finners, is a God of grace. The word grace has various ſignifications: to enumerate which at preſent, would be to little purpoſe.

pose. Considered as a divine attribute—it is that perfection of the nature of God, by which he is disposed to shew kindness to his creatures freely, without any respect to merit on their part: Or, it is God's infinite beneficence, considered as terminating upon those who deserve it not. It differs not, materially, from his goodness, or his mercy. But all these differ from one another in respect of their objects. The *Lord is good to all* indiscriminately. And every favour conferred upon every creature, in whatever circumstances, proceeds from his goodness or bounty. Mercy respects its object as miserable: And nothing can be called mercy that does not tend to relieve from misery, or to prevent it. In like manner, nothing can be called grace, that is not bestowed freely; and the moment that any person has a claim of merit to what he receives, it ceases to be matter of grace. A person may be an object of grace and of mercy at the same time; because the undeserving may be miserable. No person, under the government of a holy and just God, can stand in need of mercy, till he is likewise an object of grace; because none can be subjected to misery, till he become undeserving, and even guilty. But one may be an object of grace, who is not an object of mercy; because one may be incapable of meriting good at the hand of God, who yet has deserved no evil. Thus the grace of God was manifested towards Adam in his innocent estate: it is manifested towards elect angels: and it will terminate upon the redeemed from among men, after all their troubles and miseries are at an end. Indeed, every benefit conferred by God upon any creature, must come in the way of grace; for it is impossible for any creature, properly speaking, to merit any thing from his hand.

That

That grace is an attribute essential to God, it would be superfluous to prove. Every person must acknowledge it, who believes that there is a God. It is asserted in numberless passages of scripture. It was an article of that name of God, which himself proclaimed before Moses * ; *The LORD, the LORD merciful and gracious* : It is enumerated among the divine perfections, by the Psalmist † ; *The Lord is merciful and gracious* : and by the prophet Joel ‡, *Turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful ; slow to anger and of great kindness ; and repenteth him of the evil*. The course of providence demonstrates it : even the most eminent saints are convinced, as was Jacob, that they are less than the least of all God's mercies ; and yet he not only loads *them* daily with his benefits,—but likewise extends his goodness *to the unthankful and to the evil*. The term *grace*, indeed, is frequently appropriated to benefits of a saving nature : but from the explication now given of the word, it must appear manifest to every one, that all the benefits of common providence must come, to saints and sinners, in a way of sovereign and free grace.

Prop. II. All the kindness that God shews to his people, from the moment of their being quickened, in their regeneration, till the consummation of their happiness, in their being actually set down with Christ in heavenly places, is wholly the fruit of unmerited grace. If the covenant of works had stood, all that mankind enjoyed—would have been matter of grace in one respect : inasmuch as it was an act of grace for God to enter into covenant with his own creature,—to promise him infinite and eternal happiness—on account of a finite and temporary obedience,—and to
make

* Exod. xxxiv. 6.

† Psal. ciii. 8.

‡ Joel ii. 13.

make that obedience meritorious by paction—which was not so in itself. But, in another respect, all would have been matter of debt,—and they would have owed it to their own merit, as well as to the goodness of God. Adam's obedience being the proper condition of the covenant, though not equal in value to the life promised,—he might have claimed that life for himself and his posterity, as a pactional debt, as soon as the stipulated obedience had been complete.

But, according to the new covenant, all that we receive from God, whether in time or through eternity, is of mere grace: and no place is left for creature merit, of any kind. No qualifications, either natural or acquired, can recommend us to God's favour: no disqualifications can exclude us. No respect is had to any works that we perform before conversion; because, they are incapable of acceptance with God, as proceeding from a corrupt principle: and, in this respect, no regard can be had to what we do after conversion; because, if it is acceptable, it is not we that do it, but the grace of God that is with us.—God forbid that we should exclude holiness, or evangelical obedience, from the plan of the covenant of grace: but in such obedience, all merit is expressly excluded. Holiness is not the ground upon which we are to expect salvation; but the fruit of begun salvation in us. And this holiness, as well as every thing else connected with salvation, is bestowed upon us freely and graciously, *without money and without price.*

Prop. III. In God's gracious dealings with his people, even in this world, there is a peculiar display of love and *kindness*. A man may be gracious, or bountiful, when he cannot be denominated kind. A prince may bestow of his bounty upon a beggar, who, instead

instead of deserving it, perhaps deserves capital punishment for his crimes. But to such an one he cannot be said to be kind, while he keeps him at such a distance as the difference of their stations and circumstances warrants. Kindness includes a degree of intimacy and familiarity, that cannot subsist where one considers the object of his bounty, and treats him as far below himself. God's kindness to his people is not accompanied with that supercilious haughtiness which often appears among men. He admits his people into a holy familiarity with himself. He calls them his friends, and condescends to treat them accordingly. While he relieves and enriches them by his bounty, he likewise receives them into his favour, admits them into his presence, speaks familiarly to them, and allows them to use holy confidence and boldness in pouring out their hearts before him. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him,—and he will shew them his covenant* *.

Prop. IV. That divine grace should be glorified, by being exercised towards us, and so manifested and displayed in the clearest manner, in the sight of the whole rational world,—is the great end that God has in view, in all that he does for sinners of mankind, through Jesus Christ. It was in prosecution of this design, of manifesting the riches of his grace in our salvation, that he entered into a covenant with his eternal Son, before the foundation of the world: and hence that covenant is, with much propriety, called the covenant of grace. This was the end that he had in view in our election; for he *predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace* †. This end he still keeps in
view

* Psal. xxv. 14.

† Eph. i. 5, 6.

view, in bestowing upon us the glorious inheritance to which we are predestinated, and in all the steps that he takes, towards putting us in possession of it; for, in Christ *we have obtained an inheritance—that we should be to the praise of his glory* *. This is the great end of all God's administrations in the Church on earth. Even in that legal dispensation which obtained in the Jewish church, and which the Spirit of God calls *the ministration of death*, this end was kept uniformly in view: for it was never intended that life and happiness should be procured by ceremonial observances, but that, by these, men should be directed to seek and expect it, in a way of sovereign grace, through Christ. And in the New Testament dispensation, this end is so fully and clearly kept in view, that he who runs may read it in every divine institution, and in every page of gospel revelation. Even in the triumphant state of the Church, the same great design will be carried on. And the substance of that everlasting shout, which will be raised among the redeemed, in praise of HIM who built the Church, and brought forth the head-stone to be put upon it, will be *grace, grace unto it* †. *The law entered*, that a discovery might be made of the abounding of sin,—and that it might appear to all men, that *where sin hath abounded, grace did much more abound* ‡. And now the gospel is spread among all nations, that to the Gentiles also might be known the exceeding riches of divine grace. There is no perfection of the divine nature, that does not shine more clearly in the redemption of mankind, than in any other of the works of God. But, even in this great work, none of them shines with such transcendent lustre as this. Grace reigns in all that are

*

Z z

saved,

* Eph. i. 11, 12.

† Zech. iv. 7.

‡ Rom. v. 20, 21.

saved,—it reigns and triumphs over [all opposition,—it even reigns as a queen among all the other perfections of God : it reigns, and ever shall *reign; through imputed righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Prop. V. In that distinguishing kindness, which God shews to sinners of mankind through Jesus Christ, there is not only a display of grace in general ; but there appears *the exceeding riches of grace.* Considered as a divine perfection, grace must contain inexhaustible riches. He is necessarily and unchangeably infinite in every perfection. Justly is he said to be great in power, unsearchable in wisdom, glorious in holiness, and rich in mercy ; and it is impossible but he must likewise be infinitely rich in grace.—And if we consider the manifestation of this attribute in our salvation, we shall find it corresponding to the infinitude of it, as it exists in the divine nature. This will appear, if we fix our attention a little upon the following things :

I. The innumerable multitude of those objects, to whom this grace is extended. The followers of Christ, in every particular age, and perhaps in every place, are but a *a little flock*, in comparison of the world that lieth in wickedness. And when they shall all be gathered to the right hand of Christ, at his second coming, we know they will be but a remnant, in comparison of those who will be found at his left hand.—Even they who are externally called are few, compared with those who never heard the fame of Christ, nor saw his glory. And, by the lips of Truth we are assured, that of those who are called, *few are chosen.* But, when all they who are chosen shall be gathered together, they will amount to a *great congregation.* In
the

the New Jerusalem there shall be *the NATIONS of them that are saved*.—They appeared in vision to the Apostle John, *a great multitude whom no man could number* *. And as every individual in that multitude shall be an everlasting monument, raised to the honour of divine grace, the riches of the glory of this perfection must correspond to the number of those who shall be saved by it.

2. The multitude and the greatness of those obstacles that divine grace must remove or surmount, in bringing us to salvation. Our sin stood, as an insurmountable bar, in the way of our being saved; but, *where sin has abounded, grace doth much more abound*. It triumphs in saving the chief of sinners. Those spiritual enemies, that hold us in bondage, while in an unregenerate state,—exert all their power, and all their policy, to prevent our being saved: but the riches of this grace exceeds all their influence,—and they are finally defeated. We ourselves, being enemies to this, as well as to every other divine perfection, by nature,—make all possible resistance to it; but grace powerfully overcomes all our resistance, and effectually subdues us to itself. Even the justice of God seemed to stand, as an immovable rock, in the way of the egress of this grace to us. But this mountain also becomes a plain: and grace reigns, in a full consistency with all the honour, and with all the claims of justice. In a word, every obstacle that stands in the way of our being saved by grace, shall serve as a trophy, to perpetuate the remembrance of the victory,—to adorn the reign,—and eternally to magnify the honour and the riches of free and sovereign grace.

Z z 2

3. The

* Rev. vii. 9.

3. The channel through which it vents. The blessings of grace, that are bestowed upon us, both in this world and in that which is to come, were all purchased by the same invaluable ransom, by which our souls were redeemed from sin and wrath,—even the precious blood of Christ. As Christ is an infinite person, the value of his blood and righteousness must needs be infinite. And so also must be the value of those blessings which divine grace bestows upon us: for it does not consist, either with the wisdom or the justice of God, that a price should be paid for these blessings, that was more than adequate to their value. As riches and honour are with Christ, even durable riches and righteousness, proportionable must be the riches of divine grace; manifested in the kindness of God to us through him.

4. The riches of divine grace appears—in the number and variety of those benefits which it bestows upon every believer in Christ. Here such a large field opens before us, that it is impossible for us to travel through it. God's wonderful works, and his gracious thoughts towards us, cannot be reckoned up in order. Even Christ himself is represented as acknowledging, that *if he would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered* *. By grace we are regenerated and effectually called. By grace we are justified from all that, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses: our sins are pardoned, however many, and however great, our persons are accepted as righteous in the sight of God, and we obtain a place among his friends and children. By grace we are sanctified and cleansed, by the washing of water through the Word; and by the same grace shall we
all

* Psa. xl. 5.

all be presented together, in the presence of God and the Lamb, a glorious Church, not having spot nor blemish nor any such thing. We are protected from all danger, guided in every step of our way, strengthened and assisted in every duty, preserved from every snare, supported under every trial, made conquerors and more—over every enemy, and furnished with all that is necessary, and all that is convenient for us. We are provided with a competency of the good things of the present life, carried safely through death itself, and at last put in full and personal possession of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—Who is able to compute the value of that inheritance, which the grace of God will finally bestow upon every genuine Christian? And how can any created understanding estimate the riches, the exceeding riches of that grace, by which all is bestowed?

5. In a word, it appears in the eternity of its duration. The mercy of God endureth for ever: his grace faileth never. It cannot fail, if we view it as a divine perfection. Being nothing different from God himself, his grace must be as unchangeable and eternal as he is. Equally eternal and unchangeable will be its egress towards us. It is a fountain that can never run dry: a treasure so rich, that it never can be exhausted. No gift that divine grace bestows shall ever be withdrawn; for *the gifts and callings of the God of grace are without repentance*. If we are once justified, we shall never be condemned: if once adopted, we shall never be disinherited. If once we are completely sanctified, we shall be liable to no more defilement: if admitted into the house of God, we shall go no more out: and if our spiritual diseases are once healed, we shall never be subject to a relapse; for the inhabitants of that land, in
which

which our inheritance lies—shall never say, I am sick. The same may be said of every saving benefit that divine grace bestows upon us in this world.—Not only will God continue to give grace, until he give glory. Glory itself is the gift of grace. To grace we shall eternally be indebted, for the continuance of glory; and for such an increase of it as will correspond to our capacities, which will be continually enlarged, by continual exercise, and by continual enjoyment. Hence the shout of *grace, grace*—will eternally be raised, not merely on account of what was done in time, while the house of God was in building; but likewise on account of what will continue to be done, after the head-stone is put upon it: For even in the world to come will God persist in manifesting *the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.*

Prop. VI. The riches of God's grace can only be manifested, in a way of saving kindness to sinners of lost mankind, *through Jesus Christ.* The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God, by reason thereof, being so great, that we can have no comfortable intercourse with him, without a Mediator,—and there being no person, in heaven or in earth, appointed to that work, or fit for it, but Christ only; it is utterly impossible, that divine grace can ever shed upon us its blefsful and salutary fruits, in any other way but *through him.* Out of Christ, our God is a consuming fire: and, though he may exercise his grace to strangers to Christ, in any way that is consistent with their becoming an eternal prey to his inexorable justice; yet it is impossible for him to bestow any thing that is necessarily connected with salvation, in any other channel. All must come through him: and that in a twofold respect.

1. It must come through the merit of his atoning blood, and all-perfect righteousness. The God with whom we have to do, is a God of strict and impartial justice, as well as a God of rich and free grace: nor can he glorify one perfection at the expence of dishonouring another. His justice has claims upon all sinners, so extensive that no mere creature can satisfy: but satisfied they must be, before divine grace can have any saving egress towards us. Christ, having taken upon him our place in law, has satisfied justice, in our stead, by his obedience unto death. That righteousness which he so wrought out, being freely offered to all that hear the gospel, is judicially imputed to every Christian, in the moment of his receiving it by Faith. And on that footing alone it is, that he shares, in all time coming, in the exceeding riches of God's grace.

2. All the fruits of this grace, that Christians enjoy, either in time or through eternity, must come through the hands of Christ. When he paid to divine justice the ransom of our inheritance, God delivered that inheritance into his hand, with all the appendages of it: with a commission to bestow all upon his spiritual seed, as his infinite wisdom should direct. Thus in him dwells all fulness, both of grace and truth: and *out of his fulness* it is that we receive, *even grace for grace*. As the administrator of the covenant of grace, it belongs to him—actually to bestow upon us all that he hath purchased for us: and we can receive nothing of a saving tendency, but what Christ himself bestows.

Prop. VII. The kindness of God to individuals among his people—is intended to display the riches of his

his grace, not only to themselves, and to those who are their connections, or their cotemporaries, but likewise to after generations, and even to those who shall receive their existence *in the ages that are to come*. It was so, in a peculiar manner, with regard to the primitive Christians, who shared of the kindness of God, at the time when this epistle was written. The history of his gracious dealings with the apostolic churches, and their members—is committed to writing, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, for the instruction, edification, and comfort of all other Christians, in the ages that were then to come. With regard to Paul himself, he declares, in another epistle, that in him *first* God *shewed forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who should thereafter believe*. Something like this takes place, in a greater or less degree, with regard to all that are saved. Thus the kindness of God to us, in this present age, may be of use, as far as it is known, to our brethren in after ages.—The way of salvation is, in all periods, one and the same. And, whatever difference there may be in particular circumstances of lesser moment,—the great lines of God's gracious procedure, in all ages, and towards all persons, is the same. Whatever he has done for one, he may be expected to do for another, and for every other, in similar circumstances. Hence it is, that, in the holy scriptures, he has given us an inspired account of his gracious dealings with the Church, and with individuals, from the beginning of the world till the apostolic age: not for the gratification of our curiosity, but for the encouragement of our faith and hope. Willing to cooperate, according to their place, in promoting God's great design, *Our father's have told us what works he did*

did in their days, even in the times of old. We also should be careful not to *conceal them from their posterity*; but to *make them known to the generations that are yet to come*. Not only should we hand down to coming generations, what we have received from the preceding; but we should be careful to add something to the stock,—by handing down to them, likewise, a faithful account of what he has done in our days,—not only for the Church in general, but also for ourselves in particular; as far as it can be done with prudence and Christian discretion.—David prayed that the Lord might spare him, till he might have an opportunity to *shew God's strength to the generation then present, and his power to all that were to come*: And every Christian, as far as he has an opportunity, will be of the same disposition. Away with that false modesty, that would smother the goodness of God; and rob even the ages to come of all that advantage which they might derive from the displays of the *riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus*.

The words which we render *the ages to come*, may, with sufficient propriety, and agreeable enough to the usage both of sacred and profane writers, signify *the world to come*. And whatever kindness God shews to his people in this life, is intended to redound to the praise of the riches of his grace, even in the eternal world. His dispensations towards us, while we continue here, are often dark, and little understood, either by ourselves or others. But in the world to come the blindness of our minds will be perfectly cured,—all God's procedure towards us will be set before us in its proper light, order and connection,—and all the redeemed shall clearly see how all things have been

working together for their good, even at those times when they were disposed to say, like Jacob, *all these things are against me*. Then, and not till then, will be shewn, in the clearest and most conspicuous manner, the exceeding riches of divine grace, and the greatness of his loving kindness, shining even in those dispensations of adorable providence, which seemed to cast a shade over both.

WE are now to conclude with some improvement of the subject. And a very copious improvement might be made of it, did time allow. For instance,

1. It serves to refute various articles of corrupt doctrine, that are too commonly taught in our day; particularly,

It refutes all that doctrine, by which men are encouraged to seek righteousness as it were by the works of the law; or to trust, directly or indirectly, to any thing about themselves, as the ground, or any part of the ground of their title to the favour and kindness of God. Such is that system which attributes to man's free will what the scriptures ascribe to the free grace of God. Such is that scheme which represents faith, repentance, or sincere obedience, or all these together, as being the conditions of life, by the new covenant, instead of that perfect obedience which the first covenant required of Adam. Such is that doctrine which teaches sinners to do what they can, in hopes that Christ will do the rest for them; as if the robe of Christ's surety righteousness were of no other use, but to patch up our filthy rags.—All such doctrine tends to defeat God's great design, as mentioned in this text. It is equally derogatory to the grace of God, and to the merits of Jesus Christ. These are so many different

ent

ent modes of that *other gospel*, of which Paul speaks, which yet is not another: and against the preacher of which, though he were an angel from heaven, he pronounces a dreadful curse, and repeats it *. It is, indeed, a scheme to trouble the Church and pervert the gospel of Christ, to deceive immortal souls to their own destruction, and to bring their blood upon the heads of their teachers.

It refutes that doctrine which represents God as all mercy, grace, and goodness,—and encourages men to hope for the fruits of his goodness, without any respect to Christ or his righteousness. Rich as the grace of God is, it can only be exercised towards sinners—through Jesus Christ. God is infinitely and unchangeably good; but he is likewise infinitely just. His goodness would suffer nothing, though justice were executed, in its utmost rigour, upon every sinner: but justice would be highly dishonoured, if grace were extended to sinners, without due attention paid to its claims. The exercise of justice is necessary; but, in the nature of things, that of grace must be absolutely free. To vain men, the goodness of God may appear a sufficient ground to hope for eternal happiness, while they think themselves sure, that it is not consistent with this goodness, to punish them with eternal misery. But surely God himself is a better judge of what is consistent with his own nature and perfections, than foolish men can be: though they are pleased to dignify their folly with the specious names of wisdom or philosophy. And God himself has assured us, that *the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*. The wisdom of Christians must be drawn from the scriptures: and, if the scriptures be true,

God's throne would have been guiltless, and even the goodness of his nature unimpeached, though all the race of mankind had been left in the same state with devils: for grace can only be shewed, to any of the human family, *through Christ Jesus*.

2. This subject reaches a severe reproof to all those hearers of the gospel, who indulge themselves in such practices as nativley flow from the belief of the above; or similar false doctrines. Particularly,

It reproves all legal practices, I mean all endeavours to seek righteousness and eternal life by the works of the law, whether in a more avowed, or in a more secret and refined manner. Every descendant of Adam has naturally a strong attachment to the way of the covenant of works. None will cordially renounce it, till they find it impossible to succeed in their attempts to fulfil the demands of that covenant.—Even after we see this, we still fall upon various methods to gratify that corrupt bias, expecting, at least, some regard to be paid to our own merit, in God's dealings with us. It is impossible to enumerate all the subterfuges of the deceitful heart in this respect; but the following are a part of its ways:

Some assure themselves of God's favour and approbation; because they have distinguished themselves by acts of charity, and have been liberal benefactors to society, or to individuals: and *charity*, say they, *covereth a multitude of sins*.—This expression is quoted from the apostle Peter, who therein quotes the words of Solomon *; but, if we compare these two passages together, we shall find that there cannot be a grosser perversion of scripture, than to conclude from thence, that charity covers any sin from the piercing eye

* 1 Pet. iv. 8. comp. Prov. x. 12.

eye of God's justice, or procures the pardon of it. The proverb, which the apostle quotes, runs thus,—*hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins.* And the contrast between the two clauses, makes it evident in what sense the last clause is to be understood. Hatred stirreth up strife; because one is easily offended with the man he hates,—and every thing becomes an occasion of strife between them. But love prevents strife; because it makes a person overlook many offences or trespasses that may have been committed against him: by the man he loves, and disposes him to forgive them.—In the same sense does Peter quote this proverb: he recommends charity, or rather love, not because it procures forgiveness from God; but because it disposes us to forgive one another.—Another passage of scripture is sometimes wrested for a similar purpose; Paul exhorts Timothy, in these words, *Charge them that are rich,—that they trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God;—that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate: laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life* *. Considering the 18th and 19th verses, without attending to their connection with verse 17th, some conclude, that it is by such acts of beneficence as are here enjoined, that we are to lay up a foundation for the time to come, *i. e.* that these are to be the ground of our hope for eternity. The Spirit of God means no such thing. It is by trusting in the living God, that we are to lay the foundation of our hopes for eternity, in the faithful promise of God, joined with the merits of Jesus Christ. And then we are to prove the sincerity of our faith or trust, by these works

of

* 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19.

of beneficence. But wo to the man that has no foundation laid up for eternity, save in his own good works.

Some we have seen going into eternity, with nothing to trust to but a negative holiness.—‘ I have been given to no vice; I never did harm to any man, unless, perhaps, to myself, and what have I to fear from a gracious and good God.’ But, sinner, have you *continued in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them?* If you have not, the curse of the law continues upon you. And till that is removed, through Jesus Christ, the grace of God cannot,—will not save you.—Some have gone a little farther: They have been very zealous in the performance of religious duties, though their conscience knows they have been defective in the duties of the second table: or they have been very honest in their dealings with men, though they cannot deny that they have been sometimes negligent in the duties of the first table. But all such persons are transgressors of the whole law; for *he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all.*—Yea, though, like the young Pharisee, you think you have kept all the commandments of God, still there is one thing lacking. You must renounce all merit in your own righteousness; and count all but loss and dung, that you *may win Christ, and be found in him,*—clothed with that *righteousness which is of God by faith.*

Some think within themselves, and some are not ashamed to say it, ‘ I must confess I am a sinner, and have done some things that were wrong; but I have also done some good, and God is just: I hope therefore, that when the day of reckoning comes, the one will be a balance for the other; and my sin will be forgiven,

' forgiven, in consideration of the good I have done.' But, granting that you have done good, it was no more than your duty; and who expects a reward merely for not breaking the law? If a man had lived blamelessly in society, to the age of an hundred years, —and at that age committed one act of treason, the laws of his country would punish him for the treason, notwithstanding his former blameless life. And why should the law of God be less strict than the laws of men? No service, that ever you performed, or could perform to God, could make atonement for the least sin. And unless you are *justified by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, all your obedience must go for nothing, and you must be punished for your sin.

Even in those who are exercised to godliness, this legal bias often discovers itself, in various ways. How common is it for Christians to have their joy, and their boldness at the throne of grace proportioned to the regularity of their walk? While they think they do their duty, they can rejoice, and present themselves with confidence before God; but if iniquity prevails, they cast away their confidence, and scarcely dare bow a knee before him. To be ashamed and mourn for the prevalence of sin is your indispensable duty; but this shame and this mourning are abundantly consistent, both with a present rejoicing in the Lord, and with all holy confidence and boldness in his presence. All the ground of your joy and confidence is in Christ. And therefore cannot be affected by any changes that take place about yourself. As your own holiness is not the foundation of your boldness at the throne of grace,—so no sin of yours ought to diminish it. If you are of the true circumcision, give proof of it, by
habitually

habitually rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh.

In others, this legal disposition produces a very different effect. They find, by experience, that their sins are great and many, and that all their obedience is naught. They have seen the extent of God's law, and the strictness of its penal sanction: and therefore they give up all hope of escaping from punishment, yield themselves a prey to despair, and, perhaps, with their own hands, plunge themselves into that hell which they fear. Nothing can be more absurd or irrational. If your own righteousness cannot save you without Christ, neither can any sin of yours condemn you, if you are enabled, by faith to betake yourself to the exceeding riches of divine grace—through him: —In whatever manner this legal temper of mind operates, or whatever effects it produces, this subject reproveth, and shews the unreasonableness of it. How often shall it be necessary to testify to the hearers of the gospel, that by the works of the law no flesh can be justified; and that all who are saved, must owe it eternally to the superabundant riches of divine grace in Christ?

This subject also reproveth all who pretend to rely on the goodness, mercy, or grace of God, without any respect to Jesus Christ, or to that everlasting covenant which God made with him. We meet with not a few, especially among those who think themselves better informed than the rest of mankind, who are not ashamed to argue thus: 'God is infinitely good and gracious: he
' never made his creatures to damn them; and I can
' have nothing to fear. It is true, I have been guilty
' of some slips, such as are incident to human nature:
' But surely a being whose essence is love—will never
subject

‘ subject me to eternal misery on that account: more especially as his providence exposed me to temptation, and he gave me not power to resist it. Nay he will surely have respect to the work of his own hands.’

Truly it would be inconsistent, not only with the goodness of God, but also with his justice and holiness, to have men's damnation in view, as the direct or ultimate end of their creation. But it does not follow that he will not damn any of those whom he hath made. Divine providence was never to blame for any temptation; for God tempteth no man: neither is he tempted of any. And if men will throw themselves into the way of temptation, and then excuse their yielding, because God gave them not power to resist,—is not this to cast the blame of their sin upon God himself? And this, instead of being a ground for them to hope for exemption from punishment, is a good reason why their misery should be doubled. Let such blasphemers consider what the Spirit of God has said of such persons as they are: *It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour* *.

There are many, who come not the length to argue in the above manner, and yet act upon the same principle. They can assign no other ground of their hope, but barely that God is merciful: they have no proper views of the channel in which mercy vents to sinners: and yet they sit down with as much confidence as if they had never been liable to his wrath. But fearful will their disappointment be, if that mercy which they abuse prevent it not.—Yes, sinner, God is merciful, and yet he reserves all the sinning angels *in chains un-*

*

3 B

der

der darkness to the judgment of the great day. He is merciful, and yet *Tophet is ordained of old, even for the guilty king it is prepared: the pile thereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, as a stream of burning brimstone doth kindle it **. He is infinitely merciful, and yet, unless you are determined to build your hopes of mercy upon the foundation of Christ's merit,—the consideration that he is merciful, and that you was once within reach of his mercy,—will for ever add to the torment that his wrath will inflict upon you.

3. This subject affords various marks, by which genuine Christians may be distinguished from those who are such in name only.—All who have shared of the saving kindness of God have seen, with deep admiration, the exceeding riches of divine grace, appearing particularly in what God does for them. They are all convinced, that grace can only vent towards them through Jesus Christ, and they are satisfied to receive all in that channel—They are reconciled to the way of being saved by grace, without any respect to human merit. Knowing that they must eternally be debtors, either to the justice, or to the grace of God, they have willingly chosen the latter: and, renouncing all claim to any power of saving themselves, they are satisfied that he who does all the work should bear all the glory: and say—*not unto us, O Lord not to us; but unto thy name give glory.*—And, in a word, it is their desire and endeavour, to have this end promoted, which the text mentions as in God's eye, in all his gracious dealings with us. As workers together with God, they strive, according to their station and place, to make known to the ages to come, the exceeding riches

* Isa. xxx. 33.

riches of divine grace, manifested in God's kindness towards them through Christ Jesus. Unwilling to cast their pearls before swine, or to make an ostentatious display of what God has done for them,—as if they meant thereby to procure a name to themselves, they will use due prudence and caution, in publishing the goodness of God. But, on the other hand, they can never be willing to rob God of the glory due to him, by hiding his kindness under a bushel. If they have but a mite to contribute, to promote the display of the riches of divine grace to following generations, that mite will not be wanting.

4. The subject affords consolation to all that are in Christ Jesus, and share in the gracious kindness of God through him. Justly might you have been made eternal monuments of his impartial Justice. He might have made known his power in you, as vessels of wrath, whom your own sin had already fitted for destruction. Instead of this, he has chosen you to be subjects, in whom he might display the exceeding riches of his grace. And it may be of much advantage to you to consider, that this design is uniformly kept in view in all his dispensations towards you. Even the most afflicting providences shall finally have this issue. Perhaps you shall see, even in this life, that grace and mercy shining in such dispensations, which you once thought God had forgotten, or shut up in his anger. Perhaps it shall be seen by your successors, in ages yet to come. And if none should see it in this world, you shall be sure to see it in the endless ages of the world to come: and then you shall sing the praises of his rich grace, even on account of those dispensations, of which you are now disposed most loudly to complain.

5. It points out to Christians their duty, in various particulars.—Be careful to acquaint yourselves with the history of God's gracious kindness to his Church and people in former ages; that you may observe those displays of the riches of his grace, which he intended thereby to make, to ages that were then to come. Carefully peruse scripture history,—considering it,—not as a history of human transactions, but as a summary account of God's gracious procedure towards the Church, from the beginning of the world to the time when the sacred canon was completed. And be sure to bear it always in mind, that what he has done for any of his people in past ages, you have reason to expect he will do for you, and for any of your brethern, in similar circumstances.—For the same end, you will find your account in perusing any authentic history of the Church, though written by men that were not divinely inspired.—Observe attentively what God does for yourself, for your brethern, and for the Church, or any part of it,—in your day, that you may not only celebrate the praises of his rich grace, while you live,—but may also *tell it to the generation following; that they may set their hope in God, and may not suffer his mighty works to fall out of their mind, but may keep all his precepts.* Never forget to what you are indebted, for all the kindness that God has shewed you, in the dispensation of grace, or even in the course of holy providence. It was not owing, in whole nor in part, to any kind of worth or merit in you,—but solely to the riches of divine grace: to grace therefore let all the praise be ascribed, both now and through all eternity. In all time coming, let your sole dependence be upon that grace which has done all

all for you hitherto. And let your expectations be large and liberal, corresponding to the unsearchable riches and unbounded liberality of the God of Grace. *The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand* *.

6. To conclude: This subject points out the duty and interest of all those who are hitherto strangers to Christ, and to all that gracious kindness that God shews to his people through him. You must be an eternal debtor, either to the rich grace of God, or to his inflexible justice: and you have a present opportunity of choosing. Justice is a rigorous and inexorable creditor, and will exact the uttermost farthing. Grace is a merciful creditor, exacting nothing but an acknowledgment of debt, and a willingness eternally to sink in it, deeper and deeper.—Christ and his righteousness are again in your offer, as an unfailing security against all the claims of justice; and as a sure foundation of your access to all the riches of grace. All that kindness that ever God shewed, or through all eternity will shew, to any Christian, he is willing to exercise towards you in Christ. Out of that fulness of grace and truth which is in him, you are welcome to receive, even grace for grace. And it must be at your peril if you despise an offer so rich, so free, and so exactly suited to your necessity. For whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, our commission is to assure you, that you cannot do God a greater pleasure, than by cheerfully consenting, *that, in the ages to come, he may shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards you, through Christ Jesus.*

* Isa. xxxii. 8.

S E R M O N X I.

The Manner in which Christians are saved.

EPH. ii. 8.

By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

AFTER Moses had blessed the tribes of Israel,—reflecting both upon what God had already done for them, and upon what he had now foretold, under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy,—he cries out, *happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord *?* The same exclamation may we adopt, with regard to all the spiritual Israel. They are saved from all evil; they are finally put in possession of all happiness: all this is done for them by the LORD; and that in a manner exactly calculated to promote the great end that he has in view in their salvation.

Having shewed what this end is, in the preceding verse, our apostle proceeds, in this text, to inform us in what manner it is accomplished. As the glory of grace is the end of our salvation; so it is by the continual exercise of grace that every part of our salvation is brought about.—If we could contribute anything effectual towards it, reason would say, that we should have a proportionable share of the glory: But

as God himself does all the work, it must be highly proper that he bear all the glory. Equally fit and proper it is, that the greatest glory should redound to that perfection of the divine nature, which is most exercised in bringing us to salvation. Thus it is highly reasonable that the riches of divine grace should be manifested, in the most glorious and resplendent light, even to the most distant ages, by our salvation,—seeing it is *by grace* that we are saved, *through faith*, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

This complex proposition natively resolves itself into the following four :

I. All Christians are saved by grace.

II. They are also saved through faith.

III. That faith by which they are saved is not of themselves; but,

IV. It is the gift of God.

A few words in illustration of each of these, with some improvement of the subject, shall, through Divine assistance, employ your attention on this occasion.

Prop. I. All Christians are saved by Grace. This was not only true of these Ephesians to whom this epistle was written : it is so with regard to all that are saved ; whether they be Jews or Gentiles,—under the Old Testament dispensation, and under the New,—in the apostolic age, and in all the ages that were then to come. This is a truth so necessary to be known, and attended to,—that there is no doctrine which this apostle is at more pains to inculcate, in all his writings. He repeats it here, after having asserted it in the same words a little before. Having said, in the 5th verse, that when we were dead, God quickened

us together with Christ,—he was aware, that even this truth might be in danger of being abused by human pride: and therefore, of purpose to check its workings, he adds this proposition, in a parenthesis.—‘ Say not, O ye Ephesians, that you are alive, while others around you continue dead;—that you live together with Christ,—while others are both unlike him, and in a state of separation from him; and therefore you have somewhat whereof to glory. You did not quicken yourselves: and, even after you are quickened, you can do nothing effectual to promote your own salvation. Your own works, your attainments and qualifications, must all go for nothing in this respect. Be humble, therefore, and thankful to the God of all grace; for by grace alone it is that ye are saved.’—Here he repeats the same truth, and insists upon it, to shew how exactly God’s method of saving sinners is calculated to promote the great end that he has in view by it.

With you that are Christians indeed, I trust I need not insist in proving the truth of this position. The assertion of the Spirit of God, in the mouth of an inspired apostle, especially when repeated again within so short a space, will be to you instead of a thousand arguments. And your own experience will convince you, that it is impossible for you to be saved in any other way. You know yourselves less than the least of all God’s mercies; and how can you merit eternal salvation? You confess that it is of the Lord’s mercies that you are not consumed; and how can you doubt its being of grace that you are saved?—There is not a stronger proof, either of the corruption of human nature, or of Satan’s assiduity and dexterity in deceiving men to their own destruction, than the opposition
that

that has been made, in all ages, to the doctrine of salvation by divine grace. But let devils and men rage and cavil as they will, this truth will ever continue, as an impregnable rock, against all their efforts. And it will ever be your interest to be steadfast in the belief of it, that your whole salvation is of mere grace.

Your election from all eternity was of grace. This the apostle not only asserts, but proves, by what was said of Jacob and Esau: *The children not being yet born, neither having done good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said,—the elder shall serve the younger. As it is written Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.** The doctrine of election,—besides being so plainly taught in scripture, that it is strange to find it denied by any who acknowledge the scriptures,—is clearly demonstrable from reason itself. Every one of mankind must either be finally saved or damned. God could not be omniscient without knowing from all eternity—who would be saved, and who not. If he foresaw it, and was the Sovereign of the universe, it was easy for him to have prevented it, if it was not his will that it should be so. If it was his will that things should be as he foresaw they would be, then this act of his will was the decree of predestination.—And if there was an election, it must have been of grace. There could be no reason, without God, why any sinning creature should be restored to happiness. If any were to be restored, there could be no reason, but sovereign grace, why it should not be sinning angels, rather than sinning men. And if men were pitched upon, there could be no reason why the choice should fall upon one man, rather

*

3 C

than

* Rom. ix. 11, 12, 13.

than another; for all were alike unworthy. If it could have been supposed, that a preference was due to any, on account of superior qualifications, God took care to make such a choice, as plainly to demonstrate, that he was influenced by no such consideration. He chose not the *Solons*, the *Numas*, the *Tituses* or the *Julians* of antiquity,—men renowned, through all the Pagan world, for their wisdom and their virtue; but he chose Manasseh, a forcerer, an idolater, a murderer,—and Paul, a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious,—and other such persons; who in reality, as well as in their own opinion, were the chief of sinners: such, in a word, as sovereign grace alone could have chosen.

Your regeneration and effectual calling are of grace. So Paul acknowledges concerning himself. *It pleased God, says he, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me* *. The same thing he says concerning all Christians: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling: not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ, before the world began* †. Indeed you never could have been regenerated, if it had not been by grace. You could not be active in your own regeneration; for how can a dead man put life into himself? It could not be merited by any services previously performed; for they were all dead works. Neither could God be influenced in it,—by the prospect of any good works to be performed afterwards; for all the good works that you ever did, or ever will perform, are the mere effects of this renewing grace. And surely they cannot be the effects of regeneration, and yet the cause of it.

Your

* Cal. i. 15.

† 2. Tim. i. 9.

Your justification is wholly of grace. You and all your brethren are *justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* *. Nor is it possible for any of mankind to be justified in any other way. Besides the method of Justification by grace, which is of God's providing, all the ingenuity of devils and men has not been able to devise another, except that which is by the works of the law. And the scriptures testify expressly, that *by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight* †. Your own experience proves the truth of this testimony: you have made trial of the way of works, and have found it utterly impracticable. God's law admits of no obedience, as a ground of acceptance with him, that is not absolutely perfect. Such obedience no sinful man can perform: and therefore no man can be accepted for his own obedience. But if we could obey perfectly, who shall make atonement for the sin that we have already committed;—or even for that which is inherent in our nature? The most perfect obedience is no more than the precept of the law requires; and therefore can give no satisfaction to its penalty. If a man could perform good works,—beyond what the law requires, and that in proportion to the sin he has committed, there might be some hope, that God would sustain the good as a balance for the evil, and give sentence as the one or the other should preponderate. But this is impossible. Nothing that the law requires could come into such a reckoning: and nothing that it does not require can ever be considered as good in the sight of God. All works of superelevation, are works of abomination. Thus, if ever any sinner is justified, it must be freely, and by grace.

3 C 2

Your

* Rom. iii. 24.

† Rom. iii. 20

Your sanctification is all of grace. This is plain from this apostle's reasoning, in these words, *sin shall not have dominion over you;—for ye are not under the law, but under grace* *. ‘If you were under the law, sin might retain its dominion over you; for the law furnishes you with no assistance to subdue it,—nor provides any effectual method for abolishing its power. But divine grace effectually subdues sin, in all who are subjects of the reign of grace; and therefore, your being under grace, is a sufficient security for your being finally delivered from the dominion of sin.’ To be freed from sin's dominion is to be sanctified; and therefore grace sanctifies all that are under it.—I know you are called to purge yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,—and to be holy, because the Lord your God is holy. And I know you aim habitually at giving obedience to such exhortations; striving to be workers together with God in your own sanctification. But you must be sensible that all your endeavours would be abortive, if they were not accompanied with his efficacious working, who is the Lord that sanctifieth you. Yea, you ought to know, that even these feeble endeavours you never could employ for this purpose, unless divine grace excited and enabled you so to do. *So then*, you may say of this, as Paul says of his labour in the work of his office, *It is no more I that do it, but the grace of God that is with me* †.

Your perseverance is of grace. If it depended upon our own free will, whether we come into a state of salvation or not, it must depend upon the same free will whether we continue in it or not. And if that were the case, no man would either come into it, or
continue

* Rom. vi. 14.

† 1. Cor. xv. 10.

continue in it an hour. If grace was to bring you into such a state, and then leave you to persevere of yourselves, you would immediately fall away. Yea, I dare affirm, that if grace had placed you in heaven, when it brought you into union with Christ, you would quickly have fallen down to hell, if the same grace had not secured you against it. But the word of God has given you full assurance, both that you shall persevere, and that your perseverance shall be effected by the same gracious hand, that has already quickened you together with Christ. What our Lord himself says is both plain and peremptory to this purpose: *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; and none shall pluck them out of my hand. My Father, that gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand* *.

In a word, your final glorification will be of grace. In that chain of spiritual benefits, which is mentioned by this apostle, every one is connected with another: all come in the same channel; and the person who enjoys one has full security for all the rest: *Whom he did foreknow them he did predestinate,—whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified* †. We have seen that predestination, effectual calling, and justification are all the gifts of grace; and therefore so must glorification. Whatever noise some men make in this world about man's free will, and whatever practical dependence many have upon their supposed good works, no mention will be made of either of these in the Church triumphant. The whole song of the redeemed will tend to the exaltation of free grace. And when the head-stone shall be brought

* John. x. 28. 29.

† Rom. viii. 29. 30.

brought forth, by the hand of Zerubbabel's glorious antitype, and set upon the house of God, in the complete salvation of all whom the Father has given him,—the substance of that shout, with which the arches of heaven shall eternally resound, shall be—*Grace, grace into it.*

Not only is every part of your salvation—in some degree—owing to grace; all is wholly and solely owing to it. Grace must reign in all, and in every part, without a rival. The least mixture of human merit spoils the whole plan. If works have any place, our salvation *is no more of grace; otherwise*, the nature of work must be so far changed, that it *is no more work*. And if we allow that it is by grace, it can in no respect be of works, *otherwise grace is no more grace*. These two are so very opposite to one another, that they can never be made to coalesce into any mixture. As the man can have no share in this salvation, who is not willing to be saved wholly by grace; so when any man is saved, he must give no part of the glory to himself, nor to any other creature. Divine grace does all, gives all, is all in all, and must eternally bear all the glory.

PROP. II. *All Christians are saved through faith.* Though God's plan of grace can admit no mixture of legal works, it is no wise adverse to the use of faith, in bringing sinners to salvation. On the contrary, it was expressly appointed to be through faith, that it might be by grace. So reasons this apostle: *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed: not to that only which is of the law; but to that also which is of the faith*

faith of Abraham *. That you may have a proper view of the apostle's meaning, both in this text, and in that now quoted, I must beg your attention to the few considerations following:

I shall not detain you with any large discussion of the nature of faith in general;—as being the assent of a rational mind, to any proposition as true, founded upon moral evidence, or upon the testimony of another.—Neither shall I insist upon the various divisions and subdivisions of it. When the testimony upon which our assent is founded—is considered as the testimony of a man, our assent to it is called human faith; but it is called divine faith when it rests upon a divine testimony as such.—I say a divine Testimony *as such*; because, though it be really the testimony of God, yet if we receive it only as the word of men, we treat it with shameful indignity, and our faith cannot be called divine.—Of that faith that terminates upon the word of God, various sorts are mentioned in scripture, and among those who have written on this subject. Temporary faith is that which endures only for a time, and may consist with total and final apostacy. In this sense Simon the magician is said to have believed. Much of the same nature is historical faith, which gives such a speculative assent to the word of God as a man gives to a well attested history; or such a faith as is competent to devils, who believe and tremble. Miraculous faith, or the faith of miracles, is that dependence upon the word and power of Christ, as was necessary to be exercised, in the primitive times, while the gift of miracles continued in the church, both by them who were endued with that gift, and by those who were the subjects of the miracles which were wrought—either by
 them

* Rom. iv. 16.

them or by Christ himself. This last, as well as the other two might take place, where the person had no interest in salvation: for our Lord himself speaks of some, who, in the day of his second coming, shall say unto him, *Lord, Lord, have we not—in thy name done many mighty works, to whom he shall protest, I never knew you**,—But the faith mentioned in the text is that which is inseparably connected with salvation, and therefore is called saving faith.

Neither shall I speak, at any length, of the various metaphors which the scriptures employ, to set forth the nature and use of this faith.—It is express'd by looking, *look unto me*, says God, *and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth †*. Because the believing soul fixes its attention upon God, in expectation of the performance of his word, as the eyes of a supplicant are fixed upon the person from whom he expects an alms.—It is called a coming, as in that passage, *incline your ear and come unto me ‡*: intimating that sinners, who are naturally afar off from God, when they believe are brought near to him; so as both to have his image restored upon them, and to enjoy communion with him.—It is compared to eating and drinking, as in that remarkable expression of Christ, *whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day §*. As in eating and drinking a man unites with his food, so as to receive nourishment and sustenance from it; so by faith the soul unites with Christ, and so improves his surety righteousness, as from it to derive spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace—In a word, it is called receiving. *As many as received him, to them give he power to become the*

I

sons

* Matth. vii. 22.

† Isa. xiv. 22.

‡ Isa. lv. 3.

§ John. x. 54.

sons of God, even to them that believe on his name *. But I apprehend, that this last is rather a literal, than a metaphorical expression of the nature of saving faith. For,

This faith properly consists in the assent and consent of the soul to God's gracious word of promise, as exhibiting to us, through Jesus Christ, a full and free salvation, with all its appendages. I say, the consent, as well as the assent of the soul;—for, though faith in general is, strictly speaking, an act, or habit of the understanding,—yet this saving faith necessarily includes the consent of the will, as well as the simple assent of the understanding. This is owing to the nature of the testimony upon which it rests, and the manner in which it is laid, rather than to the nature of faith itself. A mere speculative proposition may be credited, without any act of the will; because it presents no object for the will to act upon. But the promise of God exhibits to us a gracious and highly advantageous offer,—even an offer of Christ, and eternal life in him. And therefore the promise cannot be believed, unless the offer is received with approbation. God's Testimony is not to be received by halves. At the same time that he promises us eternal life in Christ, he assures us that we must be miserable without it, that it can never be attained in another way,—and that, in a way of consenting to be saved by Christ, we shall inherit all happiness. And surely it is impossible to assent to the truth of all this, without consenting to God's plan as good. Hence every genuine believer embraces it with his whole heart, as all his salvation and all his desire.

This faith hath a threefold object. 1. The direct

*

3 C

and

* John i. 12.

and immediate object of faith is the testimony of God in his word. It can rest upon nothing but a *thus saith the Lord*. And whatever is confirmed by the testimony of God, it assents to as infallibly true; tho' it should be contradicted by the testimonies of men and angels. If objections arise, against the truth of what God has said, which it cannot answer, it tramples them under foot. If reason seems to contradict the divine testimony, it treats reason itself as a liar: well knowing that human reason may err, and, in its present corrupt state, often does err,—but the word of God cannot be false. Even apparent impossibilities it does not consider as sufficient to balance this testimony,—knowing that *with God* all things are possible. Being first satisfied, that the scriptures are the word of God, the true believer gives an implicit credit to every thing that they contain. He believes the historical part of scripture, in opposition to all profane history, where such opposition occurs, which, indeed, is but seldom. And, in opposition to all the vain theories of conceited philosophers, he *understands by faith, that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear* *. He believes the threatenings of the word of God, as did the men of Nineveh †; and hopes to escape their execution, only in the way that the gospel exhibits. He believes the doctrines of the word of God, and resolves to continue adhering to them, and contending for them, at all hazards, to his life's end. In a special manner, he believes the promises of God, with a personal application to himself; pleads upon them at the throne of grace, and hopes

for

* Heb. i. 3.

† Jonah iii. 5]

for a full accomplishment of them in due time: like Abraham, who *staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in the faith, giving glory to God.*

2. The next object of faith is Jesus Christ, as exhibited in the word of God. It considers the scriptures as given by Christ in his prophetic character; and containing his testimony concerning the Father. It embraces Christ himself, as offered to the person in the word, and says of him, *My beloved is mine, and I am his.* It receives him in his whole character, as Prophet, Priest, and King: and for all the purposes of a complete salvation. And it considers Christ and his righteousness as the sole ground upon which it expects the accomplishment of any promise, knowing that all the promises are yea and amen in him.

3. The last—or ultimate object of Faith is God in Christ, in whom, as making a gracious grant of himself to us in his word, every true believer takes up the final rest of his soul. Faith considers the scriptures as the word of God, it relies upon his infinite power and faithfulness for the accomplishment of all that they contain. It receives Christ as the gift of God: and, considering God as *in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,* it renounces all hope of any comfortable intercourse with God—unless through his mediation. It imitates Christ himself, in saying, *God is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup:* and in the enjoyment of God alone it looks for all happiness. In a word, it makes a solemn dedication of the person to God and his service. This assertion may seem strange to some; as faith has been said to be a receiving and not a giving grace: But as the promise of God secures—that every Christian shall make such a dedication

of himself, it is impossible to believe that promise, without consenting to that dedication. As we consider God as our God, because he has graciously called himself by this name; so we must consider ourselves as his people, on the credit of the same infallible testimony, He has said, *I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people*: And it is the business of faith to reply, *He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

This, which we call saving faith, differs from justifying faith no otherwise than as the whole differs from a part. That faith by which a sinner is justified in the sight of God, is, properly speaking, that act of saving faith by which a person lays hold of Christ's righteousness, and improves it as the ground of his claim for pardon of sin, and acceptance in the sight of God. But saving faith receives and rests upon Christ, and upon the promise of God through him, for a whole and complete salvation.

This faith is of such absolute necessity, that none of mankind can ever be saved without it. The sum and substance of that gospel which we are commanded to preach to every human creature—is, *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: and he that believeth not, even though he be baptized, shall be damned.* Not only must final damnation be the lot of all who hear the gospel—and refuse to believe it, but likewise of all who never heard the gospel, and therefore cannot believe it; unless God steps out of his ordinary way, and works in them the grace of faith without the external means: for *how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?* Neither is it enough that a man have a general belief that the gospel is true, or that Christianity is the religion of
 God:

God: for this the devils believe and tremble. Nor is it possible that such a kind of faith can have better effects upon men, than it has upon devils themselves. This, indeed, is all the faith that devils can rationally exercise; for, while they know the gospel to be true, they likewise know to their unspeakable horror, that they have neither part nor lot in this matter. But to men of all denominations is the gospel call directed, and the promise made: men, therefore, ought to receive it as the word of God to them. Every one must make a personal appropriation of it to himself: and trust in the faithfulness of God, for an accomplishment of all to himself in particular; and, in this way, hope for a complete salvation.

When the text says, that we are saved through faith, the meaning is not, that faith is, in any proper sense, the cause of our salvation. The efficient cause of it—it cannot be; for it is of the nature of this grace to renounce all hope of salvation, unless from the powerful hand of the Lord Jehovah. Neither is there any merit in faith, considered as our act, to procure our salvation, or any part of it: nor has God any more respect to it, in this view, than to any other act of obedience. Faith is not the condition of the covenant of grace, or of our title to salvation. If it were, our situation would be deplorable; for we are as unable to believe as we are to obey the whole law. This covenant, as made with us, is free and unconditional. Our salvation was purchased by no other ransom than the precious blood of Christ. It is the nature of faith to renounce all merit in itself, and in every thing else about the person in whom it dwells: and to depend solely upon that righteousness which God imputeth without works. If any man looks to
obtain

obtain salvation, or any good thing from the hand of God on account of his faith, he substitutes faith in the place of its object: and abuses it, in the same manner as the Jews did the ceremonies of the Mosaic law; when, instead of being led by them to Christ their antitype, they vainly expected to be justified by the bare observance of the ceremonies themselves. Such a man really seeks righteousness and salvation, not by faith,—but as it were by the works of the law.

Yet this faith is so necessarily connected with salvation, that neither can any man be saved without faith, nor can any who has it come short of salvation. Thus faith is a pledge of salvation, and by giving the one, God gives his people security for the other. Faith is an appointed mean of salvation; yea, it is a leading branch of salvation: and he who begins to save us, by implanting in us this grace, will not fail to perfect his work in due time. Faith and salvation are connected, as a man's entering into a house is connected with his dwelling in it: or as a man's accepting a gift, is connected with his possessing it. *The gift of God to us is eternal life.* By faith we lay hold on that gift, and our final salvation is our continuing to possess it for ever. In a word, they are connected, as a man's taking infeoffment of an inheritance is connected with his being considered in law as the rightful proprietor of it.

But, though such an infeoffment is necessary, whether a man has purchased an estate, or succeeds to it upon the death of the former proprietor,—no rational person will imagine that his taking infeoffment will stand for the payment of the purchase money,—or, that by a mere infeoffment, he can become the rightful proprietor of another man's estate, without either
purchase

purchase or conveyance.—By faith we take infeoffment of the heavenly inheritance, and all its appurtenances: but we could have no right to do so, if it had not been previously made ours, by God's gracious deed of gift, declared in his word of promise: nor could a conveyance have been made of it to us by promise, if Christ had not paid the price of it, in his own blood.—Therefore, as a man's infeoffment must bear a reference, both to the price paid for his inheritance, and to the deed of conveyance given him by the former proprietor; so must our faith have a respect, both to the ransom of our salvation, as paid by Christ in our name, and to the promise of God, as the charter of conveyance, by which it is made over to us. Neither the purchase of Christ nor the promise of God, nor both these together,—can make the inheritance really and legally ours, without faith; because our right cannot be complete without possession: But if either of these were wanting, we could have no right to take possession; and therefore our faith would be vicious intromission.

This method of saving sinners through faith, is most exactly calculated for promoting the honour of divine grace. Had God required the smallest thing to be done by us, in order to found our title to salvation,—that small thing would have been meritorious, in the same manner as Adam's obedience would have been by the covenant of works:—and in the same degree too. Adam's obedience could not have been meritorious, in a strict and proper sense: he had nothing to give to God that was properly his own,—nothing that was not due to God antecedently to the making of the covenant,—nor any thing that bore the most distant proportion to what he was to receive. But as the co-
venant

venant of works gave merit to Adam's obedience; so a similar covenant,—had such a covenant been made, would have given a similar merit to any thing that God had been pleased to make the condition of it. Hence there would have been no more grace in such a transaction, than in the covenant of works itself.—On the other hand, God could not deal with us as rational creatures, had he given us salvation without or against our consent. To force it upon us against our will had been to make us miserable: and to save us without our knowledge, or without asking our consent, had been to deal with us like beasts, that can neither be objects of grace, nor subjects of moral government.—Now, as it is by faith that we give our consent to God's method of salvation; and as it is the nature of faith to renounce all merit, both in itself and in the person in whom it dwells, and to acknowledge divine grace in all that we receive, it is manifest, that it was not only fit but necessary, that if we were to be saved by grace, it should be through faith. So reasons the Spirit of God,—*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed* *.

PROP. III. That faith by which Christians are saved is not of themselves. In whatever sense the expression be understood, this proposition will be found true. And every real Christian will be ready to admit the truth of it, with regard to himself in particular.

It is not of themselves, as a natural ingredient in their constitution. Faith, in general, may be called a natural habit, as love is a natural affection. And human nature never subsisted, either in faint or sin-

ner, without the one or the other. But all the habits and affections of the soul, in our natural estate, are perverted and corrupted. As it is natural for us to love what we should hate, and to hate what we ought to love; so it is equally natural for us to believe lies and liars, and to refuse to give credit to the God of truth. Thus divine love and divine faith are alike strangers in our frame, as descendants of the first Adam. The description given of the people of Israel, by the Spirit of God, is equally applicable to all mankind, while continuing in a natural estate. *They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith* *.—It is not of themselves, as its efficient cause. Neither themselves nor any other creature can implant it in them; for *no man can come to Christ, except the Father who sent Christ draw him*. Neither, after the habit is implanted, can they exercise it of themselves. Hence the prevalence of unbelief in the best of the people of God, and their frequent mourning and discouragement, arising from that source.—It is not of themselves meritoriously; for this gift of God is as far above any price that we can pay for it, as all the other gifts of divine grace are. And in the bestowing of it, he is so far from being influenced by any previous qualifications in the person receiving it, that he often bestows it upon the chief of sinners, while they whom men would consider as the most worthy characters are left to perish in their unbelief.—It is not of themselves, as being acquired by their own industry; or by the use of any natural means. Moral suasion can never produce it: nor is it possible that any thing less than the power of God can dispose any person to it. The most cogent reasons may be

*

3 D

adduced,

* Deut xxxii. 20.

adduced, for the exercise of faith in God ; for nothing can be more our reasonable service. Stronger arguments cannot be used, to persuade us to any thing, than those that are suggested in the word of God, to induce us to believe. But these arguments will be used in vain, not only by men, but even by the Spirit of God himself, while he deals with the person in a way of moral suasion only. Divine power must be exerted, before any man can either be made willing or able to believe. Even the means which God himself has instituted, and which he usually employs, in bringing men to believe, must owe their efficacy to the co-operation of almighty power. Hence the same gospel, which to some is *the savour of life unto life*, is *the savour of death unto death* in others. And they who profit least by the gospel, are often the persons who are most capable to feel the strength of an argument, and act most agreeably to reason, in the common affairs of life. Never will the gospel *report* be *believed*, unless where *the arm of the Lord is revealed*.

I know it is objected against this doctrine, that ‘ God has not only commanded us expressly to believe, but also threatens to punish us with eternal damnation if we believe not : But how,’ say our adversaries, ‘ can it consist either with the justice or goodness of God, to require us, under such a penalty, to do that which he knows we cannot do?’—In answer to this, the following considerations are suggested. 1st, If we are assured, by the word of God, that he does require us to believe, and that on pain of damnation,—and, at the same time, assured that this faith is not of ourselves,—we may likewise be assured that this is not inconsistent with any perfection of God : and that its
appearing

appearing so to men—is owing to the imperfection of their knowledge, and to the corruption of their rational faculties: for God cannot deny himself.—2dly, This same objection will apply, with equal force, against every precept of the moral law. The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven, against every breach of the divine law: and yet the scriptures assure us, and experience confirms their testimony, that we can keep no commandment of God perfectly; nor even perform any one duty acceptably without divine assistance.—3dly, That law whereby faith itself, as well as every other duty, is required, was given to mankind, when they had sufficient power given them to obey it in every article: and surely no man will assert that God was under any obligation to abolish his own law, because we, by our own fault, lost our power to obey it. What creditor thinks himself obliged to cancel his bond, when his debtor becomes insolvent?—4thly, We are rational creatures: and our want of ability to obey this, and every other command of God, is owing to a perverse bias in our nature, a shameful propensity to transgress. Now, if any man was indeed before an earthly judge, for the crime of murder, and should plead that he could not avoid it; because he had, in his constitution, such a propensity to shed blood, that he could not meet a man in the streets, without plunging his sword in his bowels;—would the judge acquit him on that account? Would it not rather be a sufficient reason for his ridding society of such a monster, by executing the law of his country upon him? And is not a similar procedure, against obstinate unbelievers equally just and reasonable in the great Judge of all the earth?—5thly, At the same time that God calls and commands us to believe, he graciously promises that

assistance which is necessary to enable us to believe ; yea, his helping hand is stretched out for that effect. His call is the vehicle, by which the necessary help is conveyed : and if we obey not the call, it is because we refuse the help exhibited. Where it is not refused, his grace becomes sufficient for us, and we are enabled to comply with his call. Thus *faith cometh by hearing*, as *hearing comes by the word of God*. This leads us to

PROP. IV. That faith by which Christians are saved, is the free and unmerited gift of God.—Upon this we shall not need to insist, after what has been said.—This habit is implanted in every Christian, by the Holy Ghost, in the day of effectual calling. Then, as an inspired apostle expresses it, *it is given them, in the behalf of Christ, to believe* *. The gradual increase of it is also the work of God : had it been of themselves, the disciples had made an unreasonable request, when they said unto their *Lord, increase our faith* †. This gift is bestowed in the same free and gracious manner as every other branch of salvation : and it comes in the same channel with all the rest. If any man lack faith, let him ask it of God : and if any man has attained it, let him never impute to himself nor to any creature, that happy distinction that divine grace has made between him and the unbelieving world around him : for, whatever the modern perverters of the gospel of Christ may teach you,—or whatever the natural pride of your heart may incline you to believe,—you may rest assured that there is no faith by which you can be saved, that is not *the gift of God*.

We

* Phil. i. 29.

† Luke xvii. 5.

WE come now to conclude with some Improvement of the subject. And from what has been said we may learn,

1. What is the true spring of all that opposition, which, in all ages, has been made to the doctrine of salvation by divine grace. Satan, that arch-enemy both to God and man, very well knows, that neither can God be so much glorified by any other means, as by saving sinners in a way of sovereign grace,—nor can any of mankind be saved in another way. He knows that there is in human nature, in its present corrupt state, a principle of pride and selfishness, that prevents our being satisfied with all the happiness of salvation, unless we likewise have all the glory; or a great part of it at least. Of this corrupt principle Satan avails himself: and, knowing how easy it is to persuade men of the truth of that which they wish to find true, he has in all ages endeavoured to make them believe, that they may be saved, in a way more honourable to themselves, and thus to bring the way of salvation by divine grace into disrepute. When he finds a man bearing the character of a public teacher in the Church, who continues under the reigning power of this selfish principle; as, alas! too many public teachers do,—and can prevail with him to believe his suggestions on this head, such a man becomes a fit tool in his hand for propagating these suggestions among mankind. Thus, as the preachers of the gospel have always been workers together with God, in bringing souls to happiness; so legal teachers are workers together with Satan, in leading them on blindfold to destruction.

2. How justly this apostle speaks of that doctrine which encourages men to seek righteousness, as it were,

by

by the works of the law, as being *another gospel, which yet is not another*; but a perversion of *the gospel of Christ**. It is another gospel; for, tho' it may be called the gospel, by those who publish, and by those who favour it,—it is a scheme totally different from the gospel of Christ, and diametrically opposite to it. Christ's gospel is calculated to promote the honour of divine grace, to humble the haughtiness of man, and lay his pride in the dust, that the Lord alone may be exalted. But the tendency of their doctrine is, to exclude all exercise of grace in our salvation, to exalt the pride of man, and cast a veil over the glory of all the perfections of God, that shine in the face of Jesus Christ. By the first all boasting is excluded: and by the other something is left to every man, whereof he may glory, if not before God, at least, in the sight of fellow-creatures.—Yet their scheme is not so entirely another, as to agree in nothing with the gospel of Christ. Satan is not so foolish as to attempt imposing upon mankind a system containing nothing but falshood. Many precious truths are blended with the system of error; and moral duties are inculcated, with a shew of zeal and love to holiness. Yea, sometimes attempts are made to mix grace and works together, the merits of Christ are blended or conjoined with our own righteousness. But all such attempts are vain. Iron and clay will much sooner unite than these two opposite systems. Either we must be saved wholly by grace, or wholly by the works of the law. Grace and works must change their natures respectively, before they can both have place in the salvation of any sinner.—Moreover, this legal scheme is not another gospel; for it is no gospel at all. The tidings that

* Gal. i. 5, 6.

that it brings to mankind are not good. The method of obtaining happiness which it recommends is absolutely impracticable. Its crafty author well knows, that by it no man can be saved: and his whole design, in propagating it, is to pervert the gospel of Christ, and so to prevent its having effect, for bringing men to salvation in God's way.

3. See the true import of that memorable exhortation—given by Paul and Silas to the jailor at Philippi: *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved* *. This has been considered by some, as expressive of the tenor of the covenant of grace, and as a proof that faith is the condition of that covenant. But nothing is further from the true sense of that text of scripture. Neither faith nor any other act of ours can be the condition of that covenant. It was made from eternity, between God the Father and God the Son. All the stipulations of it were to be performed by one or other of these adorable persons: and nothing was left for us to do, in order to our being interested in its promises. If faith were the condition of the covenant, our title to the promises could never be made out; for we can no more believe in Christ of ourselves, than we can fulfil the whole law. Besides, faith belongs to the promissory part of the covenant: it is the gift of God; and how can one gift be the foundation of our claim to another? It is true, the jailor's question was, What shall I do to be saved. And no wonder that such a man as he was, should have no idea of any way to obtain salvation but by doing. But this is no evidence that the apostles meant to encourage him to seek salvation in that way. Their design

* Acts xvi. 31.

sign was to point out to him a method of being saved, quite different from that which he thought of: not by doing, but by depending solely upon the doing and suffering of another. It is as if they had said,—‘ We do not wonder to hear *you* speak of being saved by doing. It is so natural to fallen men to seek happiness in the way of the covenant of works, that even they who enjoy the benefit of divine revelation cannot be weaned from it, without the interposition of the power of God. But we must tell you, that neither you nor any of mankind can ever be saved in that way. Unless you could do all that God’s law requires, your doing can procure you nothing that is good from God’s hand. But the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we preach, has not only done all that the law required, but also suffered its whole penalty: and all this in the room and place of such sinners as you are. That perfect righteousness which he wrought out, we freely offer to you, in the name of God. Receive it therefore, and depend upon it as the sole ground of your title to salvation; and in this way you shall be saved from all sin, as well as from all misery, saved to complete holiness, as well as to perfect happiness, without doing any thing at all yourself,—to procure your title to salvation.’

4. We may see, from this subject, much ground for mourning and humiliation before God, and that on many accounts.—What mournful prevalence of legality, both in doctrine and practice, obtains among us? How abominable this sin is in the sight of God, appears from his dealings with his ancient people. On account of their idolatry, he punished them with a captivity of seventy years; but for their legality and unbelief, he dispersed them among the nations,—put

a bill of divorcement into their hand, and left their house unto them desolate.—How many are sadly and ruinously mistaken about the nature of that faith by which we are saved? Some laugh at the personal appropriation of faith, and are not ashamed to tell the world that they wish for no other faith than what devils have. Some deny that assurance which is in faith; and consequently, must satisfy themselves with that general and doubtful faith, which has been abjured as one of the abominations of popery. And many, who yet call themselves Christians—know not what faith is.—How few are there among us, who really believe the gospel report? Infidelity, deism, and scepticism abound, even amidst the clear shining of gospel light. Many satisfy themselves with a speculative persuasion of the truth of the gospel, continuing, like Simon the magician, *in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity*. Few ever had their hearts truly opened, to receive and attend to the things that are spoken to us in the gospel. And how sadly does unbelief prevail, even among those whom God has favoured with the gift of faith?—How few of those who profess to believe in Christ, are duly concerned to confess him before men, to keep the word of his patience, and to stand up in defence of his truths and ways? Yea, how many turn their back upon their profession, in whole or in part, for very slender causes, or for no cause at all?—How many pretend to believe in Christ, and yet content themselves with the least part of that salvation which the gospel brings to hand? Salvation from misery every rational creature must desire; but how few are there who really wish to be saved from sin? Such are strangers both to faith and salvation; for Christ is not divided: and they who receive him not

as a King, to save them from sin, shall never be saved from wrath by his Priestly office.—In a word, how few of those who expect to be saved by grace, and through faith, are duly concerned to justify their faith by their works, and to bring forth the fruits of holiness in their life and conversation?

5. What you have heard from this subject may assist you in the necessary duty of self-examination. If you have obtained the gift of faith, you are in a state of salvation; but if not, you are hitherto under a sentence of condemnation: And it concerns you much to know which of these is your condition. If you are a believer, and in a saved state—You have seen your absolute need of salvation: Your conscience has been awakened, and you have been made to cry out, like the jailor mentioned above, What shall I do to be saved?—You have seen the impossibility of being saved otherways than by grace: The way of works you have tried, and have found it utterly impracticable to you, as well as unacceptable to God: and, convinced that you have no merit of your own, you are reconciled to be saved by the blood and righteousness of Christ, without the works of the law.—You have got such a view of the glory of divine grace, as reigning thro' this righteousness, unto eternal life, as has reconciled you to the whole plan of salvation by grace, and disposed you to say of the covenant of grace,—*this is all my salvation, and it is all my desire.*—You have seen that faith is not of yourself: and have felt, that it must be the gift of God. You know from experience, that the evil heart of unbelief can only be subdued, and the grace of faith implanted, by the power of the Holy Ghost.—Not satisfied with any evidence you may have, that you have believed heretofore, you will

will be concerned—now to believe,—and concerned that the life you live in the flesh, during all the time of your continuance in this world, should be by faith of the Son of God.—Your faith neither rests upon the promise of God without Christ, nor upon Christ without the promise,—nor upon the mercy of God without respect to both: but relying, with confidence, upon the testimony of God who cannot lie, joined with the merits of Jesus Christ, it claims an interest in God himself, as the portion of your inheritance, and of your cup: And the happiness that you desire and expect, consists in the final enjoyment of him.

6. The subject affords ample consolation to all true believers. You have received from God the gift of faith. This is a sure pledge that, in due time, he will bestow upon you every other gift connected with salvation. You not only have full security that you shall be saved at last,—you are already saved in the Lord, and have an interest unalienable—in all that belongs to salvation. You have an interest in Christ the Saviour, and are so united to him, that nothing shall ever separate you from him or from his love.—You have an interest in the covenant of grace; and whatever is contained in that covenant, or secured by the promises of it, you may consider the whole as your own.—You have an interest in the God of grace, and have his promise and oath to rely upon,—that his gracious *kindness shall never depart from you, nor the covenant of his peace be removed*. And, though you may be subject to various trials and afflictions, while you continue here, you may comfort yourself under them all, with the happy assurance,—that the day of your complete salvation draweth near. He that has given grace—will give glory: and it is but a few

years at most,—perhaps but a few hours, when you shall receive the end of your faith, and be put in possession of *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*—But,

7. It speaks corresponding terror to all habitual unbelievers. How dreadful, O sinner, is your condition! You have no interest in the covenant of grace; but are still under that broken covenant, which speaks nothing but curses to every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them. You have no interest in the Saviour: and though you have open access to him, and perhaps make a flaming profession of zeal for him, if you live and die in your unbelief, he will protest unto you, in the day of his second coming, *I never knew you.*—You have no interest in the God of salvation; and therefore, whatever you may dream to the contrary, you are a stranger to all solid happiness in this world, and must continue so in the world to come, unless a saving change is wrought about you.—Instead of being in a state of salvation, you are *condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on you.* Your sentence is past in heaven, condemning you to eternal death and misery; and no creature has power to reverse it; neither will ever God himself reverse it, unless you believe.—To crown all, the day of your eternal damnation draweth near, death, you see, is making daily ravages around you. And none can tell how soon your day may come. Perhaps a few moments may place you beyond all reach of the means of grace, and so beyond all hope of salvation. In the same state in which death finds you—must you appear before the judgment-seat of Christ: and how will you bear to hear your doom pronounced by the mouth of the Saviour himself, in these terrible words, *depart from*

from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!—But, dreadful as your condition is, it is not desperate;—for,

8. This subject points out the duty of all that hear the gospel, whether saints or sinners.—As to you, sinner, let me exhort you, in the words of Paul and Silas to the Jailor, *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* For whatever you are, or whatever you have been,—however long you have continued in sin, or however atrocious the sins you have committed, *unto you is the word of this salvation sent.* A free pardon of all your sin, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is presently in your offer. This shall be to you the beginning of salvation. And all the other blessings of salvation shall follow in their proper order. Say not, ‘alas! I cannot believe: you have told me that the faith you require is not of myself, but must be the gift of God: why then exhort me to believe? Is not this to require an impossibility?’ Were the gospel, which we preach, the word of men only, your objection would be just. But it is God who calls and exhorts you by us, and he can easily give efficacy to his own word. It is by means of this word that he conveys the gift of faith: and we must publish the word, in hopes that he will make it effectual, by the concurring operation of of his Holy Spirit. As Ezekiel prophesied to dry bones,—and, while he prophesied, the Spirit of God entered into them, and made them to live; so must we call and exhort sinners, who are dead in trespasses and sins, to awake, and arise from the dead, and believe and be saved: and while we do so, you have reason, as well as we have, to expect a day of power to enable you to hear and comply with the exhortation. But when
this

this power comes along with the word, you also will be active on your part, aiming at stretching forth the hand that you feel to be withered ; knowing that he who calls for it has also promised you grace to do it. —*They shall trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God.*

Ye that are believers in Christ, continue in the exercise of faith—Live by faith. Walk by faith, and not by sight. The more regularly your faith is exercised, the more comfort will you have under affliction, the more pleasure will you have in your work, the more success in your spiritual warfare ; you will make the greater progress in the way of holiness, and the more joy and peace will you find in believing. There is nothing so dishonouring to God, nor so prejudicial to your own soul as unbelief: nothing by which you may so much gratify your spiritual enemies, or so much impede your own salvation.—Be ever on your guard against legality, as well as unbelief. Remember that your salvation is wholly of grace. Trust in the riches of divine grace, when you are most sensible of your own unworthiness. And whatever you enjoy, and whatever you hope for—Whatever you do in God's service, and whatever any creature is made instrumental in doing for you, let divine grace have all the glory.

S E R M O N X I I .

The Influence of Faith upon the Christian's Walk.

2 COR. V. 7.

We walk by Faith, not by Sight.

AS it is through faith that we are saved, so faith is of peculiar use, in our progress through this wilderness, till we come to the final possession of salvation. Without faith it is impossible to please God. And therefore every person whose life and practice is agreeable to the will of God, must live and walk under its influence. Its exercise, in the Christian, is not constant or uninterrupted: neither, when it is exercised, is it always perceived, either by himself or others. But it forms his character: it regulates his deportment; and is the living principle by which every action is produced, that truly corresponds to his character and profession. Thus, what Paul here says of himself and his fellow-labourers, is, in some degree, applicable to all the disciples of the same Master. They all *walk by faith and not by sight.*

After Paul had been constrained to leave Ephesus, on account of the tumult raised by Demetrius and his craftsmen, he went to Troas, and from thence passed over into Macedonia, where he met with Titus, whom he had sent to Corinth some time before. Having been
been

been informed by him, of the effect produced upon the Christians in that city, by the former epistle which he had written to them—He wrote this second letter to them, about a year after the other,—to illustrate some things in it, further to vindicate his own office and character, and to give them necessary directions, concerning the incestuous person, the collection for the saints, and various other matters. As his beloved Timothy was then with him, he associated him with himself in the writing of it: which may be the true reason why he so frequently speaks of himself in the plural number; whereas, in the preceding epistle, as well as in that to the Romans, he, for the most part, uses the singular.

Having, in the close of the preceding chapter, spoken of that blessed hope, by which they were supported under all their sufferings, Paul and Timothy continue to illustrate the same subject, in the first part of this. To this purpose we are informed, in the first verse, of the happy change which they expected, and which every Christian may expect, when enemies have done their worst, and when we have suffered all that we can suffer in the present world. The frail bodies, in which our souls now dwell, as in a moveable tabernacle, shall, indeed, be dissolved, and return to the earth from whence they were taken: but we shall not be left without a dwelling-place; for we already have a sure interest in a better house,—not made by the hands of men, but builded by God himself,—not situated on the earth, but in heaven, where Christ is,—and not liable to decay or dissolution, like the other, but of eternal duration. And to the possession of this house we shall enter the moment that we are dislodged from the other.

In the next three verses we are informed, how they were exercised, and how we should be exercised, in relation to this eternal house. While in this tabernacle, we must lay our account with a burden of indwelling corruption, as well as a burden of sufferings. Under these burdens we may groan, earnestly desiring the possession of our heavenly house. The object of this desire must not be the dissolution of this tabernacle: to desire to die is against human nature, which must always shrink at the prospect of its own dissolution. But though we consider death as an evil, it is an evil so trifling, in comparison of the good to which it leads, that a Christian may cheerfully submit to it, in the prospect of entering home to that house which is the real object of his desire.

In the fifth verse, we are told in what manner they were brought to this exercise. We have heard of men wishing for death, that they might escape from those miseries to which they were subject,—or which they foresaw they must suffer, if they had continued in life: This may be accounted for on the principles of corrupt nature. We have known some put an end to their own life, without any visible cause: This, tho' contrary to reason and to nature, may be accounted for by their being deprived of the full exercise of reason, or given up to the power of Satan. But to desire to die, or even to submit with cheerfulness to death, from an assurance of eternal happiness after it, is what no man ever attained under the influence of natural principles, or in the mere exercise of natural powers.—What is it then, Paul, that raises you so far above the common level of mankind; and produces in you, that supernatural desire of which you speak? 'It is produced by the power and grace of God. He has given us, in

' his gracious promise, that objective security of eter-
 ' nal happiness, upon which our expectations are built.
 ' It is he who enables us to depend upon that security;
 ' and so produces in us—that subjective assurance of
 ' which we speak. Yea, it is he who implants in us
 ' that desire of being clothed upon with our heavenly
 ' house, which triumphs over the fear of death, and re-
 ' conciles us to dissolution. And he affords us the
 ' strongest encouragement to hope for the gratification
 ' of this desire, in that he hath given us his Holy Spirit,
 ' who not only prepares us for the happiness of the e-
 ' ternal world, but is himself an earnest and pledge of
 ' that happiness; in regard that he is given to none
 ' but those who shall finally possess it.'

In the sixth and eighth verses, we are informed what
 influence this desire, and this assurance, had upon their
 manner of bearing those sufferings, to which they
 were exposed—in the fulfilment of their ministry. ' By
 ' this means it is,' would they say, ' that we are inspi-
 ' red, with such a degree of holy courage, boldness and
 ' confidence, as to meet, with resignation and compo-
 ' sure, all the sufferings to which we are exposed: yea,
 ' and to despise all that our persecutors can do against
 ' us. We know—the worst they can do is to dislodge
 ' us from this earthly tabernacle: We know, that while
 ' we continue in it, we are necessarily absent from our
 ' exalted Lord and Redeemer, whose blessed company
 ' we hope to enjoy in our heavenly house; and there-
 ' fore we are cheerfully willing, whenever it shall please
 ' God so to order it,—yea, if it were left to our own
 ' determination, we would much rather choose,—to
 ' remove from this frail and mortal body, that we
 ' might be present with the Lord.'

But do you not, in all this, act an unreasonable

part? With the world in which you now dwell—you have some experimental acquaintance. You see, you feel, and know, by the testimony of your own senses, what your present situation is: And there are advantages as well as disadvantages attending the present state. But of the life to come you have no experience; you have no acquaintance with the world of spirits; you never saw that eternal house, of which you talk so rapturously. You have only heard of it by report; and who knows who far that report is to be depended upon? No man ever came back from thence, to tell you what it was. Is it not then the most consummate folly to wish to exchange all that you see and know, for that which you never saw, and about which you know so little?

To obviate this cavil, the words of our text are brought in, by way of parenthesis.—‘It is true, we never saw our house that is from heaven; and all that we know about it is by report. But that report is the report of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived; and it may be relied on with more assurance than even the testimony of our senses. We not only depend upon his testimony in this instance; we pay the same regard to it in every thing else. Upon this principle we conduct ourselves, in all the actions, and under all the events of life. We are influenced, not by our attention to visible or sensible objects,—not by our own feelings or personal experience, not by the testimony of our senses, or by the dictates of unenlightened reason; but solely, and often in direct opposition to all these, by a firm and unshaken reliance upon the infallible testimony of God that cannot lie.’

What Paul here says of himself and his beloved Timothy, is applicable, not only to all that succeed

them in the faithful exercise of a gospel ministry,—but likewise to all true followers of Christ, in every station of life; for every real Christian, as far as he lives consistently with his own character,—walks, during the whole continuance of his pilgrimage in a clay tabernacle,—*by faith, and not by sight.*

In the words we have two things deserving our consideration :

I. The Christian life denominated—*We walk.*

II. The manner of that life or walk ascertained, both negatively and positively.

Positively—*we walk by faith.*

Negatively, we walk—*not by sight.*

A few words in explication of each of these, with some improvement of the subject, shall, through divine assistance, constitute your entertainment, during the present discourse.

I. With regard to the denomination here given to the Christian life,—it is called *a walk*. The text is much parallel to another of the same apostle,—where he says, *The life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith of the Son of God* *. Only in that place he speaks without a figure; whereas here he makes use of a metaphor, comparing the life of Christians to walking along the way. And this comparison intimates the following things:

1. That Christians, in this world, are in an unsettled and moveable state. For the same reason the body is called a tent or tabernacle, in the first verse. We are strangers and pilgrims here, accomplishing a journey towards a better country: and, during this whole pilgrimage,

* Gal. ii. 20.

pilgrimage, *we walk by faith, not by sight.* Indeed, there is no person, in this world, in a state of rest. A state so changeable must come to an end—*It is appointed for all men once to die.* And this truth no man will venture to deny, however little influence it has upon many, during their life.

The difference between the people of God and the rest of mankind, in this respect, is,—that whereas others live as if they were to live always, form such attachments to the things of time, as if they were never to leave them, and vainly seek rest for their souls in the vanities that are under the sun,—the Christian knows himself to be on a pilgrimage,—and demeanes himself accordingly. He considers all that he can possess in this world as but the enjoyment of a day, and is on his guard against being so much attached to any thing here, as to be unwilling to leave it and proceed on his journey.

Need any of you be told, that here you have no continuing city? The fashion of this world is continually passing away. How widely different is your present condition, from what it was a few years, a few months, or perhaps a few days ago? It will probably be as much changed in a few days more. How many of those enjoyments that you once possessed—are now gone for ever? All the rest will quickly follow; and it is not long when death will snatch you from them all. Have you never observed what happens when you are literally on a journey, in a strange place? An object presents itself to your view at a distance; it appears beautiful, and you wish to have a nearer view of it. By degrees your wish is gratified; you come up to it: perhaps you stop a little, and gaze upon it with delight. But you must leave it, and pursue your journey.

ney. Your back is now turned upon it; you leave it more and more distant, till it evanishes, and you see it no more. The same must be the case with all that this world can afford. And why should you set your heart upon that which is not, or upon that which will so quickly be no more. For the sake of your own peace, be denied to the things of this world: and bear it ever in mind, that *you are not yet come to your rest, nor to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you.*

2. That it is a progressive state. The child of God does not stand still in this world, but walks, and so makes continual progress in his journey. In one sense, this is the case with all mankind. The motion of time is uninterrupted; and every moment brings us all so much nearer to eternity. No negligence or inactivity of ours will prevent this; nor any reluctance, or desire that it were otherwise. But the people of God make progress in another sense. In proportion as they approach towards eternity, they likewise advance towards God, and towards the *better country*. As they draw nearer to it, in point of time, they are more and more fitted—and made meet for it. The Holy Ghost, who dwells in them, is still carrying on that good work which he began in them, on the day when they first set out on their spiritual pilgrimage: though he neither makes always the same progress in his work, nor is his progress always alike visible. They also are workers together with him in this matter; and, when grace is in exercise, they spend every part of their time in preparation for eternity. Accordingly, the text imports,

3. That Christians, in this world, are in a state of voluntary activity. The child of God, in this spiritual journey,

journey, is not, like Peter in his old age bound, and carried whither he would not. He is not dragged along the way, like a lifeless machine, nor driven as a reluctant beast of burden. He voluntarily walks along the way.—He sees before him a prize of inestimable value, in hopes of obtaining which he not only walks,—but *lays aside every weight*, and runs. He stretches himself, he strains every nerve,—he agonizes in running *the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of his faith*. It is sadly true that he sometimes falls, and seems to go backward; but he draws not back to perdition. Even his falls and back-goings are so over-ruled by divine grace, as to be useful for the furtherance of his journey. His fall retards him in the mean time; but when he is raised up again, he walks the more steadily,—he runs with the greater speed.

The men of the world, if they had their choice, would not walk, but sit still: they move towards another world with great reluctance. *The angel of the Lord pursues them through life; and, at death, they are chased out of the world*. But while the *good man's footsteps are ordered by the Lord, he delights in the way in which the Lord leads him*. He finds pleasure in running the way of God's commandments, and even in submitting to all the disposals of providence. And even when called to leave the world, he *walks, in the same cheerful and voluntary manner, through the valley of the shadow of death, without fear of evil, believing that God is with him, and feeling that his rod and staff comfort him*. If he had his choice of the best condition that this world can afford, and an assurance that he might enjoy it for ever, he would choose to walk on, to proceed in his journey and leave it:
knowing

knowing that *to depart and to be with Christ is far better.*

4. This expression imports, that the Christian's life, in this world, is a toilsome and uneasy life. The luxury of modern times has contrived various methods of accomplishing journeys without walking. Some ride upon horses, some loll in their chariots, as much at ease as if they were at home. It is not in this manner, Christian, that you are to perform your journey. You must travel through the wilderness on foot. The luxuries of life are neither bestowed according to the merit of the person who enjoys them, nor according to the share he has in the favour of God. Solomon had *seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth* *. The like may you see every day.—Even your glorious Master, when in our world, performed many a weary journey on foot. We never hear of his riding, but once; and that only two miles, upon an ass. Instead of appearing in the state and grandeur of an earthly prince, he came into the world under divers circumstances of more than ordinary abasement. He spent his days in toil, and his nights in watching and prayer. He drew his subsistence from the hospitality of his friends,—and his money, when money was necessary, from the jaws of a fish. Even the birds and wild beasts were better accommodated than he was.—*Surely the servant is not greater than his lord, nor the disciple than his master.* He was oppressed and he was afflicted; and would you spend your days in ease and pleasure? Can you hope for plenty, when he was subject to poverty and want? Dare you seek great things for yourself, when he, who was Lord of all, was content with so very little? Nay, seek

seek them not; for if you are an object of God's favour, you will not receive them. You must learn to *endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. You may look to eat your daily bread in the sweat of your face. You will probably want many things, that some others enjoy. You may find many difficulties in your way, which wicked men never encounter. You must toil and fight, and struggle, while they continue at their ease. Daily, and all the day long must you suffer plagues and chastisements, while they prosper at their will—Even your spiritual enjoyments here will be but scanty. Your work will always be above your strength,—that strength, I mean, which you have in yourself.—Your way may be hard and slippery. You may often walk in darkness, and have little or no light. You may feel hunger and thirst, and be ready, in a spiritual sense, to faint and succumb; and find little sensible supply. But these, and all the other hardships of your way, you may cheerfully endure, knowing that when your journey is ended, you shall enter into perfect and everlasting rest.

II. We proceed to speak of the manner in which the Christian's life is spent—his journey performed: and first of the positive part of what is here said of it, *We walk by faith*.

There are chiefly three ways in which our knowledge, in this world, is acquired. *First*, By the testimony of our external senses. What we see with our eyes, or hear with our ears, we usually have no doubt that it exists, precisely as we saw or heard it: for tho', in certain circumstances, the senses may be deceived, yet the knowledge acquired in this manner is sufficiently certain for all the common purposes of life.—*Secondly*,

By rational demonstration. Comparing things unknown with things that we previously knew,—we learn the species, the qualities and relations of material things,—and even various moral truths, with as much certainty, or even with more—than if they fell under the cognizance of our senses. *Thirdly*, By moral evidence, or the testimony of rational agents. Thus are all matters of fact ascertained, of which we have not ourselves been witnesses. And, though this kind of evidence is, in some respects inferior to both the others.—yet, in many cases, we are as sure of what we learn in this way, as we can be of any thing whatsoever. Thus we have no more doubt that there was such a man as Cæsar, or that there is such a place as Bengal, than we have that the sun shines at noon, or that two and three make five. And such is the dependence that we have upon that sort of evidence, that we often venture our life, our credit, and our worldly all upon it: even where we have nothing to depend upon, but the testimony of fallible men.—Our assent to this kind of evidence is called *faith*: and when the testimony upon which it rests is considered as the testimony of God, it is called *divine faith*. This is it by which Christians walk.

To speak particularly of this faith here, would only be to repeat what was said in a preceding discourse. Only, in addition to what was then said, it may be to our present purpose, to mention the few following things:

As it is manifest, that the strength of our faith should always correspond to the degree of veracity that belongs to his character, upon whose testimony it rests;—and as we know by experience, that it always bears a proportion to the view we have of that

veracity;—so it is manifest, that the testimony of God, who cannot lie, is the strongest evidence that we possibly can have, for the truth of any proposition. And hence it follows, that our faith can never correspond to that evidence, till it rises to full assurance. If we doubt about the truth of any thing which God has said to us, it must be owing to one of two things; either that we doubt whether God has said it to us or not,—or else that we doubt whether or not it be possible for God to deceive us. One or other of these must be the source of all that unbelief, which prevails among them that hear the gospel.

The greatest part of those truths, that constitute the matter of the Christian faith, are of such a nature, that they could never have been known to us, otherways than by the testimony of God. The plan of redemption, as laid in the council of peace from eternity,—and executed in the fulness of the appointed time,—by the incarnation of the Son of God, by his obedience unto death, and by his ascension into glory,—is so far above the utmost effort of human wisdom, that it never could have entered into the heart of man to conceive it. And as none were present, at the concerting of that wonderful plan, but the persons of the Godhead only,—it is plain that all our information about it must be derived from God himself: and if we do not believe it upon the footing of a divine testimony, we cannot rationally believe it at all.

It is equally manifest, that if we did believe these things, upon any other evidence, our belief of them could not be a divine faith. If we credit a testimony—only as far as we see it to be true, our assent is not built upon the testimony, but upon our own observation. And such assent is not faith, but sensation. We have daily opportunities of seeing some parts of

the word of God verified, both in the external course of providence, and in God's manner of dealing with our own souls: and the more attentive we are to his dispensations, the more of this kind will we observe. By this means our faith may be strengthened and confirmed: but so long as we assent to the truth of the word of God, only so far as we see it verified, and because we see it,—this assent is not faith. In such case, we put no honour upon God, nor upon his testimony: we trust our own senses, our feelings, or our observation only. *Blessed is he that hath not seen, and yet hath believed.*

In like manner,—if one assents to a testimony, only as far as it is supported by rational demonstration, his assent is not built upon the testimony, but upon those arguments, which constitute the demonstration; and therefore, it may be science, but it is not faith.—There are many things contained in the word of God, which are capable of the clearest demonstration. In this manner may the principal grounds of the Christian religion be established, against the cavils of infidels: and Christians may render a reason of the hope that is in them. But so long as a man's assent to these truths is only founded upon that rational demonstration, it stands upon the wisdom of men, and not on the faithfulness of God; and therefore, it is not that faith which is mentioned in the text.—Reason, as well as sense, may be an useful handmaid to faith. It may be a mean of conducting a man,—and of shutting him up—to the faith. It may even be useful to confirm weak faith, in such parts of the divine testimony as lie within its compass,—and of making a person ashamed of his unbelief. But reason, or rational arguments can never be the ground, nor any

part

part of the ground of a divine faith.—Such a faith can rest upon nothing but a *thus saith the Lord*.

And as the word of God consists not in those letters or syllables in which it is express; much less in any false glosses, that men of corrupt minds may put upon them, but in the mind of the Spirit of God—as expressed by them; so, whatever truth is fairly contained, or implied in the scriptures, is an object of faith, in what words soever—or in what language soever it is express: and every such truth must be received, as a part of the divine testimony; though it be not found, in so many words, in any part of scripture. On the other hand, when any person misunderstands any part of scripture,—puts a sense upon it which the Spirit of God never intended it to bear, and pretends to believe it in that sense, his faith is but fancy, his doctrine is error, and his experience, as far as founded on that doctrine, or that faith, is delusion. He changes the truth of God into a lie: he believes not the true God, but a creature of his own imagination: and his doctrine, though express in the very words of scripture, is to be held in abhorrence, by all that would stand fast in the faith.

Once more, True faith includes in it,—or, at least, it necessarily produces, a firm reliance upon the faithfulness and power of God, for a full and final performance of all his words of grace, to the person in particular,—till he be *filled with all the fulness of God*. If a friend in a distant country should promise me a large estate in that country, and should invite me to go and take possession of it, engaging to pay all my debts, and defray all the expences of my journey;—and I should pretend to believe him; yet if, instead of setting out on my journey, or drawing upon my benefactor

benefactor for my necessary charges, I should continue in poverty where I was, through fear that his promise would not be accomplished;—would not my conduct demonstrate, that I did not really believe him? And would not my friend have good reason to be offended at my mistrust? In like manner, if a man does not trust in God for the accomplishment of his promise, venturing his all, for time and eternity, on that bottom, he pretends in vain to be a believer.—He whose faith is genuine not only consents that God should do as he hath said, and pleads that he may,—but also rests assured that he will. In this assurance, he can look with composure upon the disappointment of all his hopes in this world, and upon the failure of all his earthly enjoyments. He can see, undismayed, the earth removed, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea. He can feel, unconcerned—the approach of his own dissolution, and be sensible of the failing of flesh and heart. He can brave all the rage of men, and all the malice of devils. He can bid defiance to all the terrors of death, and all the power of the grave. He can stand secure amidst the wreck of nature, and the crash of worlds.—Mistake me not, ye weak, ye little ones in the flock of Christ; I say not that such a full assurance of faith is the attainment of every Christian, or of any Christian at all times; because I well know that the faith of the best in this world is still mixed with much unbelief. But every degree of faith is always accompanied with a proportionable degree of this trust. And nothing but a due increase of faith would be necessary to produce all this—in the weakest of Christ's followers. I will venture further to say, that you have but little experience in religion, if you have not, in some moment of peculiar nearness

to God, felt something of this in your own exercise ; for sure I am—this is the faith by which Christians walk.

They walk by this faith, in the following respects :

1. By faith they learn the way in which they ought to go. At man's first creation, God inscribed upon his heart a law, sufficient to direct him in every part of his way. Some remains of this law continue upon the hearts of all Adam's posterity ; and thus every man has some natural knowledge of right and wrong. But this knowledge is so mutilated and imperfect, that, though it may inform us that we go astray, it can never keep any person in the right way. But God has given us a new edition of that law, in his holy word, pure and perfect. As a part of the word of God, this law is an object of faith. By faith the Christian perceives the authority of God in it ; he receives it as the law of Christ,—one of those precious benefits, that, through the Mediator, are made over to him by promise ; he learns the will of God, concerning his duty as thereby intimated : And thus, God's statutes become the men of his counsel, in the house of his pilgrimage.

Notwithstanding the clear objective discoveries that we have of the way of truth and duty, such are often the perplexing circumstances of our lot, and such is our natural dulness, and incapacity to understand and apply the rule, that our way is often covered with darkness : and we are at our wit's end. Even the gracious presence of God does not always prevent this ; for *clouds and darkness* are sometimes *round about him*. Many are the bye-paths, which may be mistaken for the way of duty. Many are the enemies, who attempt to lead us astray ; making use, for that purpose, of persuasions,

persuasions, stratagems, allurements, and terrors, as best may suit their purpose. On all which accounts every Christian finds reason to adopt Jeremiah's confession, *O Lord, the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps**. To remedy this, God, in various promises, has engaged to give us the necessary direction—*I will instruct thee and teach thee the way wherein thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye †*. Upon such a promise the faith of the Christian fixes,—pleads it at the throne of grace, and relies upon God for the performance of it. According to his faith it is to him. God, in his providence, dispels the dark cloud, and his Spirit, at the same time, casts such light upon his word, that the person sees the way of duty clearly and distinctly. This light faith only can take up; by it the man receives that direction which God grants him in accomplishment of his promise, and he goes on his way rejoicing.

2. By faith they receive strength to prosecute their journey. All Christians, in this world, are in a state of childhood. Their way is long and difficult, and they have no strength to prosecute it. Not one step can they move in it without supernatural aid. Even the renowned writers of this epistle were not ashamed to confess, that they were *not sufficient of themselves—to think any thing as of themselves*. And no wonder that we should find it so with us. *But our sufficiency, as well as theirs, is of God. ‡* In his word of promise he exhibits to us all necessary strength. *I will strengthen them, says he, in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord*. Such a promise faith lays hold upon. It trusts in the

Lord

* Jer. x. 23.

† Psal. xxxiii. 8.

‡ Chap. iii. 5.

Lord and is helped.—The person, though sensible of dangers and difficulties before him, through which nothing less than omnipotence can carry him, stands not still, nor waits till he feels himself strengthened, before he sets forward. But, as soon as he feels upon his conscience—the force of the divine command, hastily sets himself to obey: trusting, that he who calls to go forward, will give the promised strength in the moment of need. He finds himself strengthened accordingly. He breaks through troops; he leaps over walls; he performs impossibilities: he does all things, through Christ strengthening him.

3. By faith they are furnished with motives to animate them in their walk, and so are encouraged to prosecute their journey with unwearied perseverance. Though the authority of God is a sufficient reason for our obedience, yet he does not require us to obey him in a blind and irrational manner. Many of his commandments have reasons expressly annexed to them. And even such as have not, are enforced with such arguments, in other places of scripture, as manifestly shew them to require nothing that is not our reasonable service.—In general, many powerful motives are suggested by the word of God, to induce us to set out and to persevere in our spiritual journey. We are told of the danger of continuing in our natural situation, and so warned to flee from the wrath to come.—We are informed that, however disagreeable the way may seem, to those who never made trial of it, the longer we continue upon it, the more desirable it will become; for Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.—We are assured, that if any man draw back God's soul shall have no pleasure in him; whereas, he that endureth to the

end, the same shall be saved.—We are certified, that Christ's yoke is easy and his burden light : that every person who hath forsaken any thing, or lost any thing, or suffered any thing, for his sake, shall have compensation, an hundred fold in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting.—A happy passage through the valley and shadow of death, a glorious resurrection,—a place at the right hand of Christ at his coming,—a public acknowledgment and acquital at his tribunal,—a final presentment of soul and body, blameless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,—a being for ever with the Lord, and being completely like him, as seeing him as he is,—all this, and much more than tongue can tell, or heart conceive, is secured by the promise of God, to all that persevere to the end, in this spiritual journey.

To all this faith gives credit; and, under the influence of these motives, and such others as the word of God suggests, the righteous holds on his way, and he that hath clean hands waxeth stronger and stronger. This I take to be a special part of what the apostle means in the text. 'Were we to be influenced,' would he say, 'in our conduct and manner of life, by motives drawn from the objects of sense, as the rest of the world are, our practice would not be so different from that of other men. But, as faith in the promise of God is the main principle of all our actions; so the motives by which we are influenced are such as faith gathers from his infallible word; and such as could never have been suggested to us, unless by a divine testimony. We know, that, by walking after Christ, in the way of holiness, we expose ourselves to the hatred and ridicule,—to the censures and persecution of men; but we are assured of God's acceptance and approbation.

'We

' We deprive ourselves of the pleasures of sin; but
 ' these we forego, without regret, expecting superior
 ' pleasure in the ways of Wisdom. We may suffer the
 ' loss of earthly enjoyments; but we hope for an in-
 ' corruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. We
 ' may suffer the demolition of this earthly tabernacle;
 ' but we are assured that a better house awaits us, a
 ' building of God, eternal in the heavens. It is true,
 ' that all these motives are drawn from things that
 ' neither we nor any other mortal ever saw: but we
 ' are informed of them by the testimony of the God
 ' of truth; and upon this we have more dependence,
 ' than even upon the testimony of our own senses.'

WE come now to speak a few words concerning the
 negative part of what the text says, about the manner
 of the Christian's walk: *We walk—not by sight.* In-
 terpreters observe, that the word, which we here ren-
 der *sight*, does not properly signify the visive faculty;
 but the outward form or visible things, which is the im-
 mediate object of that faculty. And, that Christians,
 when acting in character, walk not by sight, or accord-
 ing to the appearance of things, is true in a twofold respect.

1st. They walk not by the sight, or appearance of
 those material things, which alone are capable, strict-
 ly speaking, of being seen. In this view, the words
 import the three things following:

1. Material, or seen things are not the principal ob-
 jects of their attention. The men of the world are so
 immersed in sensuality, that they can think of almost
 nothing but what has a tendency to gratify their sen-
 ses. They walk after the sight of their eyes, and that
 is also the desire of their hearts. Their god is their
 belly, and therefore they mind earthly things.—But

as for us, our hearts and affections, and therefore our attention, are turned away from these, and fixed, in some degree, upon those spiritual objects, that, by the gospel, are revealed from faith to faith. Upon these we meditate with pleasure and delight.—We hold it unworthy of persons made for eternity, to employ their precious time, or the greatest part of it, about objects that can only please the sight, or at best be profitable to the mortal part. Such an employment may be suitable to the nature of a beast, that has only an animal life to support, and a temporary existence to provide for; but it is far below the character of an immortal spirit.

2. Things capable of being seen are not the principal objects of their pursuit. It is natural for every dependent being to seek after a happiness adapted,—or which, to it, appears to be adapted—to its constitution. Sin has so far deranged our nature, that we are ignorant of that happiness which is truly adapted to it. Unrenewed men pursue happiness with all their might; but they seek it any where, or every where, except where it is really to be found. Though their views concerning it are often different,—and even opposite to one another, they all concur in seeking it among sensible things. But the Christian is of another spirit. His sensual appetites he labours to subdue. Instead of making provision for the flesh, he crucifies it, with the affections and lusts. And, despising the objects of sight, he makes those spiritual and eternal things which faith discovers—the principal objects of his pursuit. This is elegantly express'd in the last verse of the preceding chapter. *We look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things*
which

which are not seen are eternal. Some observe, that the original word, there rendered to look—signifies properly to take an aim, like one who intends to shoot at a mark. ‘Things that are capable of being seen are not those by which we take our aim. We shoot at a more noble mark; even those things that, being spiritual and invisible, are suited to the nature and capacity of our immortal souls: and, being eternal, will continue to yield satisfaction as long as our souls shall exist.’

3. The motives, by which they are influenced in their walk, are not drawn from visible things. This, we saw, is a principal sense in which they *walk by faith*: and therefore it must also be chiefly in view, when it is said, that they *walk not by sight*. If the motives of their actions were drawn from things that are seen, they would surely follow such a course, as might be calculated to obtain seen advantages,—or, at least, to secure them against visible disadvantages. If they had the esteem of men for their motive, they would practise those things which were most likely to recommend them to men's favour,—instead of those that are sure to procure their hatred. They might enjoy riches and honour, and ease and pleasure, in the way of sin, as well as other men do; if the desire of these had a prevailing influence with them. But the manner of life that they pursue, natively exposes them to troubles and persecutions, and all manner of visible evils. *If in this life only they had hope, they would be of all men most miserable*: and voluntarily to make themselves so—would be the most egregious folly. But no such folly appears in their conduct, when it is considered, that they have an eye to those eternal objects which faith discovers; and in them expect an
ample

ample compensation for all those evils to which they are exposed, in the way that leads to the possession of them.

2dly, Even in respect of those things which they do pursue, they are not influenced, in the pursuit of them, by their own sight, sense or feeling; but by the testimony of God concerning them, received and relied on by faith. Though spiritual things fall not under the cognizance of the outward senses, they are capable of being perceived by the soul, in a manner some way corresponding to that. The mind has faculties that may be compared to the outward senses; but by none of these are you directed in your walk, if you walk as a Christian ought. Corresponding to bodily sight, there is a method of obtaining immediate knowledge of spiritual things—by intuition, or direct personal experience. This you shall attain in the other world, where faith shall be changed into vision. What is now reported to you in the word of God, and therefore perceived by faith, you shall then know by immediate intuition,—as we now know what we see and hear. But this is not the case now. That heavenly house, in which you hope to dwell for ever, you have not yet seen; and therefore, in desiring and longing for it, you cannot be influenced by a personal experience of what it is; but only by the testimony that God has given you concerning it. So it is with regard to all those invisible things, towards which you press, in your daily walk. Your whole persuasion, both of their existence, and of their excellence, depends entirely upon the word of God; and therefore is the fruit of faith, and not of sight.

There is, indeed, an inferior degree of sight, sense or feeling of spiritual things, which may be attained
even

even in this life; and that in two ways: 1. Faith being *the substance of things hoped for*, as well as *the evidence of things not seen* *, contains a kind of anticipation of the happiness of eternity. When a man has an assured persuasion, by faith in the promise of God, that he shall be supremely happy, in the future enjoyment of him, it produces in the soul a present happiness, which bears a resemblance to that which he hopes for. Reflecting upon the exercise of his own faith, and upon that satisfaction of soul which it produces,—a man may be sensible of a present enjoyment of God by faith; and this, though improperly, may be called sensible enjoyment. 2. Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Besides promises respecting mere temporal blessings, there are others relating to such spiritual benefits as must be enjoyed in time; such are the promises of peace of conscience, of joy in the Holy Ghost, &c. Now, a person may feel himself in possession of these blessings; and be as sure of the accomplishment of such promises to himself, as if he could see it with the bodily eye.—In both these cases, the same thing that was an object of faith before, comes to be an object of spiritual sight or sense.

But, even with regard to these, Christians may say, *we walk by faith, and not by sight*. Indeed we are often too much attached to this kind of sight,—and too little disposed to walk by faith, when this is wanting. Like the doubting apostle—Thomas, we will not believe except we see. But as Thomas, in this instance, acted out of character, so do we, when we follow his example. As far as we live like Christians, we believe the promise of God as firmly, when we see
not

* Heb. xi. 1.

not the accomplishment of it, as when we both see and feel it: and the persuasion of its truth has the same influence upon our walk, as if it were confirmed by sense or feeling. If we find it accomplished, or if we see God taking steps toward the accomplishment of it, we are thankful,—and proceed on our journey with the greater alacrity. But though no such things take place,—though every thing, both within us and around us, seem to conspire to render it impossible that ever the word of God should be accomplished, we do not therefore stand still, or go back again; but set forward, always assured that he is *faithful who hath promised, and able also to perform it*. Thus faith continues to have its usual influence upon our walk, even when our sight, sense or feeling runs in direct opposition to it; as appears in the following instances:

I. When a Christian walks in darkness about his spiritual estate, and can attain no sensible assurance of his interest in Christ, or his being within the covenant of grace,—he dares not, on that account, neglect any duty, that is incumbent upon him as a friend or disciple of Christ. The sacrament of the Lord's supper affords a pregnant example. You all know that the sacramental feast is provided only for the friends of Christ; and that he who eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself. When an opportunity of joining in that ordinance presents itself, you endeavour to examine yourself whether you be a friend of Christ or not: but perhaps you find no satisfying evidence that you are. In that case, no doubt, you are much afraid, lest you should be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and so expose yourself to the just judgment of God. If you walk by faith, you will not dare to neglect the duty on that

account. The dying command of Christ, a grateful remembrance of his dying love, and a secret persuasion of the all-sufficiency of his promised grace, will have such influence upon you, that you will rather expose yourself to any danger, than neglect to cast in your mite for keeping up the remembrance of him. The same thing may be said of every similar duty.

2. When difficulties, apparently insurmountable, are seen in the way,—when the Christian is most sensible of his own weakness, and when the help of God, in which he trusts, seems to be, in a great measure, withdrawn,—the influence of faith prevails over that of sense: and, even in that case, he sets forward. When Israel came to the Red sea, they had no way to escape the fury of their enemies, but by going forward; and that, in all human appearance, was impossible. But when Moses, by the commandment of God, spake to the people, that they should go forward,—they did not wait till they saw the waters divided, a way opened through the midst of them, and a wall formed by them on every side. In that case, sight itself would have conspired to assist their faith, and encourage them to obey. But while the sea continued in its ordinary channel; and they had nothing but the word of God to depend upon, for a passage to be opened for them,—they set forward at the command of God, in opposition to the strongest testimony of sight and sense. A similar instance we have in the case of Samson,—a man of much frailty, but of a most heroic faith. God had strengthened him to perform various exploits, against the enemies of his people, which were beyond the power of any man. But Samson, yielding to the blandishments of an harlot, had shamefully betrayed the secret of his God: the Lord had con-

requently departed from him; and he had become a mocking-stock to those who were wont to tremble at his name. In the height of his distress, a new opportunity presented itself, of doing something for the people of God, more advantageous than all that ever he had done before: but the enterprize was impossible to human strength. Two massy pillars supported a roof, upon which lay three thousand men and women; and these were to be pulled down.—His own death was to be the certain consequence of his success. And he had long been mournfully sensible of the Lord's departure. Yet over all these difficulties his faith triumphed, and he succeeded accordingly.—Thus, when sense declares that God has forsaken you, and you feel the mournful effects of his desertion,—faith will confidently depend upon his promised presence and assistance. And your conduct must be regulated by the dictates of faith, in opposition to those of sight. The faith of miracles, indeed, is now ceased. But saving faith will ever produce the same effects with regard to spiritual things, which the other produced in relation to material objects.

3. When the greatest danger is seen to lie in the way of duty; and when sense and reason assure us that the danger cannot be avoided, unless the duty is postponed, the Christian, depending upon the promise of God, despises the danger; and, that he may not be wanting in the performance of his duty, rushes into the jaws of a seen destruction.—Besides the instance of Samson, above mentioned, this observation might be illustrated by that of David. He saw, as well as Saul and all Israel did, that Goliath was a man of war from his youth, that his enormous bulk must be accompanied

accompanied with proportionable strength,—that he was clad, from head to foot, in armour of proof,—and that he had, on his side, a vast advantage, from the terror with which his appearance had struck the whole army of Israel, for forty days before.—He saw as plainly, that himself was an unformed stripling, ignorant of the art of war, covered with no defensive armour, and even incapable of bearing it,—without any thing to defend himself, or annoy his tremendous enemy, save a staff in the one hand, a sling in the other, and five small stones in his scrip. Had he consulted with flesh and blood, he could see nothing before him but certain death, if he should venture to fight with the gigantic Philistine. But the sight of the danger had no influence upon his conduct. His faith encouraged him to follow the call of God; assured, that he who had delivered him *out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear*, would make that uncircumcised Philistine like one of them.—A similar instance of his walking by faith, in opposition to the dictates of sense, is recorded by himself, in the *sixtieth Psalm*, without his seeming to take notice of it. A combination of powerful enemies had invaded the land: God himself had rejected his people, scattered them, and given them wine of astonishment to drink: and when they went forth against the enemy, he seemed to desert them in the conflict,—and went not forth with their armies. Had David walked by sight, he would have concluded that God was taking part with the Syrians and Edomites, and that to go forth against them—would be to rush upon the bosom of God's buckler. But he saw the way of duty clear before him; God had made him captain of his people, and had promised to deliver them by his hand. He had

also given them a banner, and it was to be displayed in the cause of truth; and therefore, no seen danger could prevail with David to desert it. He firmly resolved—not only to repel the invaders, but also to march into Edom, and besiege the fortified city: singing as he went along, in the faith of promised assistance, *through God we shall do valiantly; for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.*

4. When, instead of a present accomplishment of the promise, the Christian sees Divine providence moving in a contrary direction: and the Lord seems to be taking methods to render its accomplishment impossible;—even then he so far overlooks appearances, as to form his whole conduct upon the assured persuasion, that God will still do as he hath said. A clear instance of this we have in Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God. It was expressly promised that Sarah should have a son, whose posterity should inherit the land of Canaan, and of whom the Messiah should come. Yet Abraham was an hundred years old, Sarah was ninety and nine, and under a natural incapacity of bearing children, before this promise was accomplished. After the child was born, his father was expressly told, that he was the son of the promise, and that *in Isaac his seed should be called.* Yet a positive command from God required that this same Isaac should be slain by his father's hand, and offered for a burnt sacrifice upon mount Moriah. Is any person now so blind, as not to see, that if this command is obeyed, it must be impossible that ever the promise should be fulfilled? Yet even this sight had no influence upon the patriarch's conduct. Without hesitation he set himself to obey the rigorous injunction, accounting that God was able to raise his

Isaac from the dead, to be the father of the promised seed. Thus *he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in the faith, giving glory to God* *. There is nothing more common with God, than to exercise the faith of his children, not with delays only, but also with various impediments thrown in the way of the accomplishment of his word. And the more valuable the promised blessing is, the more of this kind usually takes place, before we come to the possession of it. But let not the sight of these things affect your conduct. Continue, *in hope, to believe against hope*: and let your whole walk be influenced by an unshaken persuasion, that God will make all his mountains a way; and that, in due time, the vision will speak, and will not tarry.

IV. WE are now to conclude with the following inferences.

I. From what has been said, we may see, the excellence of the grace of faith, and its usefulness to them that possess it. It not only furnishes much joy and comfort, encourages hope, and leads to contentment with our lot; it also regulates our walk, and animates to a life of holy obedience. As *we walk by faith*, it is impossible to go forward one step in our spiritual journey without it. There are five things, which faith accomplishes, that can be performed in no other way, all serving highly to recommend it.—(1.) It attains the knowledge of things that surpass all created knowledge.—Hence says Paul to his Ephesians, *I bow my knees to—God,—that he would grant,—that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith:—that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints,—and to know the love*
of

* Rom. iv. 20.

of Christ, which passeth knowledge *. That the love of Christ really passes all the knowledge of men and angels, every person will be ready to confess, that ever had a sight of it. But, from this passage it appears, that, through Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith, all saints know, and even, in a sense, comprehend it. The word of God gives them information of it, which they could derive from no other quarter. This information faith depends upon: and thereby acquires a knowledge of it, that, in comparison of what is derived from all other sources, may be called comprehensive.

—(2.) It believes things, that, upon the principles of unenlightened reason, are incredible. Reason says it is incredible that the dead should be raised; because from privation to act there is no return: but to faith it seems not at all incredible that God should raise the dead. To reason it may seem incredible that all this visible world should have been created out of nothing; because it is among the first principles of reason, that of nothing—nothing can be made: but *through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear* †. Still more incredible it may seem to reason, that in one indivisible essence there should be three distinct persons, of the same glory, power, and godhead: but faith is assured that *there are three, that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one* ‡. In these and all similar cases, the true believer, with the utmost justice, concludes, that human reason, in its present corrupt state, may be mistaken; but the word of God can never be untrue.—(3.) Faith can bear things, that, in all human appearance, are intolerable.

* Eph. iii. 14.—19.

† Heb. xi. 3.

‡ 1 John. v. 7.

intolerable. The sufferings to which many Christians have been exposed, in the cause of Christ, have been such as human nature could not have subsisted under, if it had not been supported by the power of God. But God has promised to strengthen, help, and uphold them with the right hand of his righteousness. In such a promise they trust, and are helped. There are few among them who have not occasion, at one time or other, to say, as David, *I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living* *.—(4.) It sees things invisible. Paul and his brethren not only saw things that were not seen by others, but they looked stedfastly and habitually at *things that are not seen,—and are eternal*. And of Moses it is said, that *he endured, as seeing him that is invisible* †. In a word.—(5.) Faith performs things impossible. Things simply impossible, or that include a contradiction in their own nature, even the power of God cannot perform; because such a work would necessarily destroy itself. But many things that are impossible with men, are possible with God. And whatever is possible with God, is also possible to faith; because it is the property of this grace, to employ the power of God for accomplishing its purposes. Hence that remarkable saying of Christ.—*All things are possible to him that believeth* ‡.—How excellent, how useful, how honourable is this grace of faith! If you wish to be enlightened, strengthened, exalted, above the reach of nature,—above the level of natural men,—pray for this grace, live in the exercise of it, and strive daily to grow in it. Let your petition constantly be, with the disciples, *Lord, increase our faith*.

2. See the sin, the folly and unreasonableness of infidelity*

Psal. xxvii. 13.

† Heb. xi. 27.

‡ Mark ix. 23.

fidelity. In all ages and places of the Church, there have been many, who were strangers to true faith, though they made a profession of it. But, in our degenerate times, there are some, who are not ashamed to avow that they have no faith. They deny that the scriptures are the word of God, and refuse their assent to the truths contained in them; unless as far as they are confirmed by human reason. These men walk by sight, and not by faith: some of them tell us plainly, that they will believe nothing in religion, but what they see. We have not time, at present, to answer their cavils, or to demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion,—though we know it to be capable of demonstration. We would only beg leave to suggest to them, if any such are present, the two following considerations:

(1.) Were you to act upon the same principles in the common affairs of life, as you do in matters of religion,—it would be simply impossible for you to subsist in the world. Are there not many things, relative to the most important concerns of life, that you necessarily must believe, upon evidence—not better than what you have for the truth of Christianity? Abstracting from the divine testimony, upon which our faith rests, you have the leading facts, upon which Christianity is grounded,—attested by a competent number of eye and ear witnesses. If their testimony concerning the birth, the miracles, the death and resurrection of Christ be true, our religion cannot be false. And if you reject their testimony, how can you admit other facts, that are not better attested? How do you know, for instance, that ever there were such men as Alexander or Cæsar,—as Plato or Aristotle? How are you sure that there are such places as Paris

or Vienna, if you was never out of Britain? Yea, how can you know who are your nearest relations? For all these, and many other things of a similar nature, you can have no evidence but the testimony of fellow-creatures. Yet, what would be the consequence, if you did not both believe them, and conduct yourselves by that belief? Or what pretence can you have for believing these things, and refusing to believe others, that are equally, or even better attested?

(2.) Whatever objections you may have, to the truth of the Christian religion; you cannot pretend to prove that it is not true: otherwise you go further than any of your brethren ever did, so far as we know. And therefore, you must grant, that it is possible it may be true. Supposing it *not* to be true, we who profess to believe it—are in no worse circumstances than you are. We live as happily in this world as you do; though our views of happiness are not the same as yours: and you cannot pretend that our faith makes our prospect for eternity worse than yours is. Yea, the hope of eternal life which we entertain, whether true or false, affords us a happiness that you can have no experience of,—a happiness that we would not exchange for all that you possess.—It is true, that some who profess our religion, disgrace that profession by a life unworthy of it; but we dare appeal to ourselves, if Christians, in general, are worse members of society than the rest of mankind; or if there is any thing in their religion, that tends to make them so.—But supposing the Christian religion to be true, the odds is greatly against you. If the scriptures are the word of God, and if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then the following words which he spake, must contain an infallible truth, *he that believeth and is bap-*

tized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned *. Eternal misery is the best that you have to hope for upon this supposition. And how dare you continue to reject Christianity at such a venture? I dare appeal to your own consciences if you can wholly divest yourselves of apprehensions, that possibly the scriptures may be true. And if you find it so, whether will you flee for help, in the solemn day when these words of Christ shall be finally verified? Or upon whom will you leave the blame, if you perish for ever? Take advice, therefore: I am sure the time is approaching, when you will consider it as the advice of a friend. Lay aside your prejudices: examine the matter with candour and impartiality. Cease to follow the impulse of your own lusts, and learn, after the example of Paul, who was once as great an enemy to Christianity as you can be,—to live *by faith*, and *not by sight*.

3. See the sin and folly of unbelief. Though every infidel is an unbeliever, there are many unbelievers who are not infidels. Yea there is much unbelief in the exercise of every Christian, while in this imperfect state. Unbelief consists in the want of a due dependence upon the testimony of God: and, above all other sins, it is exceeding sinful. It denies the faithfulness of God, and tends to make him a liar. This is, upon the matter, to deny his existence; for surely a liar can be no God.—It is the mother of all other sins; and has the same influence upon the life of all sinners, as faith has upon that of the saints. It even turns into sins—all the pretended duties of those in whom it reigns; for *without faith it is impossible to please God*. Yea, so far as it prevails in the people of
 God,

* Mark xv. 16.

God, it spoils all that they do, and, for the time, turns saints into sinners. While we walk by faith, we keep the way of God's commandments; but, as often as we walk in unbelief, we turn aside from God and from happiness. This was the bitter spring of that first sin, which ruined mankind; and, wherever the word of God comes, it lies, to this day, at the root of all the sin that is committed.

Its folly is not less than its sinfulness. By it we deprive ourselves of all the joy and comfort,—of all the conduct and direction,—of all the present enjoyment, and of all the hope of futurity, that may be drawn from the word of God. It eats the substance out of all the blessings of life, and puts the curse of God into them. It aggravates all the miseries of life, and robs us of all that might sustain or comfort us under them. It binds upon us the guilt of all other sins; and, in regard to those in whom it reigns, it renders all that God has done for the salvation of sinners—totally abortive. It excludes them from all communion with God in his ordinances here, and effectually precludes their entrance into his rest hereafter. Yea it sinks them deeper in condemnation than those who perish in any other sin. Even for Sodom and Gomorrah, it shall be more tolerable, in the day of judgment, than for unbelievers. To say all in one word: after all that has been said about the sin against the Holy Ghost, which can never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come,—the finishing ingredient of it,—the only thing that can make that sin complete is final unbelief. To every one in this assembly is the word of God come. The Holy Ghost speaks to you, in this gospel, as really as if there were not another on earth to hear it. And if

you continue to reject his testimony and his counsel, by unbelief; you cannot die a common death: I mean, you cannot be subject to a common degree of everlasting misery. Hell will be for you, as Nebuchadnezzar's furnace for the three children,—heated seven times more, than it is for other sinners. If you either love God or your own souls, beware of unbelief.

And beware of doubting. This,—however little it is attended to,—is but another name for unbelief. And as much doubting as obtains with you, concerning the truth of any word of God, so much unbelief are you chargeable with in his sight. God is infinite in faithfulness; and every word of his must be infallibly true. Your assurance of the truth of any proposition ought to correspond to the strength of the evidence, by which it is confirmed. And surely, there is no kind of evidence comparable to the testimony of God. Your senses may be imposed upon; every juggler can do it. The testimony of mortals may be false; and all men may be liars. Demonstration itself, in the mouth of erring mortals—may deceive. Even the angels of God have nothing in their own nature, to secure them against becoming liars. But nothing can be conceived more impossible, than that God should speak a falsehood. It is therefore impossible, that your faith in his word should correspond to the evidence upon which it rests; unless it rise to *full assurance*. Assurance is an essential ingredient in the nature of divine faith.—You may doubt of your present interest in the promise of God; of this you can never have such assurance, as not to need to examine it anew; but to doubt of the truth of the promise itself is really to disbelieve it.

4. See the sin and folly of too much attachment to sensible

sensible enjoyments. I do not speak of those enjoyments only, which affect the bodily senses; though, it is to be feared, that the inordinate pursuit of these —proves the ruin of the greatest part of those who perish. For a Christian willingly to indulge himself in this, is, so far, to renounce his true character; and to live by sight and not by faith in the worst sense of the word. *To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

But what I mainly intend, is that kind of spiritual fight or sense, which was explained on a former head; a sense of one's having a present interest in the promise, of his enjoying a begun accomplishment of it, —or, of his having communion with God by faith. To this the greatest part of exercised Christians are too much attached. I would not be mistaken; I neither mean that the knowledge of your interest in the covenant of God is not attainable,—nor that it is not your duty to seek after it. It is expressly required that you give all *diligence, to make your calling and election sure.* Many Christians have had the Spirit of God bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God: no Christian should satisfy himself without it. To what other purpose is the duty of self-examination so often, and so strongly inculcated? But, as this knowledge is not the attainment of every Christian, and as God may have holy and wise reasons for with-holding it,—it should always be sought after with such a measure of resignation to the will of God, as to be able to wait, without impatience, till he see meet to grant it. Your attachment to this kind of sensible enjoyment may be lawful, while it is accompanied with this resignation.

But it rises to excess; and you are guilty both of
sin

fin and folly, in all or any of the following cases.—

(1.) When you give yourself up to discouragement and down-casting on account of the want of it. The ground of your joy, as well as of your faith, is all without you. And you must learn to rejoice in the Lord, even when you find nothing about yourself but causes of mourning. An eternity of sensible enjoyment awaits you; surely you may submit to live by faith for a few days.—(2.) When, on account of your want of this, you indulge yourself in the neglect of any duty, that you would think incumbent upon you if you had it; excepting the single duty of being thankful for it. Your not being sensible of your being in a gracious state will not even excuse you from a compliance with the dying command of Christ, when Providence gives an opportunity; nor will it prevent your being accepted in that solemn exercise, if you endeavour to do it, in the strength of the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and in a believing remembrance of him.—(3.) When you cast away your confidence, or refuse to believe the promise, because you dare not say with certainty, that you have a present interest in it. Whether you are in a gracious or in a graceless state, this makes no difference in respect of the access you have to Christ and the promise. The apostle Peter said to a mixed multitude *the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call* *. The same thing says the Holy Ghost to every mixed multitude, and to every individual, without discrimination. It is only by a believing improvement of this unrestrained access to the promise, that ever you can obtain an interest in it. But to make your interest in the promise the ground or condition of your access to it, is to turn
the

* Acts ii. 39.

the Christian life upside down,—and to cast an effectual bar in the way of your obtaining an interest in it, or profiting by your access to it.—(4) When you improve your assurance of an interest in Christ, as a ground of your faith, or of your boldness in coming to the throne of grace. It is Christ, exhibited to you in the promise of God, and nothing within you, that is the object and ground of your faith. Sensible enjoyments may be an encouragement to weak faith; and hence it is, that they are most frequently bestowed upon young Christians, while they are yet babes in grace. But if ever you claim, or expect any thing from God because you have these, or once had them,—if you use a boldness in coming to God, either by faith or prayer, that you durst not use if you had them not,—you shamefully abuse your privilege; and it is kind, as well as just in God, to withhold them from you.—(5.) When, because you cannot be sure that you are in Christ, you certainly conclude that you are a stranger to him; and so give yourself up to unbelieving discouragement or despair; and rob God of the glory due for all that he hath done for you. If you find no certain evidence that you are presently in a state of grace,—unless you have certain evidence that you are not, you ought to suspend your judgment; till, by renewed actings of faith on Christ and the promise of God; you make your calling, and so your election sure.

5. See various marks by which the real followers of Christ may be distinguished from the rest of mankind.—They are all sensible that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth; and are habitually *travelling towards the place, of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you.* And, as they make progress towards eternity,

ternity, they strive to make progress in holiness, that they may be fit for the happiness of the eternal state. —It is their constant aim to *walk by faith and not by sight*. They receive the gospel, not as the word of men; but, as it is in truth, the word of God. They receive it as the word of God to them in particular; embracing its gracious offers, claiming as their own all that it exhibits. They say of the Lord, he is *my God*; and of Christ, *my beloved is mine and I am his*. —They trust in God for the performance of his word, and venture their all upon it, for time and eternity; knowing that he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.—Having received Christ Jesus the Lord, they are concerned to walk in him; improving him daily as the sole medium of communication between God and them,—and running in the way of his commandments with delight.—Sensible that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps, they constantly make application to God for leading in the way of duty; and they depend upon his gracious promise, that he will guide them with his counsel, until he receive them to his glory.—Upon him also they depend for strength to accomplish their journey; like David, they go in the strength of the Lord God; making mention of his righteousness even of his only.—The inheritance towards which they walk is God himself. Him they have chosen as their portion; and in the enjoyment of him only they look for a happiness commensurate to all their capacities and desires.—They neither suffer themselves to be diverted from the prosecution of their journey, by the prospect of seen advantages,—nor by the fear of those evils and dangers, that are seen in the way of duty; but, setting these glorious objects which faith

discovers, in opposition to all the objects of sight or sense, they press forward in God's way,—assured that he will compensate every loss that they may sustain, deliver them from every danger,—and give them experience of the truth of his own word, that *he that walketh uprightly walketh surely*. To sum up all in one word—Sensible of prevailing unbelief, and mourning before God on that account, as well as on account of what they feel of an undue attachment to the objects of sense,—it is their constant and habitual aim, to *walk by faith, and not by sight*. If such is your exercise, you have reason to be assured, that you are a disciple of Christ : and according to your faith it shall finally be unto you.

6. To conclude, We may see from this subject, the duty of all who profess the Christian religion, or have the word of God among their hands : It is to follow the example of these primitive teachers of Christianity, and *walk by faith, not by sight*. Beware of considering yourselves as in a state of rest. In this world you cannot long remain. If you do not walk forward voluntarily, towards that better country which the gospel discovers, you must be driven towards that place of eternal misery, *where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*. Set not your heart upon the objects of sight or sense. These are all temporal and transitory ; and even those eyes, by which they are seen, shall, in a little, be closed in dust.—Let not your walk be regulated by any observations, however sagacious they may appear, that have been made, by yourselves or others, upon the things that are seen : but let the word of God be the sole rule of every part of your conduct. And let every part of your deportment be influenced by a lively faith of all that the

Lord hath spoken.—Let the faith of his authority, interposed in his law, point out to you the way in which you ought to walk: Make his statutes your counsellors in the house of your pilgrimage. Let the faith of his threatenings guard you against venturing on forbidden ground; for these will be found as true as any other part of his testimony. And none shall escape the execution of them, who continues in the way of sin, or flees not for refuge to Christ, as *the Lord our righteousness*. Let an unshaken faith of the doctrines of his holy word, fortify you against all the efforts of evil men and seducers, however plausible their tenets, or however consonant to the dictates of carnal sense or corrupt reason. In a word, Let a lively faith in his gracious word of promise, animate you to prosecute your journey in a manner becoming your character: Thus, in the midst of weakness, you will be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus: In the midst of sorrow you will rejoice evermore: In circumstances the most hopeless, and against all human probability, you will be sober and hope to the end; you will continue to love the Lord your God, when all things, in the course of his providence, seem to be against you; and, even when you lie among the feet of your spiritual enemies, you will sing a song of victory and triumph, assured that the Lord will drive them all out before you, by little and little.

S E R M O N XIII.

Holiness inculcated on Gospel Principles.

2 COR. vii. 1.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

IN all ages, the principal objection against the doctrine of salvation by divine grace, through faith, and without the works of the law, has been, that it encourages licentiousness, and is inimical to holiness. Hence the advocates of the legal scheme have always boasted of their attachment to holiness,—and they who stand up in defence of the doctrine of grace—have been charged with denying that holiness is necessary to salvation. No charge can be more unjust.—Some, no doubt, who pretend to believe this doctrine, may abuse it as an encouragement to sin; for, as early as the days of the apostles, there were some *ungodly men*, who *turned the grace of God into lasciviousness* *. But these men's practice, whatever their pretensions be, affords a decisive proof, that they neither believe the scripture doctrine about salvation by grace, nor properly understand it. For it is a peculiar excellency of

* Jude, verse. 4.

this doctrine, that it not only requires a perfection of holiness, but likewise points out the only method in which it can be attained,—and furnishes all the motives, by which any of mankind can ever be truly influenced in the pursuit of it. In order to set this matter in a proper light, and to vindicate that cardinal doctrine of the gospel, from the vile aspersions that enemies have cast upon it,—it will not be improper, after having attempted an explication of the method of salvation by grace, and of the use of faith in conducting us to salvation, in some preceding discourses,—now to point out the influence that this doctrine has, in producing evangelical holiness,—as it is intimated to us, by the Spirit of God, in the text now read.

In our natural estate, we are all as an unclean thing. And the best of saints, while in a state of mortality, have much of their natural filthiness remaining about them. To purge us effectually from that corruption must be the work of the Holy Ghost: but in this work we ourselves must be active; for though we can do nothing, without him, it is equally true, that he will do nothing in this matter, without stirring us up to be workers together with him. In our endeavours to this effect, our principal motives must be drawn, neither from any advantages that we may hope to gain by those endeavours, nor from any evils which, in this way, we may hope to shun. We ought neither to be influenced by the hope of any reward to be purchased by our holiness,—nor by the fear of that punishment, to which sin necessarily must expose us; but by sincere gratitude for those benefits that God has bestowed upon us already, and by a lively faith in those promises, by which all future happiness is secured to us. These promises are left and given to all that hear the

the

the gospel ; and all that hear the gospel are bound, as well as the Christians in Corinth, to improve them, as the strongest motives to the study and practice of holiness.

In the text we may notice the following particulars :

1. The tender compellation, by which these Corinthians are here addressed—*dearly beloved*. However deficient some of them were, in affection for this apostle, he was their spiritual father in Christ, as he elsewhere intimates * : And still, notwithstanding all their faults and miscarriages, he retained a paternal affection for them. The relation between a minister of the gospel and the people among whom he is called to labour, should be cemented, like all other relations, by a mutual love, corresponding to the closeness and intimacy of it.—Where this is wanting on the part of the minister, his work becomes a burden to him, and he soon remits in his diligence. And where it is wanting on the part of the people,—they readily transfer to his ministrations, that contempt or aversion that they have to himself, and there must, in all probability, be an end of all his usefulness among them. How careful should both ministers and people be, to guard against every thing that tends to impair their mutual affection for one another? And how thankful to the providence of God, when nothing of this kind is suffered to take place?

2. The duty to which the Corinthians are here exhorted, and we together with them. We are called to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness*.

3. The

* 1 Cor. iv. 14, 15.

3. The manner in which the apostle urges the exhortation.—He speaks not in the second person, but in the first, including himself with them; *let us cleanse*, &c. The same exhortation that he gives to them, he also takes to himself. Those duties that are incumbent upon private Christians, are likewise incumbent upon ministers of the gospel, as far as competent to their places. And we can never expect that our exhortations will be duly complied with by our people, unless we are careful to recommend by our example, the same duties which we doctrinally inculcate.

4. The manner in which the exhortation is to be complied with, and the duty performed, *in the fear of God*. Not that slavish fear, which is the fruit of the spirit of bondage, and which is the chief principle of all those apparently good actions that are performed by unregenerate persons; but that holy filial fear, which is the genuine fruit of the Spirit of adoption,—is consistent with filial love, and has influence upon all the regular services of the children of God.

5. The motive, by which this exhortation is enforced, drawn from those promises which he had recited in the last verses of the preceeding chapter. *Having these promises*, &c. It is the duty of public teachers in the Church, to make known to their hearers both the precepts and threatenings of the law, as well as the promises of the gospel. This may be of use to fright them from the open practice of vice, to shew them the danger of their natural estate, and, through the blessing of God, to drive them to Christ for deliverance. But from the law, as armed with a penal sanction, no effectual motive can be drawn, to enforce evangelical obedience. No man will ever cleanse himself from any kind of spiritual filthiness, nor arrive at
perfection

perfection in holiness,—nor, indeed, at any degree of true holiness, unless his leading motive is drawn from the precious promises of the gospel.

It is only proposed, as the Lord may be pleased to assist, to offer you a few thoughts, for the further illustration of the *second*, *fourth*, and *fifth* of these; and then, passing the other two particulars, to conclude with some improvement.

I. The *first* thing to be spoken of is the duty here enjoined. This, in general, is self-sanctification. Now, sanctification, as our standards teach us, is the work of God's free grace; and therefore, can only be performed by his Holy Spirit. Yet, in this and various other passages of scripture, it is required of us as a duty; and that chiefly for two reasons:

I. Because the law of God necessarily requires it. That law, even before sin entered into the world, prohibited every species of moral pollution, and required the utmost perfection of holiness,—in heart and life,—in nature and practice. Though, by the entrance of sin, we lost our power to obey,—God neither lost his authority to command, nor did the law of God lose its binding obligation. Not only was it man's duty to continue holy, as God made him at the first,—but now that we have lost our primitive holiness, the same law, still requiring holiness as before, must necessarily bind us to purge ourselves from all the pollution that we have contracted,—and return to that estate of integrity, in which we were originally created. This the law of works requires of all that are under it, on pain of eternal damnation. And as the law of Christ, for the matter of it, is the same with the other, it requires the

the same thing of all that are his subjects ; for *it is written, be ye holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy* *.

2. Because, when the Holy Ghost comes to accomplish this work, he always does it in a way of stirring up the person to diligence and activity in the duty which is incumbent upon him in this respect. Thus we are made a kind of instruments, in promoting his gracious design in ourselves. In justification we are wholly passive ; because, this being a judicial deed, past in the court of heaven, none can be active in it, but he whose prerogative it is, to have power to forgive sins. In regeneration also, which, indeed, is the beginning of sanctification, we must be passive ; because we can perform none of the functions of spiritual life, while we continue dead in trespasses and sins. But the moment that the principle of life is implanted, the soul begins to be active ; and it continues to be a co-worker with God, in every part of its own sanctification. *We work out our own salvation with fear and trembling ; and yet it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* We cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; yet he sprinkles us with clean water, and cleanseth us from all our filthiness and from all our idols. We gradually perfect holiness, in the fear of God ; though it is he that efficaciously makes us perfect in every good work, to do his will. We are diligent, through his grace, in our duty ; while he stirs us up to that diligence, strengthens us for it, gives success to our endeavours, and, by his own irresistible hand, accomplishes that to which our endeavours could never reach.

I

Now,

* Lev. xix. 2.

Now, sanctification consists of two parts, usually called *mortification* and *vivification*: and we must be active in both. As Christ was active and voluntary in dying for us; so must we be in dying daily to sin: and as he was active in his own resurrection from the dead, so must we in rising and living more and more unto righteousness. Of both these branches of sanctification the text speaks; and accordingly, we are exhorted,

1st, To the duty of mortification; which is here expressed by our cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. For understanding this part of the exhortation, the following things are to be observed:

By all sin we contract filthiness and pollution, as well as guilt. The guilt of sin exposes us to condemnation and punishment; and the filth of it renders us hateful, and loathsome in the sight of God. As we come into the world guilty, through the imputation of Adam's first sin, so we are born filthy and polluted, as being partakers of his corrupt nature. Every actual sin that we commit, as it adds to our guilt, renders us also more vile and polluted; so that the longer we continue in sin, the more filthy we become. Never any sinner got a proper discovery of himself, but he was made sensible of his pollution,—and disposed to cry out before God,—*Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee?*

This filthiness has infected every part of human nature. Both soul and body are polluted. Hence we read, in the text, of the filthiness, both *of the flesh and of the spirit*. These two words, as opposed to one another, are to be understood in different senses, in different parts of scripture. Sometimes the flesh signifies

fies the ordinary course of nature, and the spirit is the saving operation of the Holy Ghost. So says our Lord to Nicodemus; *that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* *. At other times the flesh signifies the unrenewed part of the man,—or the remainders of natural corruption in believers;—and the spirit, the renewed part,—or the gracious principle, implanted by the Spirit of God, in the day of regeneration. In this sense our apostle says to his Galatians, *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary, the one to the other* †. But in neither of these senses can the words be understood here; as in both these, the spirit is incapable of any filthiness. We are therefore to take them in the most literal sense, as meant of the soul and the body; the last of which is literally flesh, and the first is spirit.

With regard to the body,—being a piece of matter, it may be thought incapable of spiritual—or moral pollution. And, doubtless, so it would, if it subsisted by itself. But, being united to a rational soul, it is a part of a human person, who is a subject of moral government; and every part of the rational person is defiled. The members of the body, which ought to be employed as instruments of righteousness unto holiness, are only fit, in the corrupt state, to be instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.—The body has its appetites and desires, which are common to us with the beasts that perish; and these are corrupted, as well as those of the soul. In a mere animal, these appetites can neither be morally good nor evil; because the animal can be subject to no law. But in a rational subject, these appetites must be sinful, as far as they

* John iii. 6.

† Gal. v. 17.

they transgress the law of God, or lead to transgressions of it. And indeed a great part of the filthiness of our corrupt nature, consists in a disposition to gratify these appetites, in a manner prohibited by the law of God, and ruinous to the dearest interests of the immortal soul.

With regard to the soul, or rational spirit, that also is become altogether filthy. Its whole constitution is depraved; and its whole exercise, while in an unrenewed state, tends to render it more polluted. Its extensive desires are all perverted; being set upon sinful and vain objects. All its faculties are depraved. The understanding is become a mass of darkness, ignorance, and confusion. The will is stubborn and rebellious, set in direct opposition to the sovereign will of God. The affections are all misplaced: We love what we ought to hate; and hate him who, above all things, ought to be the supreme object of our love and esteem. The proper order of these faculties is perverted; the affections blind the understanding, and tyrannize over the will. That which ought to be the leading faculty is implicitly led by those which ought to follow its dictates; and that faculty which boasts of being always free, is held in abject bondage to sin and Satan. The image of God, which was originally stamped upon the soul, is defaced, and the image of Satan is erected in its place. Thus man, that was the glory, as well as the governor of the lower world—is become the vilest part of the visible creation; and the only part of it that is an abomination in the sight of him that made it.

Though the cleansing of the whole man, from this spiritual filthiness must be a work beyond the power and the skill of any mere creature; yet there are va-

rious things incumbent upon us, by which we may actively contribute to the gaining of this desirable end. To this purpose, let us daily betake ourselves, by renewed actings of faith, to the blood of Jesus Christ, as the fountain that God hath opened, for sin and for uncleanness; improving it—in its sanctifying—as well as in its justifying efficacy. Let us carefully abstain from all those outward acts of sin, by which our corruptions might be gratified, nourished and strengthened; thus let us starve our filthy appetites, instead of making provision for the flesh, as we have too often done, to fulfil it in the lusts thereof.—Let us abstain from sinful thoughts, imaginations, purposes and affections, and take every method to cross, to mortify, and disappoint our corrupt desires; thus crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts, that we may live.—Let us earnestly pray to God, for his sanctifying Spirit; knowing, that no earthly father can be more disposed to give good gifts to his children, than our heavenly Father is to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.—Let us confidently trust in God, that, according to his promise, he may cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols; mixing our faith with constant and fervent prayer, that he may do as he hath said.—And if we are favoured with the motions of the Holy Ghost to this effect, let us cherish them with the utmost care. Beware of resisting or grieving the Holy Spirit,—rejecting his counsel, or refusing to hearken to his voice. If he, in any degree, opens your understanding to know your duty, or shines upon his own word, as thereby to give you warning against any sin,—see that you walk in his light. If you follow your own corrupt inclinations, in opposition to the dictates of conscience, and to the voice of
the

the Spirit of God, in his word,—he may justly be provoked to give you up to the lusts of your own heart; and to say concerning you,—*he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.*

2dly, We are exhorted to the duty of vivification, or living unto righteousness, here expressed by *perfecting holiness*. Concerning this we may observe the following things :

Holiness is that perfection which is opposed to moral impurity. In scripture it is represented as the glory of the divine nature. *Who is like unto thee?* says Moses, *glorious in holiness* *. Among creatures, it is that which renders a rational being agreeable in the sight of God, and fit to be employed in his service. Though it is a positive perfection, it is difficult to give any description of it, that does not convey a negative idea. It consists not barely in freedom from spiritual filthiness; but is opposed to it, as light is opposed to darkness. As darkness is the privation of light, so defilement is the privation of holiness. Every corruption has an opposite grace. And grace does not barely consist in freedom from corruption; but includes something positive, in opposition to it. Thus faith is something real and positive, diametrically opposite to unbelief. Love to God is a positive habit of the soul, in opposition to that enmity, which is natural to the carnal mind. And, in like manner, holiness is a positive quality, constituting a principal branch of the image of God, and the conformity of a rational creature to God's will of approbation.—Thus holiness is not only something required of us by the law of God, it is something highly ornamental to our nature. Hence we read of *the beauty of holiness* †. Visible beauty is not
more

* Exod. xv. 11.

† Psal. xxix. 2.

more pleasing or agreeable to the outward eye, than holiness is in the eyes of God, and of all who are endued with spiritual discerning. Our Lord himself compares the practice of holiness to a shining light; *let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven**. And as God himself is glorious in holiness, I have no doubt but perfect holiness will constitute a principal part,—if not the very essence of that glory, with which the saints will be adorned in the heavenly world.

This holiness is not only a thing absolutely necessary to the happiness of a rational being, but is itself a principal branch of happiness. That it is necessary to happiness is clear from various considerations. There is no happiness, adequate to the desires of a rational soul, without the enjoyment of God; and this can never be attained without holiness; for the scripture testifies, and reason itself confirms the testimony, that *without holiness no man can see the Lord* †. Indeed, without it no man can sincerely desire to see him. Unholy desires are fixed upon impure objects; and in God these desires can find no gratification. As happiness can never be perfect, without the gratification of all the person's desires, it is manifest that an unholy person never can be happy. While he continues possessed of a rational soul, his desires must be infinite; nor can any thing satisfy them but an infinite object. Impure desires can never find an infinite object to fix upon; for nothing unholy can be infinite.—That holiness itself is a branch of happiness is equally manifest; for as, on the one hand, every person who has got a proper discovery of his own filthiness—is miser-

able,

* Matth. v. 16.

† Heb. xii. 14.

able, and counts himself wretched because he is unholy; so, on the other hand, every one who has seen the beauty of holiness, desires to be adorned with it; and while this desire is not gratified, the person cannot be completely happy.

The original standard of all holiness is in the nature of God. What is conformable to that infinite nature is holy; and what is contrary to it must be impure and unholy. But as the nature of God is not perfectly understood by any creature, nor is capable of being so,—it is impossible for us to judge of our holiness immediately by that standard.—For this reason, God has given us, in his holy law, a transcript of his nature, adapted to our capacities; and this is the rule of all holiness to mankind. As broad as that law is, so extensive is holiness. It must reach to the inward as well as the outward man. It must adorn the nature, influence the exercise of the heart, and appear in the life and conversation. Perfect holiness includes an unblemished conformity to the law of God in all these respects.—Hence it is evident, that perfect holiness can never be attained in this life. There is a degree of spiritual filthiness about every one of Adam's posterity in a mortal state; so that we all need the first, as well as the second part of this exhortation. David saw *an end of all perfection*, because the *law of God is exceeding broad*. Paul acknowledged that he had not yet *attained*, nor was *already perfect*. The apostle James plainly says, that *in many things we all offend**. How comes it then, that some, in our day, who profess more attachment to the scriptures, and more zeal for them than others, maintain a possibility of being perfect; while, at the same time, they deny the perseverance

* James iii. 2.

rance of saints? Is the transition then so easy, from perfect holiness back to the gulph of spiritual defilement, in which we are sunk by nature? These men, —we may say it without being uncharitable, neither know themselves, nor the law of God, nor the gospel. I know that Job is said to have been *a perfect and an upright man*; but that he was not perfect in this sense, is plain from his afterwards cursing his day. The perfection ascribed to him was the same with uprightness, or godly sincerity; and in the same sense is the word used, whenever it is ascribed to all, or to any of the people of God in this world.

Yet, to perfect holiness every man ought to aspire; and every genuine Christian will aspire. In the text we are expressly required to *perfect holiness*. ‘But why require of us an impossibility? For us to perfect holiness is not only impossible by any strength of our own; but it is impossible by the help of any grace, that we can expect in this world.’ There is nothing unreasonable in the demand, nor any thing foolish in the attempt.—Every argument that enforces holiness at all, pleads equally for the perfection of it. The broad law of God requires it; and without it we never can be conformable to that unerring rule.—It is absolutely necessary to perfect happiness; and as no man can satisfy himself with an imperfect happiness, no man can act as becomes a rational creature, without aiming at perfect holiness. As much as our holiness is imperfect, so much pollution must remain about us; so much spiritual deformity must continue upon the soul; and it must be, so far, unfit for the full enjoyment of God.—Besides, in aiming at perfection, we may attain somewhat more, than if we aimed only at something short of it. If a man shoots at a mark, that is fairly

within his reach, he does not think it necessary to exert his whole force ; on the contrary, he may restrain himself through fear of shooting his arrow beyond the mark. But he who aims at something that he thinks beyond his reach, will strain himself to the utmost, that he may come as near to the mark as possible.—To this mark of perfection every Christian will come at the last, though he cannot in this world ; and he must come to it, by means of constant and habitual pressing towards it.—You are running a race, Christian. And would any reasonable man desist from running, because one should tell him that he could not attain the prize till his course was finished ; or that he could not reach the goal, till he had gone over the ground. You must be perfect when you come to the heavenly world ; but this you cannot be, unless in the way of pressing after it while you continue here.

As our cleansing from filthiness, so, more especially, the perfecting of holiness in us—must be the work of God. The *Holy Spirit* is not so denominated, on account of any holiness about him, that is not to be found in the other persons of the adorable Godhead ; for they are all infinite in this, as well as in every other perfection. But this epithet belongs to his personal designation, on account of his peculiar agency in our sanctification. In various passages of scripture, God claims it as his sole prerogative, to sanctify his people. And this we ought ever to bear in mind, in all our endeavours to sanctify ourselves. *Sanctify yourselves therefore, says God, and be ye holy ; for I am holy. And ye shall keep my statutes and do them ; I am the Lord which sanctify you* *.

*

3 N

tion,

* Lev. xx. 8.

tion, never have any dependence upon your own endeavours, nor expect to have success in them,—unless in as far as the hand of God is employed in sanctifying you. If you do,—after you have washed yourself *with snow water, and made your hands*, in your own apprehension, *never so clean*, the Lord will *plunge you in the ditch, and your own clothes shall abhor you*. If ever you have any degree of success in such endeavours, beware of imputing it, in whole or in part, to yourself. Say continually *not unto us, O Lord, not to us; but unto thy name give glory*.

Yet, besides what is incumbent upon you, towards cleansing yourselves from filthiness, there are likewise various things, which you may, and ought to do, in order to your making progress in holiness, and arriving at perfection in due time.—Make continual application, by faith and prayer, to that infinite fulness of grace and strength, that God has made to dwell in Christ, for all those supplies that are necessary to enable you to be holy. He is made of God unto you, not only *wisdom and righteousness*—but *also sanctification and redemption*; and you may as soon find a righteousness about yourself, sufficient to answer all the demands of the law,—without being indebted to Christ for it,—as you may attain the smallest degree of evangelical holiness, without deriving it from him. If you would run successfully, in this spiritual race, you must always do it—*looking unto Jesus, as the author and finisher of your faith* *.—Strive to live in the constant exercise of all those graces, which constitute that inward holiness of heart, in which you wish to grow. The weapon that is seldom used gathers rust. Every habit is strengthened by exercise; and, on the contrary,

* Heb. xii. 1.

rary, is weakned by neglect. Continue in the exercise of that love to God, which is the principle of all practical holiness; and is therefore called *the fulfilling of the holy law* of God;—of that holy joy and rejoicing in God, for which you have always reason; of that humiliation for sin, and for the imperfection of your holiness, which will excite you to diligence in this matter; and of that resignation to the will of God, the want of which produces much unholy exercise. And in proportion to the growth of these graces in you, will be your progress towards perfection in holiness.—Be diligent in the practice of those duties, both toward God and toward men, which constitute the holiness of the outward life,—and afford the best evidence of inward holiness. Attend carefully and regularly upon all the ordinances of God's worship, in their appointed seasons,—in private as well as in public; be not negligent in any of those good offices, that you owe to fellow-men, in your several stations and relations, according to the second table of God's holy law; but be careful, as the gospel of *the grace of God teacheth*, not only to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*,—but also to *live soberly and righteously and godly, in the present world* *.

Frequent the society of holy persons, and maintain communion with them in holy duties. You know how true it is, that *evil communications corrupt good manners*; while corrupt nature readily catches the infection of bad examples. The renewed nature has a similar aptitude to receive the impressions of a good example and to follow it. *As iron sharpeneth iron,—so doth the countenance of a man his friend*.—Be much employed in the contemplation of God's holiness.

The more you see of it, the more you will love it; the more you love it, the more will you desire conformity to it; and the more successful will you be in pursuing after that conformity. It is by *beholding, as in a glass*—this *glory* of the Divine nature, that you may hope to *be changed into the same image, from glory to glory*,—through the saving operation of *the Lord the Spirit*.—Think much of the obligations that you lie under—to be holy. God has been, all your days, loading you with his benefits,—and he looks for no other return. You have often repeated your vows and engagements to be the Lord's, and this is the only way to pay them. Be careful to pay them now, and every day of your life, in the presence of God's people.—Cry incessantly for the sanctifying presence and influence of the Holy Ghost: without this all your own attempts will prove utterly abortive.—Let your endeavours to perfect holiness be always accompanied with corresponding endeavours to cleanse yourselves from sin. The connection between the two parts of the text deserves to be attended to. You are not only called to *cleanse yourselves* and *perfect holiness*; but to *cleanse yourselves, perfecting holiness*; plainly intimating, that these two branches of your duty must go hand in hand, there can be no communion of light with darkness; no more can you make progress in holiness, or in any branch of it, in a way of granting indulgence to any lust. You must *put off the old man with his deeds*, in proportion as you *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* *.—Be ever denied to all your attainments in holiness. Never claim a merit with God on that account; nor expect any good thing from his hand

* Eph. iv. 24.

hand because you are holy. Of all the different species of spiritual filthiness, none is more hateful to God than the filth of legality. Bear it always in mind, that no holiness of yours can ever be a righteousness to answer the demands that the law of works has upon you. And if you attempt to use it as such, God may justly be provoked to leave you to fall backward in this pursuit, and even to contract more filthiness in other respects,—to convince you of your sin and folly in this. While you go forward in this business, *in the strength of the Lord God*, be sure that you make mention of his righteousness, even of his only.—In one word, Keep your eye always fixed upon those great and precious promises, which the apostle here urges, as affording the strongest argument to enforce this exhortation. You will never have pleasure in the study of holiness,—and therefore you will never make any due progress in it, unless you are influenced in it by gospel motives; and these must be chiefly drawn from the promises of God.—*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

II. WE are now to speak a little, concerning the manner, in which this duty is to be performed,—*in the fear of the Lord*. And here we propose not to insist at great length. We shall only consider, in a few words, what is that fear of God which is here inculcated,—and then, what influence it may be expected to have, in promoting the study of holiness.

1st, Concerning the fear of God, we would call your attention to the following observations :

Fear, in general, is a painful affection of the mind, arising from the prospect of some future evil, to which the person considers himself as in danger of being exposed. Hence it is evident, that, as mankind could have been exposed to no evil, they could have had no just apprehensions of danger, if sin had not entered ; and therefore, they must have been strangers to fear. In agreeableness to this definition, the fear of God is that painful apprehension of God's displeasure, and its effects, to which a person is liable, who is conscious that he deserves it. Hence, however proper this affection may be in a sinner, it would have been both unnecessary and unreasonable in an innocent person. Reverence,—the deepest reverence is due to God, from all rational creatures, in every state. But he is not an object of fear, strictly speaking, to any but those who have sinned. It was not competent to our first parents, in their innocent estate,—nor will it obtain among the saints, when their love is perfect and sin is totally abolished in them. But perhaps the word is seldom used in so strict a sense, in scripture.

So proper and necessary is the fear of God, among mankind in their present state,—that it is often put for the whole of practical godliness. In the New Testament, love is called the fulfilling of the law, and is made a summary of all acceptable obedience ; but in many places of the Old Testament, the fear of the Lord is mentioned as comprehending every commanded duty. Hence says Moses to Israel,—*These are the commandments,—which the Lord thy God commanded to teach thee,—that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes, and his commandments.*—A-

gain, *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.*—And again, *The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,—to fear the Lord our God for our good always* *. And, indeed, the people of God, under that dispensation, had reason to be more influenced by fear, in their obedience, than we now have. The law, being intended as a school-master to bring them to Christ, was given to them in such an awful manner, that even Moses said, *I exceedingly fear and quake.* But now the terrors of the law give way to the allurements of the gospel. We are not come to mount Sinai, but to mount Zion: and *God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a sound mind* †.

Yet there is a twofold fear of God, to be found among the hearers of the gospel, and mentioned in different passages, both of the Old Testament, and of the New; as was hinted in the general explication of the words.

1. There is a slavish and servile fear of God, such as a slave entertains of the whip in the hand of a rigorous and cruel master. Though this is not the fear mentioned in the text, it is in danger of being mistaken for it; and therefore it is proper that Christians should know something of the nature of it. It may be distinguished by the following marks—It is always the fruit of a legal principle, *i. e.* a disposition to seek righteousness as it were by the works of the law; and therefore is the true principle of all that obedience to God, which is performed by those who continue under the law, as all mankind are in their natural estate. Hence it is opposed to that principle of filial love which is the fruit of the Spirit of adoption ‡.—It is
always

* Deut. vi. 1, 2, 13, 24.

† 2 Tim. i. 7.

‡ See Rom. viii. 15.

always accompanied with a fervile hope. I say not that both these are always in exercise at the same time; but they are always rooted, and ruling principles in the same person; and have a like influence upon his actions. In proportion as his fear prevails, when he is under conviction of sin,—his hope preponderates, when he can persuade himself that his services are regular. In proportion as he fears the punishment of his sin,—he vainly hopes for happiness, as a reward for his obedience.—It has for its direct object, the vindictive wrath of God, which the sinner finds to be due to him on account of sin. Where it reigns, the person is neither affected with God's displeasure, nor the dishonour done to him by sin. He fears for himself only.—It is diametrically opposite to the love of God; and hence, perfect love casts it out. It represents God as a rigorous master, and his law as a cruel bondage. It produces hatred of God, and inflames the natural enmity of the carnal mind against him.—In a word, It is always accompanied with torment; and the degree of torment is always in proportion to the measure of fear. Hence that horror that rises in the sinner's conscience, when convinced of sin; and hence that certain and fearful looking for of judgment, that is the beginning of hell to every final unbeliever*. Now, though there may be a remainder of this fear about the people of God, as there is of every other corruption, while they remain in this world; this is not the principle from which their obedience proceeds; nor is this the fear of God that is intended in this text. But,

2. There is a holy filial fear, that God puts into the hearts of his people, when he implants every other
2
gracious

* Compare Heb. x. 27. with 1 John iv. 18.

gracious habit, in the day of regeneration. This is it that the apostle means in this place ; and it consists of the following ingredients—It includes a holy reverence of God, and a profound awe of his omniscient eye. There may be reverence where there is no fear ; as has been hinted ; but this fear cannot subsist without reverence. Neither can there be due reverence of God in any person who has sin about him, without a mixture of fear. The Christian, sensible that God is always present with him, and is witness of all his actions, and of all his thoughts, is deeply impressed with a sense of his infinite justice, holiness and glory ; he stands in awe and sins not, he is ashamed because he has sinned,—he abases himself in the sight of God.—It includes a holy jealousy of ourselves, lest we offend such a holy Lord God, and provoke the eyes of his glory. Sensible of the remaining corruption of his nature, the true fearer of God feels himself prone to what God has forbidden, as well as averse to all that he has required. He therefore keeps a strict and jealous eye upon himself : earnestly and continually praying, that God may set a watch over him, to prevent his sinning against him.—It includes a holy dread of God's fatherly displeasure, and of those chastisements, with which he visits the iniquities of his children. Though depending upon the merits of Christ, as his security against vindictive wrath ; yet the person is affected with a sense of his liability to be smitten with the rod of children : and carefully avoids what may expose him to it. Even David says, in relation to this, *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee : and I am afraid of thy judgments**.—It includes a holy caution and circumspection in the person's walk. Knowing how

*

3 O

ready

* Psal. cxix. 120.

ready he is to turn aside, he examines every step of his way, before he take it, and reflects upon it after he has taken it; comparing it with the word of God, which is the unerring rule by which he walks,—lest, in any thing he transgress that rule unawares.—In a word, It includes, or at least induces a holy watchfulness against all the snares and temptations of the enemy,—by which he might be drawn aside. The Christian soldier must always be upon his guard; more afraid of displeasing his Captain by his negligence, and by what he may fall into in consequence of that negligence, than of any personal injury that the enemy can do to himself.

2dly, If it is asked, What influence this fear of God may be expected to have, in exciting us to sanctify and purge ourselves? We answer, Much every way. Where no fear of God is, all manner of wickedness is indulged in the heart, and all kinds of immorality abound in the person's life. Hence the royal Psalmist considered the abounding transgressions of wicked men, as a certain evidence, that *the fear of God was not before their eyes* *. If the fear of God did not prevent transgressions; or if the want of that fear did not tend to produce transgression, David's conclusion would not be just. The fear of God impresses our minds with a sense of God's presence, which is always with us, and of his omniscient eye upon us, in all that we do. Under its influence, the person considers, that God is witness, not only to his outward actions, but also to the most secret thoughts, motions, and dispositions of his heart. He maintains a persuasion that God cannot be an indifferent spectator of any thing that he does,—nor even of any thing that he is: but, as he must approve all that is agreeable to his law,

* Psal. xxxvi. 1.

law,—so he must disapprove all that is contrary to it, and be highly displeas'd therewith.—Influenced by this fear, we look forward continually to the solemn account that we must give to God, in a little, of all the deeds done in the body; and to that impartial sentence which we must then receive, according as our works shall be. And if these considerations do not induce us to the study of holiness, surely no other considerations will.

The fearer of God knows that sin is that abominable thing which God hates, by which he is dishonour'd, and provok'd to anger, even against his dearest children; and, as he would escape the Divine displeasure, he endeavours to *cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of the flesh and of the spirit*.—He knows that holiness, even the perfection of it, is what God loves, and requires of all his worshippers. He is sensible that the neglect of what God requires is as displeasing to him as what he forbids. He is aware that without holiness no man can see the Lord; and that without the sight of God's face there can be no happiness adapted to the nature or capacity of a rational soul. Therefore, as he wishes to be acceptable in God's sight, and eternally to enjoy the beatific vision of his glory, he strives to *perfect holiness, in the fear of God*.

III. THE last thing propos'd, on the doctrinal part of our subject—was to consider a little the argument, by which this exhortation is enforced; as it is express'd in the first words of the verse, *Having therefore these promises*. And here two things are to be enquir'd:

1st, What promises are they to which the Spirit of God here refers?

2dly, What influence these promises should have in exciting us to diligence in both the parts of sanctification?

WITH regard to the first—All the promises of the gospel are left to all that hear it. And there is no promise—belonging to the covenant of grace, that may not have influence to excite us to the duty here enjoined; as might be shewed at large, were it possible for us to go through them all. But it is manifest that the apostle, in these words, has a special eye to those promises, which he had mentioned in the preceding verses. To these, therefore, we shall, at present, confine ourselves. And particularly,

1. We have a promise of God's gracious presence, in the Church, and in the hearts of believers—*I will dwell in them, and walk in them, or among them*—as some read it*.—We need not detain you to enquire, in what part of Old Testament scripture God hath said this. Though it is not to be found in so many words, the sense of it is express in various passages. He seems to have a particular view to what we have, Lev. xxvi. 11, 12. *I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.*—But, as the Spirit of God spake by this apostle, as well as by the Old Testament prophets, his mentioning this as a promise of God, is sufficient to render it such, if it had not been so before. Now, by this promise we are assured, that as God dwelt, by the visible symbols of his presence, in the temple at Jerusalem, so he dwells, and always will dwell, in respect of his gracious presence, in the Church, and in every
part

* Chap. vi. 16.

part of it, by means of his own ordinances; in whatever part of the world these are regularly administered. It is of the New Testament Church, rather than of Jerusalem, her type, that God says this is *my rest for ever, here will I dwell; for I have desired it.** In like manner, he dwells in the heart of every genuine Christian. As the Church in general is the temple of God, every true member of the Church is, as it were, an apartment in that temple. In the literal temple, there was but one particular apartment, where God was peculiarly said to dwell; *viz.* the most holy place, within the veil. But he dwells in every part of this spiritual temple; and is as really present, in the heart of every Christian, as he was upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubims. His presence in the Church is neither inactive on his part, nor unprofitable to her, or to her members. He not only dwells, but walks *in* her, and *among* them. If a man sits still in any place, and does nothing, his presence can be of little use.—But if he walks up and down, he sees every thing as he passes;—He finds pleasure in his walk, and is in case to take such methods for the management and improvement of every thing about the place, as may be most for advantage. So God takes pleasure in his Church, as a man does in walking in his own garden; he observes every circumstance in her condition, and in that of her members; and he manages all her concerns in the best manner.

2. We have a promise, that he *will be* our God, and we *shall be* his people †. This promise follows the other, in the passage already referred to; and it is repeated, in many passages of scripture. This is the great and cardinal promise; containing the sum and substance

* Psal. cxxxii. 14.

† Lev. xxvi. 12.

substance of the whole covenant of grace, as it is made with us in the dispensation of the gospel. And it imports, among other things,—that God will graciously bring us within the bond of that covenant, by which alone he can be so related to any of mankind; bringing us into a state of union to Christ, and of favour with God through him,—That he will grant us a saving interest in himself, as our portion and inheritance; enabling us to claim this interest by faith; and improving for our advantage, in the most effectual manner, all his adorable perfections, and all that he possesses:—That he will do all that for us, which any people expects their God to do for them; subduing our enemies, delivering us from spiritual bondage, guiding us through the wilderness of this world, and bringing us at last, to possess *a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

By the same promise we have security, that his propriety in us, as his people, shall be acknowledged both on his part and on ours; on our part, by a solemn and hearty dedication of ourselves to him, and on his part, by a gracious acceptance of that dedication; for, as he will have none to be his people but such as are made willing in the day of his power;—so neither could our consent make us his peculiar property, without his acceptance. Both these are therefore secured by the promise, that we shall be his people.—It likewise affords security, that, by his grace, we shall be enabled, to live as becomes his people, worshipping him according to his appointment, and walking with him in the ways of new obedience. We cannot be his people without this; and therefore his engaging that we shall be his people, assures us that he will enable us to
it;

it; for he does not leave it to any other to fulfil his gracious engagements.

3. We have a promise that God will graciously *receive* us *. By nature we are all unclean and hateful in the sight of God. We are therefore excluded from his favour, and justly shut out of his gracious presence. Neither our persons nor our services are capable of being accepted of him. But when a person is united to Christ, and clothed with his righteousness; as all his sins are forgiven, so his person is accepted as righteous in the sight of God; he is restored to favour; and, from that time forward, God accepts his gifts and services, though still imperfect and defiled, as they proceed from him; because they are perfumed and purified by the mediation of Christ. And the man is honoured to have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

This promise is conditionally express, though the others run in an absolute form. It is upon our *coming out from among* a wicked world, and abstaining from the practice of sin, here called *touching the unclean thing*, that we may hope to be graciously accepted of God. Not that there is any merit in our so coming out and abstaining, to procure for us this gracious acceptance. Neither are we required so to come out and abstain, without God's gracious assistance. But it is plain, that while we continue among the wicked, we are wicked,—and therefore our persons are incapable of acceptance. And, while we indulge ourselves in touching the unclean thing, our pretended services are all but splendid sins; and sin can never be an object of acceptance before God. The man, therefore, who still cleaves to the practice of sin, and
to

* Chap. vi. 17.

to the society of sinners, pretends in vain to hope for the accomplishment of this promise in that way.

But this, and all other promises, which are so express, are called *conditional*, only in a very improper sense. It has been proved, in a foregoing discourse, that the covenant of grace, as made with us through Christ, is absolutely free and unconditional. The righteousness of Christ imputed to us—is that which alone founds our title to all the promises, and to all the blessings promised. In a particular manner, it is on that footing alone, that our persons and services are accepted of God. Nothing is required of us, as the ground of our title to the accomplishment of this or any other promise. And nothing is required of us, in this, or any other part of scripture, that is not secured to us, by the promise of God, in some other passage. Though it is our duty to come out from the wicked world, and though all real Christians are enabled, in some degree, to perform the duty; yet their being so enabled is the work of Divine grace in them. What our Lord said to his disciples, is equally true with regard to all Christians, to the end of time—*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and again, because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you* *. As it belongs to him to bring in all his sheep, into his own fold; so it belongs to him to gather them, by the working of his Holy Spirit, from among the world that lieth in wickedness; and he has graciously promised to do so: *I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west. I will say to the north give up, and to the south keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth* †. Various other promises might

be

* John xv. 16, 19.

† Isa. xliii. 5, 6

be mentioned to the same purpose ; and in the same manner might we prove, did time permit, that God has promised to keep us from touching the unclean thing.

The design of conditional promises is not to encourage us in vain hopes of receiving any good from the hand of God, on account of any thing that we can do ; but to point out the proper order and connection, in which the promises of God are accomplished, and the blessings of the covenant bestowed ; and, at the same time, to intimate, that, in the accomplishment of some promises, we must be active, as workers together with God. Thus, though we may expect a gracious acceptance with him ; we have no warrant to look for it, unless in the way of his enabling us to come out from among our former companions in sin,—and to avoid touching the unclean thing. Neither are we to hope that he will separate us from sin, and from a sinful world, without a disposition and endeavour on our part to be active in forsaking both.—If any man, therefore, thinks that he is accepted of God, and yet indulges himself in the practice of sin, or in keeping society with sinners ;—or hopes to be accepted, while that continues to be the case, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him.

4. We have a promise of being received into God's family and made his *sons and daughters* *. To be the people of God is much ; but to be the children of God is more : Yet this honour have all his saints. Adam was the son of God, in his original estate, as being created by him, after his own image and likeness. But Christians, after having been the children of the devil, in their natural estate, are created anew

*

3 P

in

* Chap. vi. ult.

in Christ Jesus, after the image of him that made them. And, by a judicial sentence of the court of heaven, they are adopted into his family, and declared to have a title in law, to all the privileges of his children. *Behold what manner of love, the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*

Now, in promising to make us his sons and daughters, God affords us security,—That we shall always have that place in his heart, that children have, or ought to have in the heart of their father. God loves his people, cares for them, sympathises with them, and takes pleasure in them, as a father in the children of his own bowels; and that not only when they behave towards him as that relation calls for,—but even when they shamefully trample upon his authority, and deny him a father's honour.—It contains security, that he will do all for us, that a dutiful and loving father may be expected to do for his children. He will feed us at his own expence, and at his own table. He will clothe us with the robe of righteousness, and deck us with the garments of salvation. He will protect us from every enemy; and in every case of danger. He will himself instruct us in all useful knowledge, and train us up for the place he intends us to occupy, and for the business in which we are to be finally employed. And, at last, he will make us completely happy, in possession of the family-inheritance.—It secures to us *the Spirit of adoption*, under whose influence we may cry, *Abba, Father*; claiming that relation to him; applying to him, as our father, for all that we need; forsaking all prodigal courses, and living agreeably to the character of his children.—And, in a word, This promise encourages us to hope, that we shall enjoy all the privileges, immunities, and dignities of his children.

Even

Even in this world we shall enjoy them, in a manner adapted to our present imperfect state ; and we shall enjoy them in a perfect, undisturbed, and uninterrupted manner, in the world to come. What these are cannot be told ; for *it doth not yet appear*, either *what we shall be*, or what we shall enjoy. But we know that we shall have an eternal residence in his house, an unalienable interest in all that he possesses,—a perpetual and growing intimacy with himself,—an increasing conformity to his image,—and an everlasting advancement above all that are not partakers of the same dignity.

IN answer to the second enquiry, *viz.* What influence these promises, and others connected with them, should have, in exciting us to comply with the exhortation in the text ? the following things are to be observed :

Our having such promises left us, is itself a benefit, calling for such a return. The promises of men, especially of great men, are often made without any resolution to perform them. And often, where there was such a resolution, it is changed, on account of a supposed change of circumstances ; or it is forgotten that ever such promises were made. Hence the making of such promises, instead of being a benefit, proves a very great injury to those who trust in them. But none of these things can take place with God. He is faithful who hath promised, as well as able to perform it. Never did he make a promise, without an unfeigned intention to perform it, to all who trusted in it. Never did he forget any promise that he had made ; but often he gives proof that he remembers them, after they had been shamefully forgotten by those to

they were given. Never did any change of circumstances produce a change of mind in him; for no change can take place, which he did not foresee when the promise was made. Nor was there ever a person, who could justly charge him with a breach of promise. *He is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent.* His promise, therefore, may be firmly relied on, as an infallible security for all that is contained in it. And surely our warmest gratitude is due to him who has given us this security. Indeed, as faith in the promise anticipates the happiness that shall arise from the accomplishment of it; so it is our duty to anticipate that gratitude, which will be due to him when the promise is finally accomplished. We ought to be grateful for what we hope to enjoy, as well as for what we already possess. And there is no way in which we can express our gratitude to God acceptably, without endeavouring to cleanse ourselves, and be holy; for there is nothing else in which he has so much pleasure—*He that offereth praise glorifies him.* But even vocal praise is a mockery of him, where it is not accompanied with the study and practice of holiness.

Besides, by the promises of God we are furnished with security, that, if we are sincerely employed in what is here recommended, our endeavours shall be crowned with success. It is folly to set about any work, without first counting the cost, that we may know if we are able to finish it. As to the work of our sanctification, if we know ourselves, we must be sensible that we have no sufficient strength for it in ourselves; and that we never can succeed in it, by means of any help that fellow-creatures can give us. It is God alone who can give us success in this work.

And

And unless we look for his assistance and co-operation, we cannot rationally set forward in it. But such assistance he has promised; and, in a believing dependence upon his promise, we may set about it, in a sense of our own weakness; and yet in the firm assurance, that our labour shall not be in vain.—Hence that exhortation, delivered by this apostle, to the Philippians, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure* *. The force of his reasoning may not be very obvious to a carnal eye. Speaking after the manner of men, he would either have said, ‘Work out your own salvation; for you must do it yourselves, God will neither work in you to will nor to do.’ Or else he would have reasoned thus, ‘You need not attempt to work out your own salvation, for you are utterly incapable of accomplishing it.—It is God alone who can effectually work in you, either to will or to do.’ Either of these advices would have been pernicious. And in either case the reasoning would have been fallacious. But he reasons in a manner opposite to both. He takes it for granted, on the one hand, that we can do nothing of ourselves; but he does not therefore encourage us to lie still and be inactive, waiting till we feel God working in us: and, on the other hand, that our salvation will not be accomplished without our own activity;—though he does not therefore encourage us to attempt any thing in our own strength. He teaches us to draw our principal encouragement to be active from the consideration that God is ready to furnish us both with will and strength to be so.—‘I exhort you,’ would he say, ‘to be diligent in working out your own salvation,—particularly by purging yourselves
‘ from

* Phil. ii. 13.

' from your natural corruption, and growing in
 ' holiness: But I know you may object the impossi-
 ' bility of your complying with the exhortation.
 ' You can neither accomplish your own salvation, if
 ' you would, nor can you, of yourselves, so far con-
 ' quer the hardness and obstinate impenitence of your
 ' own hearts, as to be thoroughly willing to be sancti-
 ' fied and saved in God's way. But I have a ready an-
 ' swer to this objection: God has graciously promised
 ' to make you both willing and able to do what he
 ' requires of you, in this and in every other respect.
 ' He is ready to accomplish his promise: and, though
 ' it is impossible for him to give you assistance or suc-
 ' cess in a work in which you are not employed; yet,
 ' the moment you set about it in earnest, you shall find
 ' him working in you, both to will and to do of his
 ' good pleasure.'

Moreover, if we have such promises, and hope for
 the accomplishment of them, it must be necessary,
 that we labour to be fit for the enjoyment of what is
 promised. Who, that hopes for a large inheritance,
 and a dignified place in society, is not educated be-
 times, in a manner corresponding to his intended sta-
 tion?—We have security, in the promise of God,
 for the final enjoyment of God, as our portion and in-
 heritance: We are, at the same time, assured, that
 without holiness no man can see God. And shall we
 not strenuously endeavour to be prepared for such a
 happiness, and to be capable of it?—What man, that
 expects some honourable and lucrative employment,
 will not previously endeavour to qualify himself for
 discharging the business of his place? God has promi-
 sed us a place in his family, where we shall both serve
 him and see his face. But we can neither serve him

nor see his face without holiness; nor can we do either, in that perfection which the promise secures, without perfect holiness. Indeed, it is utterly impossible that the happiness promised to the people of God in another world—can ever be enjoyed without holiness. Those filthy appetites and desires, whether of the flesh or spirit, that reign in unrenewed men, could find no gratification in heaven; and therefore an unholy man would there be miserable, through the want of what he desires. All the exercises, and all the enjoyments of that place of blessedness, are perfectly holy; and no man can feel satisfaction in either, till he have perfected holiness, in the fear of God. Either we must comply with the exhortation in the text, or we must renounce all hope of happiness, even in the accomplishment of all the promises of God.

In a word, Every particular promise, contained in the gospel of Christ, furnishes a corresponding argument for the study of holiness, in both its branches. Were it possible to run over all the promises in the Bible, it would be easy to demonstrate this concerning each. It shall suffice to shew that it is so with regard to those promises above mentioned, to which the text more immediately refers.—If we have a promise of God's dwelling in us and walking among us, shall we not endeavour to prepare him an habitation? Being infinitely holy himself, he cannot dwell with pollution. And, as our hearts, and even our bodies are his temples, we must give up all hope of the accomplishment of this promise, unless we purge ourselves, and aim at perfect holiness, as the text requires.—The promise that he will be our God, and that we shall be his people, includes an engagement, that we shall serve him, and live to him as our God,
and

and shall walk as becomes his people. This we cannot do without being holy. And surely a promise that we shall be holy, insures success to our endeavours, and ought greatly to animate our strivings after it.—The promise of receiving us graciously, upon our coming out from among the wicked, and abstaining from sin, is a material declaration that we cannot be accepted of him, while we continue in sin. We must therefore cleanse ourselves and be holy, if we hope for the acceptance of our persons or services.—And if he has promised to be our Father, and to make us his sons and daughters,—is it not proper and necessary that we strive to resemble him, and so to be children becoming such a Father? Would it not be grossly absurd for the son of an earthly king, to be a willing slave to his greatest enemy; clothed in rags, starving with hunger, and feeding swine, in a far country, while he had access to return to his father's house? Yet this is an image, by which infinite Wisdom has chosen to represent your natural estate of filthiness and pollution. And shall you hope to be acknowledged as sons of God, and yet continue in that condition? Nay, my brethren,—Let us desert the service of our former master; let us forsake our vile lusts, those swine that Satan employs us to feed; let us cease to expect satisfaction in those empty husks, by which these lusts are nourished; let us return speedily to the house of our heavenly Father, putting off the filthy rags of our own righteousness,—let us put on the best robe, which, by our Father's commission, is brought forth to us in the gospel; even the robe of imputed righteousness. Putting off the old man with his deeds, let us put on the garment of inherent holiness; and daily let us wash this garment, and make it more and more white in the

blood of the Lamb. Let us never desist from our endeavours to cleanse ourselves,—nor from pressing after perfection in holiness, till, like the King's daughter, we be all glorious within;—till it may be said to Christ concerning us, as it was to Gideon concerning his brethren—*they are as thou art, each one resembling the children of a king.*

WE are now to conclude with some application of the subject. And, that we detain you not too long, we shall just mention what might have been insisted upon at large.

The subject affords us much useful information — It sets before us the filthy and polluted state in which all mankind are by nature. We could have no need of cleansing if we were not defiled. But there is filthiness cleaving both to the flesh and spirit. And this is the case, in a great degree, even with the most advanced Christians, in this life; otherwise this exhortation would be of no use to them. Saints and sinners, in this mortal state may all join in the prophet's confession; *We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags* *.—It points out the inestimable privilege of all that hear the gospel, in that they have all the promises of the gospel exhibited and left unto them,—to be received, embraced and improved, for all the purposes of salvation; and particularly for the purpose here mentioned. It cannot be doubted, but the greatest sinners have most need to cleanse themselves. And if the exhortation belongs to them, to them also must the promises belong, by which we should be encouraged to comply with the exhortation. Yes, sinner, however justly you deserve all the wrath denounced in the covenant of works,—

*

3 Q

you

* Isa. lxiv. 6.

you are welcome to all the promises, and to all the blessings promised in the covenant of grace.—It shews the happy difference between those two covenants. The first covenant also had its promise,—and that promise afforded a motive to obedience; but, according to it, man's obedience was the foundation of his title to the promise; whereas, by the covenant of grace, our previous title to the promise is the leading motive of our obedience. By *that* covenant, holiness was necessary to found our claim to happiness, by *this* a sure prospect of happiness, purchased for us by the obedience and death of Christ, affords a nobler excitement to the study of holiness. Under *that* we must have laboured to *perfect holiness*, like a hired servant in the hope of his wages, or like a slave in fear of the whip of a cruel master; but under *this* new and well ordered covenant, we press after holiness, under the influence of the Spirit of adoption, drawn, powerfully but sweetly, by the cords of gratitude and love.—

From this subject it appears, That the doctrine of salvation by Divine grace, through faith, is so far from being inimical to holiness, or from encouraging any to think holiness unnecessary,—that it sets the necessity of it in the clearest light, and affords the most powerful motives to it. Holiness, indeed, is not necessary to entitle us to salvation, but it is necessary to fit us for it: Yea, holiness is a principal branch of that salvation which Divine grace bestows. The command of God requires holiness; and though that command, to the Christian, is no longer armed with a penal sanction, its authority is not therefore the less respected. Though God has not given us the spirit of fear, he has endued us with the spirit of love; and surely this will

not have less influence than the other, to produce in us a due respect to all his commandments.—The holiness of God makes it necessary that we should be holy; for otherwise it is impossible that we should be admitted into his presence. Yea, the nature of things makes it necessary; seeing without it we could not be happy, in the possession of that salvation which is promised us. Place an unholy person in heaven, and he will be more miserable than he could be in any other place,—hell only excepted.—Neither is holiness less necessary because we are saved through faith; for faith and holiness are inseparably connected. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and therefore impossible to be holy; or even to perform one act of holy obedience. Our principal motives to holiness must be drawn from the promises of God; but these promises can only be received by faith; and surely, till they are believed, they can have no influence upon our minds.—How can that doctrine be inimical to holiness, which requires the perfection of it? Does not the same apostle who says to the Romans, *By grace are ye saved, through faith*, say also to the Corinthians, *Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God?* And is there any inconsistency, between our adhering to his doctrine in the one passage, and our following his exhortation in the other?—Indeed, the system of salvation by grace, which we hesitate not to call the only scriptural system, is likewise the only system upon which holiness can be inculcated with effect.—Arminian teachers, exhorting to holiness, are like Pharaoh's task-masters, calling aloud for brick, but affording no straw. True holiness, as well as faith, must be the gift of God. This gift, as well as all the rest

that are connected with salvation, must come to us, in a way of sovereign grace, through Christ; and it must be received by faith.—All our strength for cleansing ourselves, and for perfecting holiness, must be drawn from him, through faith in *these promises* which he hath left us. All attempts to be holy, upon any other plan, will for ever prove abortive. A man, without the assistance of Divine grace, may attain a shadow of holiness, with which he may please himself, and by means of which he may walk in a smoother way to destruction: But all that holiness which leads to salvation, and is acceptable in the sight of God, must be the work of God's free grace.

This subject exhibits various marks of genuine Christianity, by which the hearers of the gospel may try themselves. If you are a Christian indeed, you have seen yourself altogether an unclean thing, covered over with *filthiness*, both of *flesh and spirit*; you abhor yourself on that account, and repent in dust and ashes.—You have seen a beauty in holiness,—on account of which you love it, and all those who are adorned with it; and you earnestly desire, yourself to be so beautified.—You have seen the promises of the gospel, as directed and left to you in particular; you have been determined to embrace them, and to depend upon God for the accomplishment of them to yourself.—Trusting to these promises, and influenced by gratitude for their rich contents, you habitually ply the work of self-sanctification, in both its branches; not satisfied with a mere negative holiness, you press after positive conformity to the holy law of God, in your nature, in your heart, in your lip, and in your life.—You rest not in any thing that you have attained, and you resolve never to rest in any thing that you can attain

tain in this world; but, sensible of the imperfection of all that you do, as well as of what you are,—and of the filthiness that still cleaves to your person, and to all your performances, you press towards the mark of absolute perfection, assured, that, in due time, you shall reap if you faint not.—You live under the influence of that holy filial fear of God, which has been described; and this restrains you from offending him, while filial love and gratitude animate you to all holy obedience.—Yet, renouncing all dependence upon your own most strenuous endeavours, you trust for all your success, and even for the sincerity of your endeavours to the gracious and irresistible operation of the Spirit of holiness, secured to you by the promises which you have in the word of God: Having received Christ Jesus the Lord, you are careful daily to improve him, as *made of God unto you, not only wisdom and righteousness, but also sanctification and redemption.*

To conclude, This subject points out, in the clearest manner, the duty of all professed Christians, and the strongest arguments for exciting to diligence in it. The first and most important of all duties is, by faith, to embrace the promises of the gospel. They are all directed *to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* Till these are believed, as the word of God to you, you can never perform any other duty acceptably; you can have no strength or furniture for such performance, nor any motives of sufficient efficacy to excite you to it—Mourn deeply, and habitually, for all the filthiness, and all the imperfection, that you find cleaving to you. Without this you never can be strenuous in your endeavours to cleanse yourselves, or to be perfect.—Incessantly press after holiness, considering it as
your

your greatest ornament, as well as your reasonable service. It is an ornament to your Christian profession, as well as to your person; yea, it is thus that you are called to *adorn the doctrines of God your Saviour in all things*.—Without holiness you cannot enjoy God in his ordinances; and what is there in them, worth enjoying, if he forsake them? Without it you cannot enjoy the esteem or approbation of good men, whose approbation alone is worth desiring. Every unholy action, as far as they know it, proves an offence to the generation of God's children. You cannot even be approved by wicked men, among whom you live; while the manifest inconsistency between your holy profession and your unholy walk—fills them with prejudice against religion, and hardens them in their sinful ways,—it must also represent you to them as condemned out of your own mouth, and brand you with the odious name of hypocrite.—Without holiness you cannot enjoy inward peace, nor the soothing approbation of your own mind. Every sin lays up a fund of future remorse, and robs you of the comfortable testimony of a good conscience.—Without it you can have no satisfying evidence of the truth of your faith of your union to Christ, or your interest in the promises. The doctrine of the apostle James is not less true than that of his brother Paul. Every true Christian shews his faith by his works; but to shew your faith without good works is an absolute impossibility. In one word, Without holiness you can neither be fit for death, nor capable of happiness in that eternal estate towards which you hasten. There is no place within the creation of God, nor any state, in which the power and goodness of God could place him, where an unholy person could be happy. On earth he cannot, as the

experience of almost six thousand years evinces; because all earthly things are vanity. In hell he cannot expect it; because there all unholiness will be severely punished. And even in heaven, if it were possible for him to enter that holy place, he could not be happy; because there he would find nothing to gratify his unholy desires.—After all, beware of depending upon your own endeavours in this matter; but always trust in *the Lord that sanctifieth you*: And pray incessantly for the inhabitation and influences of his sanctifying Spirit. And when you have done all, count yourself an unprofitable servant. Beware of putting your own holiness in the place of that righteousness which is revealed in the gospel, from faith to faith. Thus, while you *go in the strength of the Lord God*, see that you *make mention of his righteousness, even of his only*.

F I N I S.

As the Author's distance from the press rendered it impossible for him to revise the proofs, there have crept into the work the following

E R R A T A.

<i>Page</i>	<i>15.</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>19.</i>	<i>for are</i>	<i>read is</i>
---	ib.	---	31.	interest	interests
---	49.	---	24.	even successful	unsuccessful
---	65.	---	19.	serious	series
---	70.	---	10.	lose	loose
---	ib.	---	ult.	administration	administration
---	149.	---	13.	after any	add thing
---	274.	---	7.	for matter	read master
---	281.	---	11.	person	portion
---	285.	---	10.	fully	fitly
---	216.	---	11.	wrest	wrested
---	369.	---	23.	agreeable	agreeably
---	392.	---	30.	as	which
---	403.	---	22.	indeed	indicted
---	419.	---	10.	who	how
---	35.	---	19.	or visible	of visible

Letter escapes, consisting in the omission or change of letters or points, where the sense continues obvious, the candid reader will overlook.









