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SERMONS

TO

YOUNG PEOPLE;

PREACHED A. D. 1803, 1804.

ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

Faith and Practice.
Enquiry concerning Eternal Life.
Religion our own Choice.
Indecision in Religion.
The Principle of Virtue.
God's Glory Man's End and Happiness.
Encouragement to Early Seeking.
Self-Dedication.
Prayer.
Observation of the Lord's Day.
The Excellence of Religion.
The Happiness of Life.
The Standard of Honour.

Good Company recommended.
Caution against bad Company.
Caution against bad Books.
Frugality.
Dissipation.
The Instability of Life.
Procrastination.
Redemption of Time.
Reflections on Death.
Judgment.
The Person and Character of the Judge.
The state of those who die in sin.
The future Blessedness of the Righteous.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

Prayers

FOR YOUNG FAMILIES.

ALSO

SERMONS

- I. ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.
- II. ANSWER TO THE OBJECTION, THAT EDUCATION IN RELIGION SHACKLES THE MIND.
- III. REFLECTIONS OF THE AGED ON THE EARLY CHOICE OF RELIGION.

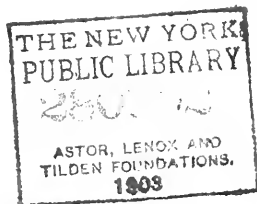
BY JAMES DANA, D. D.

Gather instruction from thy youth up; so shalt thou find wisdom till thine old age. My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation—constantly endure, and make not haste in time of trouble. Miss not the discourse of the elders; for they also learned of their fathers, and of them thou shalt learn understanding.

SON OF SIRACH.

From Sidney's Press.
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District of Connecticut, to wit.

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"Sermons to young people; preached A. D. 1803, 1804. on the following subjects: Faith and practice. Enquiry concerning eternal life. Religion our own choice. Indecision in religion. The principle of virtue. God's glory man's end and happiness. Encouragement to early seeking. Self-dedication. Prayer. Observation of the Lord's day. The excellence of religion. The happiness of life. The standard of honour. Good company recommended. Caution against bad company. Caution against bad books. Frugality. Disipation. The instability of life. Procrastination. Redemption of time. Reflections on death. Judgment. The person and character of the Judge. The state of those who die in sin. The future blessedness of the righteous.—— To which are added Prayers for young families. Also Sermons, I. On religious education. II. Answer to the objection, that education in Religion shackles the mind. III. Reflections of the aged on the early choice of religion. By JAMES DANA, D. D."

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, An Act for the encouragement of learning by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books to the Authors and Proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned.

HENRY W. EDWARDS, *Clerk of the District of Connecticut.*

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FAITH AND PRACTICE.

THE DOCTRINE WHICH IS ACCORDING TO GODLINESS.

From this connection of the words, from the contrast to the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine according to godliness, we may form a correct judgment of *the faith once delivered to the saints*. “Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them who call on

“ the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and un-
 “ learned questions avoid, knowing that they do gen-
 “ der strifes. Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy
 “ doctrine.”

The prevailing sickness;* my advanced years; a warm affection to the flock; a particular wish that the youth, on whom our hopes are placed, may embrace pious paths, constrain me to address a course of sermons more especially to the *younger* part of the congregation. I shall, however, in the structure of them, and in the selection of subjects, have regard to hearers of *every age*. May a divine influence accompany the composition, delivery and hearing of them.

It is proposed to begin with a discourse on the view given us of the gospel as *the doctrine according to godliness*.

In thus describing the religion of Jesus Christ, the apostle would distinguish it from all false religion—the exhibition of *the truth* in opposition to *the hidden things of dishonesty, walking in craftiness, corrupting the word of God, and handling it deceitfully*.

In his epistle to Titus, recommending to “ adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things,” he proceeds to give a summary of this doctrine. “ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying un-
 “ godliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Salvation by *grace* is the inscription on the gospel plan. Grace is dispensed thro’ a *Mediator*, giving himself for our sins. The great design of his expiatory sacrifice was to promote *holiness*. Holiness is the qualification of the gospel,

* August 1803.

Possessing this qualification, our *hope* in Christ is well founded. Thus the doctrine of Salvation is adorned, and is made to appear what it really is, the doctrine according to godliness—not according to any scheme of natural religion; nor according to any human device; nor according to the reveries of enthusiasm—but sound and uncorrupted doctrine, worthy of an holy and merciful God, most necessary and useful to man.

In the same letter to Titus, a summary of Christian doctrine is given us in the following language. “The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done; but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy Ghost—that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.”

Hence it appears that godliness includes faith and practice—truths to be believed, and duties to be performed. Both may be comprehended in this general language: Holiness of heart and life founded on the faith of Christ. For godliness is to live *by the faith of the Son of God*. Faith is the assent of the understanding to revealed truth, and the assent of the heart, or a practical faith.

We will consider, FIRST, the principal truths contained in the religion of Jesus Christ, which evince it to be the doctrine according to godliness. SECONDLY, the rules of life, which prove the same thing.

FIRST, the principal *truths*, or articles of Christian faith.

We wish to speak on this point *as the Holy Ghost teacheth*, and not to teach for doctrine *the commandments of men*. To speak in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth would be the *doting about questions, and strifes*

of words, against which the apostle enters an express caution; and which he mentions as opposed to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness.

Three truths claim special attention: The death of Christ as our ransom—the energy of the holy Spirit—immortality in soul and body.

1. *Redemption by the blood of Christ.*

In a passage already recited, the apostle declares that Jesus Christ *gave himself for us*. And chap. ii. 5, 6. of the first letter to Timothy, “There is one Mediator “betw en God and men; the man Christ Jesus, *who* “*gave himself a ransom for all.*” Similar declarations frequently occur in his other epistles. It shall suffice to quote the following. “In whom we have redemption “thro’ his blood. Whom God hath set forth to be a “propitiation, through faith in his blood. Christ hath “given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to “God for a sweet smelling favor.” The sentiment of his *vicarious* sufferings runs through a great part of the epistle to the Hebrews. This sentiment, and indeed the whole gospel, proceeds upon the supposition that man has lost original rectitude. “How can man “be justified with God? Who can bring a clean thing “out of an unclean?” A view of God, glorious in holiness, will be accompanied with sober thoughts of ourselves, as polluted by the condition of our birth, needing a ransom. The sinner, who beholds the purity of God, has a view of sin as exceeding odious. He loathes and abhors himself. “The whole world is “become guilty before God. Judgment is come up- “on all to condemnation.”

From this judgment, the ransom, which the Mediator paid, is the only deliverance. God “hath made “him, who knew no sin, to be a sin-offering for us, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in “him.” This is a doctrine according to godliness: It reflects the highest honor on the wisdom, holiness,

government and mercy of God : It exhibits sin as the accursed thing, the demerit of which is awfully displayed in the crucifixion of THE HOLY ONE AND THE JUST. *For if these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry ?*

You may imagine that *absolute* grace might have pardoned sin. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. He hath determined the case otherwise, if Christianity be true : And no presumption of its falsehood arises from the assurance it gives us, that Christ crucified is the only foundation God hath laid for the absolution of sinners. Will you undertake to prove, that his law would have appeared to be holy, just and good, if remission of sin had been dispensed without any such provision or medium as the sacrifice of Christ ? Infinite wisdom always has the highest reasons for its appointments. We therefore infer, from the ransom which God hath provided for sinful man, that the plan is infinitely wise, while the reasons of it are far above our comprehension. But from what do we reason or infer, if we say that some other plan would have been as wise, or wiser ? What do we know of the possibilities in the divine power and wisdom ? Shall we call in question the propriety of his revealed counsel ? Shall we reject it against ourselves ? It assures us, that he " will magnify the law, and make it honorable. My " righteous servant shall justify many ; for he shall " bear their iniquities. The Lord is well pleased for " his righteousness' sake." Pardon for sinners, reconciliation for enemies, through the cross of Christ, does *not frustrate the grace of God* ; but displays it in harmony with perfect holiness and the stability of his government. " It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all " acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world " to save sinners."

2. In connection with his expiatory sacrifice we mentioned, secondly, *the energy of the holy Spirit*.

" Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot en-

“ter into the kingdom of God. The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost” are joined with justification by grace through the redemption in Christ. (Titus, iii. 5, 7.) In regeneration a new man is born—“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Of his own will begat he us.”

We must then admit, as a principle of our religion, the operation of a Spirit distinct from a man's own, and superior to any finite agency, changing his views, affections, and hopes. That the mode of operation cannot be traced is no objection. For we hear the sound, and see the effects of the wind; *but cannot tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.* The real operation of the Spirit is proved by its fruits. “The fruit of the spirit is in all righteousness, and goodness, and truth.” The doctrine of regeneration is therefore according to godliness.

The doctrine of divine influence and assistance to human enquiries and endeavors is an important article of our religion. “We have access, through Jesus Christ, by one Spirit, unto the Father. Ask, and ye shall receive.” Earthly parents “give good gifts unto their children. How much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them who ask him? He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will with him also freely give us all things. Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.” Passages of this tenor abound in the gospel—that we might give all diligence, and add to our faith the whole assemblage of personal and social, divine and christian virtues. Let this doctrine of the energy of the holy Spirit be firmly believed, as a foundation and constant incentive to all holy conversation and godliness.

3. *Immortality* in soul and body is an important article of our faith.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ, by his appearance, “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.” The full manifestation of this truth was reserved to these last days. By the revelation of Jesus Christ it is ascertained, that *this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*. He rose to immortal life as a pledge that he will, at his appearing and kingdom, *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*. Had he not risen, to die no more—had he not, for the suffering of death, been highly exalted and glorified, our faith would have had no foundation. His resurrection declared him to be the Son of God with power—the *first-fruits of them that sleep* in him, who shall bear the image of the heavenly Adam in the glories of immortality, as they have borne the image of the earthly, in a subjection to corruption and mortality. “The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The heirs of promise *shall be like him, and see him as he is*. Were it not for this hope, the godly, in certain circumstances, would be of all men most miserable. But in this hope they patiently continue in well doing.

The principles of Christian doctrine, which we have noticed; that is, the sacrifice of the cross as our ransom—the influence and energy of the holy Spirit—and the immortality revealed in the gospel, recommend the religion of Jesus as highly worthy of an holy and merciful God, and of the highest value to a guilty world. These are truths which lie at the foundation of all holiness—the motives which are exhibited in every part of the gospel, to persuade and influence to a Christian temper and life.

Some have thought it immaterial what principles a man holds. They seem to think that they are not accountable for their principles—that these depend not on the will—that the life may be right, however wrong

our faith. It is true, that many wrong opinions may consist with a good heart. But can a man be a Christian in practice, who does not consent to the first principles of the doctrine of Christ? Can he be justified otherwise than by faith in the blood of Christ? Can he be sanctified in spirit, soul and body, except by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? Can he purify himself as Christ is pure, and adorn the doctrine of the Saviour by an heavenly conversation, without the hope of immortality? Can he be a real Christian, if the faith of the Son of God is not the governing principle of his life—if the promises of the gospel do not constrain him? Doubtless faith and practice must go together. Works without faith are dead, no less than faith without works.

We will not here examine how far men's religious principles depend on themselves: That they are, in a great measure, voluntary must be allowed. The lovers of truth will not be left to dangerous and fatal errors. *If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine.* Ignorance or error proceeding from want of love to the truth, from pleasure in unrighteousness, from hatred of the light, is a crime, not an excuse. This is a commandment of God, *that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ.* If the mission of Jesus hath been proved, and men, from any cause, will not attend to the proofs of it, their disbelief is their sin: It proceeds from an evil heart.

We have shewn, that the principal articles of our faith exhibit it as a doctrine according to godliness. The same thing will further appear,

SECONDLY, from the *duties* of this religion; duties depending on the principles.

Among the first duties of the Christian religion are FAITH and REPENTANCE. These indeed are the sum of the doctrine according to godliness. Jesus opened the gospel of the kingdom in this manner, *Repent, and believe the gospel. This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* The faith intended is the

work God hath assigned us—the same as to *labor for the meat of everlasting life*, as the connection sheweth. It is therefore no other than a *practical* faith. To confess Christ, what is it but a renunciation of all worldly lusts, and an engagement to observe whatsoever he hath commanded?—to learn of him, to follow him, to take his yoke upon us? In this sense, and in nothing short of this, *he that believeth shall be saved*. That faith, which is considered as an obligation to holiness, and actually becomes a principle of it, is saving faith. Such thoughts of the great God as accord with the discoveries he hath made of himself by Jesus Christ, lay the foundation of godliness. For “no man knoweth the Father, save he to whom the Son will reveal him.” This knowledge is a practical knowledge, a practical faith; and therefore eternal life. It is the dedication of ourselves to God in Christ, *a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable*.

REPENTANCE is a change of inward principles and affections: It is turning from sin to God. Fruits meet for repentance are stated by our apostle. “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?” Such “have put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and are renewed in the spirit of their mind; and have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

Here you have a view of gospel faith and repentance,—the qualifications, the distinguishing character, of a disciple of Jesus. Grace and faith, far from dispensing with true holiness, are the motive and principle of it. “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Thus is grace exalted. By three different characteristics our apostle

delineates real Christianity—*faith which worketh by love—a new creature—keeping the commandments of God.* Each of these means the same thing: Each expresses the condition of the gospel, and exhibits it as the doctrine according to godliness.

This condition is otherwise expressed by *humility* and *charity*. The result is the same: It is the doctrine according to godliness. “Come unto me, ye who labor and are heavy laden. Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly. All men shall know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Without love, divine and social, neither faith, nor alms deeds, nor martyrdom avail. “Be clothed with humility. Put on charity above all things.” This will adorn the doctrine of our Saviour. “Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Add to faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and charity.”

Such are the duties of religion; such is the doctrine according to godliness. It recommends universal holiness; and on the only ground on which it can be produced and maintained, the principles and promises of the gospel. A conformity to this doctrine is a renovation of the understanding and heart: It is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—It is an imitation of the moral perfections of God—a state of reconciliation with him—benevolence to men—and the enjoyment of ourselves. The principles and spirit of this wisdom from above are purity, peace, gentleness, mercy and good fruits, impartiality and godly sincerity. In agreement herewith we shall do good to all, spreading peace and happiness round us, according to our opportunity and ability; fulfilling our respective duties as members of society or of the church of Christ; and exhibiting the virtues adapted to our circumstances—content with our own state, rejoicing or sympathizing with others as their state may be.

Opposed to the doctrine according to godliness are divisions and schism, pride and uncharitableness, contentions for forms at the expence of vital piety ; for things indifferent at the expence of things essential ; for human systems to the denial of the unalienable right of private judgment, and implicit invasion of the prerogative of the head of the church.

Opposed to his doctrine are the pretensions to private revelation, which bring the oracles of God to the standard of every visionary. Thus a fight against God is maintained under a misguided zeal for him.

As little do the seclusion and austerities of a monastic life accord with his religion *who went about doing good.*

Any doctrine that interferes with the order of society, with the duties of our relations and stations, is contrary to that of Christ. This teaches to lead a quiet and peaceable life—to love our nation, and seek the good of Jerusalem—to cultivate the public, private and friendly affections, as they were conspicuous in the author of our religion.

Opposed to his religion is every doctrine of licentiousness—every doctrine addressed to the prejudices, passions and lusts of men—every doctrine which makes religion uncertain and mutable. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.* Truth is immutable. Godliness is the same in all times and places. “The wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness, and ungodliness of men.” The grace of God teacheth to *crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts—to strive for the mastery* of our appetites.

The view we have taken of the truth as it is in Jesus, the doctrines to be believed and their practical design and influence, may suffice for our proposed delineation of religion.

The true Christian knows what and why he worships. The love of God and friendship of Christ teach him universal benevolence. He views with complacency all the followers of God and of his Son. He has meat to eat, of which the world is ignorant. He

learns obedience by all that he suffers, as did the blessed Jesus—never murmuring or desponding. He sees the beauty of holiness, the deformity and malignity of sin; and his inward affection to the former, and abhorrence of the latter, correspond to the nature of them. The administration of God is contemplated, not with acquiescence merely, but with delight. Observing the works and ways of God, his fervent prayer is, *Thy will be done*. This is godliness.

If the view we have taken of Christianity be just, then doubtless *this counsel is of God*. No other could have exhibited the glorious harmony of his holiness, justice and mercy. No other could have laid such a foundation for the restoration of apostates. No other could give the *peace which passeth all understanding*. No other could supply with strength against sin. No other could give the lively hope of eternal life. How necessary, how useful and important the doctrine of Christ? No man ever spake as he spake. Could he have done the works he did, if he were not a divine person? Could he otherwise have foreseen and foretold the various events, which came to pass according to his declaration, respecting himself and his religion and disciples?—respecting the temple and city of Jerusalem, and the people of the Jews?—Therefore,

Secondly, we ought to *give diligent and earnest heed* to his doctrine. By *receiving the record which God hath given of his Son*, we *set to our seal that God is true*. “We receive the witness of men: The witness of God is greater.” We receive his witness, when the gospel *worketh effectually* in us. Believers on the Son of God *have the witness in themselves*, in the sanctifying influence of the gospel. Their conversation in heaven is a good exemplification of their faith. A religion, which has such effect on its disciples, is manifested to be the doctrine according to godliness.

Thirdly, if the conversation of any professors is not as becometh the gospel, let the reproach fall on *them*,

and not on their *profession*. Did they walk worthy of their vocation, they would *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*. That the name of Christ and his doctrine are reviled through them is for a lamentation. This is their condemnation. For “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

Would we, who profess godliness, act up to this profession, let us reverence Jesus as sent of God, and separate ourselves from such as treat him with indifference and with scorn. “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” The asserters of the sufficiency of the light of nature, the revilers of the gospel, would be thought to have an improved taste, a correct and enlarged mind. The gospel has enlightened mankind sitting in darkness, without hope, thinking the Godhead to be like unto gold, or silver, or stone, or wood, graven by art and man’s device. To whom but Christ, the light of the world, is it owing that the same ignorance on moral and religious subjects does not prevail in the present time throughout Christendom? Or whence is it, that the infidel has now a better understanding on such subjects? He will not ask nor receive counsel from God only wise—will not acknowledge that he is obliged to Christianity for the light it has given him. Those who have no sense of the fall, corruption and imbecility of human nature—who see no need of a Redeemer to atone for man’s guilt, or of supernatural assistance to set him free from the defilement of it—who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and will not submit to the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, cherish vain imaginations. “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and

“blind, and naked.” The sick nigh unto death, and yet imagining themselves in sound health, are not more disordered in their natural understanding, than sinners are in a moral sense, if they think themselves just persons. The first thing requisite in the religion of guilty, condemned, helpless creatures is to be sensible of their condition.

To us the gospel is preached, whether we will hear or forbear. What may be thought of the piety or virtue of any who have not heard of Christ is not the enquiry for such as have heard of him : But what must be thought of the piety or virtue of the latter, if they will not receive HIM, though his mission has similar proof to that which we have for the existence and providence of God.

What doctrine did Jesus teach ? What precepts did he give ? How did he live ? All that he taught and enjoined, all that his own example enforced, is according to godliness. His religion is practical throughout : A practical faith or assent is the condition of it : Its great design is to call all men to repentance ; to make them holy as God is holy, and thus meet for the enjoyment of him. The grace of the gospel restores the dominion of righteousness. The believer, the penitent, *yields himself to God as one alive from the dead. Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

SERMON II.

AN ENQUIRY ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE.

MARK X. 17.

AND WHEN HE WAS GONE FORTH INTO THE WAY, THERE CAME ONE RUNNING, AND KNEELING TO HIM, AND ASKED HIM, GOOD MASTER, WHAT SHALL I DO THAT I MAY INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?

THE consideration of this question will afford useful instruction, first, in its immediate reference to the character and circumstances of the person who proposed it. Secondly, as an enquiry of universal concern.

FIRST, With reference to the person who proposed it.

Three evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have related the story of this young man's application to Christ: They all introduce it upon the occasion of young children being brought to Christ for his blessing. The disciples reprov'd those who brought them; but HE, approving of their being brought, was displeas'd with the disciples, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." St. Luke introduces

the parable of the Pharisee and publican as delivered at the same time. Upon this occasion *one came running, and kneeling to Christ, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* Luke informs us, that he was a *ruler*: Matthew, that he was a *young man*: All the three evangelists say, that he had great *possessions*. The connexion, in which they all introduce his application to Christ, intimates that he was impressed with the instructions and examples of humility contained in our Lord's parable, and in the case of the little children.

Neither the elevated rank, nor the affluence, nor the youth of this person prevented an enquiry about eternal life—an enquiry of the highest moment.

The Jews thought that in their scriptures they had eternal life. The text saith, that when our *Lord was gone forth into the way*, the young man proposed his question. That he came *running* expresses earnestness in the matter. His *kneeling* to Christ, and styling him, *Good Master*, expresses some idea of the real character he addressed—some persuasion that the best directions upon the subject of eternal life might be expected from him. The reverential posture, the respectful form of address, do not appear to have been adulatory, or intended in derision. Had the enquirer viewed Jesus as an impostor, why did he go *away grieved*? He might have left him without any such emotion, had he not been convinced of his divine mission.

But however serious or earnest in his enquiry, the young man had certainly *false* notions on the subject. The grief with which he went away shews his disappointment with the answer to his question; and therefore his wrong opinion of the way and terms of eternal life. The Jews of that day expected justification by the works of the law. He, with others, might think, that, touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless. His question, taken in connection with what follows, carries an implication

that he had already fulfilled the terms of life. What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? "I have kept the commandments from my youth. "What lack I yet?" This amounts to the language of the Pharisee in the parable, who, trusting in himself that he was righteous, accused his fellow worshipper to the Father: "God, I thank thee that I am not as "other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers; or "even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I "give tithes of all that I possess." If the young ruler was willing to justify himself, the answer to his questions was calculated to strip him of his self-flattery, and turn his apparent concern into a right channel. Jesus, knowing what was nearest his heart, tried him in that thing. On hearing the commandments enumerated, he said, without hesitation, "Master, all "these have I observed from my youth. What lack "I yet? Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and "said unto him, One thing thou lackest: Go thy way, "sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and "thou shalt have treasure in heaven: And come, take "up the cross, and follow me." He appears to have been a person of engaging manners, from his respectful application to Christ on the most interesting subject. He had probably maintained a character of visible sobriety and regularity of life. He might be thoughtful and inquisitive. Our Saviour might behold him as an hopeful youth, open, in some measure, to a conviction of early mistakes and prejudices, wishing to be directed in the path of life. Viewing him with affection and concern, Jesus, the friend of sinners, the lover of souls, answered him in the words just recited. With whatever sincerity and engagedness he came to Christ, he had not *weighed* the subject of his application. He was ready to make an hasty conclusion in favor of himself. He knew not that his wealth was his idol. He little thought that his virtue

would be called to a trial so severe as was required by the answer to his question.

The peculiar situation of Christianity in the beginning required an inattention to the outward comforts and advantages of life, and taking up the cross, which is not ordinarily required. Place all the allurements of the world in one scale, and the joys of heaven in another, the latter infinitely outweigh, though purchased at every earthly sacrifice, and at the price of life.

It is not mentioned as a fault, that the young ruler had large possessions. He might come honestly by them. Nor would he, in ordinary times, have been required, as a condition of discipleship, to appropriate them all to charitable uses. The affluent are required, in all times, to distribute to the poor; but not to cast their whole substance into a common stock. Religion always demands the heart: This is where the treasure is. The heart cannot be divided between heaven and earth. Set your affection, not on things on the earth, but on things above.

All these have I observed from my youth. Was he aware of the extent of the divine commandment? The first and great commandment is this; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Could he say, I have kept this commandment from my youth? Had he thus loved God, he would have complied with the terms which Jesus proposed. *Whosoever hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.* Eternal life must be accepted as the free gift of God to the children of disobedience—bestowed through the atonement of Christ, and on his terms. "The righteousness of faith, without the law, was witnessed by the law and the prophets." In opposition to this righteousness, the Jews in general, in the days of our Saviour and his apostles, and long before, went about to establish their own. Had

the young man believed unto righteousness, his conference with Jesus would not have issued as it did. However studious of information on the subject of eternal life, however hopeful his case might appear, from the manner and circumstances of his application to Christ, he went away in sadness, as soon as he heard the terms of life. He hoped, no doubt, that eternal life might be obtained by his own strictness, by some good thing he could do. It was an hard saying, that he must take up the cross. Whatever reluctance he felt at foregoing the hope of eternal life, he preferred treasures on earth, a portion in this life.

From this part of our subject we see the danger of riches. In the infancy of the gospel, the temptations from them were such, that our Lord made this reflection upon the case before us, "How hardly shall they who have riches enter into the kingdom of God? For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." An affluence is dangerous, not only when the cause of religion calls for extraordinary sacrifices; but at all times. The danger is particularly specified in Agur's prayer: "Lest I be full, and deny thee." Also by St. Paul: "They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. Charge them—that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches; but in the living God." Riches especially prove a snare, when they fall to a person by inheritance, and come into his possession in youth.

Further; when persons of superior rank seriously enquire about eternal concerns, they are beheld with respect. We hope that they are not elated with earthly dignity—that they are open to divine teaching.

Again; thoughtfulness about eternal life is particularly commendable in *youth*. Sobriety and gravity, you tell me, may be admitted to be suitable for middle

age and the decline of life ; but in the young they may be considered as affectation—incompatible with cheerfulness and pleasure. With licentious mirth and pleasure they are incompatible ; but not with that which becomes an intelligent, accountable creature. That mirth is not to be desired, the end of which is heaviness ; which unfits for contemplation ; which cannot be reviewed without pain. Would you wish to forget that you are made wiser than the beasts of the field ? would you wish to act with no more understanding or reflection than they ? to give the reins to your appetites and passions ? Those pleasures, which unfit for useful employments, as well as for every religious exercise, are baneful to society ; destructive of your reputation, advancement and usefulness ; of your health and ease ; and of all inward serenity. You may be soberminded, and yet cheerful. To be soberminded is not to be morose and cynical, or lumpish and melancholy. It is to be reasonably thoughtful what we are, for what end we are made as we are, and by what means we may secure an happy eternal existence. It is to be thoughtful of our mortality, of our souls, of the good part which can never be taken away. Is it not folly to defer such thoughts, if the soul excels the body ? if no stage of life is exempt from death ? if eternity is of more moment than time ? if man can provide for his own highest satisfaction, only while he acts a part becoming his rational, moral nature ? It is amiable in the young, amidst the snares and allurements of wealth, honor and pleasures, to be inquisitive on their immortal concerns. Such as are distinguished from others by their family, or fortunes, or situation in life, should be ambitious to honor themselves by being patterns to others, of a just reverence and love to religion, by a civil carriage, and unblemished morals.

Again ; many who begin well in religion, go back in a time of temptation. The way to life is through the strait gate and narrow way. They did not fit

down first, and count the cost. The young man addressed Christ in a respectful manner on the most weighty subject. But he had not laid his account for opposition. He came not expecting to hear of difficulties and crosses in the way to life. He came not as one determined to pursue that way, whatever it might cost him. When he was told of self-denial and the cross, his courage immediately failed. Disappointed and sad, he continued with Christ no longer. His earthly riches were dearer to him than his soul.

We may not infer from hopeful beginnings, from partial regards to religion, from present warmth, that the principle is fixed, or really introduced. If Christ hath any rival in the heart, there is not the spirit of religion. Education, custom, reputation, regard to health, a certain tenderness of conscience, may restrain from many vices, and excite to various virtues. *This* temptation may overcome one person; and *that* another. The proper trial of every one is in regard to *the sin which does easily beset him*—whether pride, avarice, sensual indulgence, or any other. Many lay restraints on their own reigning passion for awhile, and in certain situations, anticipating the fuller gratification of it in time to come.

Lastly, the confidence which the young man placed in the externals of virtue, in a negative holiness, instructs us to beware of a similar confidence, and of every false foundation of hope. Others, judging from appearance, may think us Christians: but God looketh at the heart. The heart is deceitful. Deceiving their own heart, men seem to themselves to be religious. Much care and self-examination, with fervent prayer to him who is greater than our heart, are requisite, lest a deceived heart should turn us aside. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: See if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.” Any known, allowed, habitual sin proves that the

heart is not right, whatever a man may do in religion. “No man can serve two masters: For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or he will hold to the one, and despise the other.” Christ is the foundation, other than which no man may lay. All the attempts and doings of sinners, which do not refer to, which are not built upon, this foundation, all the hopes of salvation which are not bottomed upon it, must, like the house on the sand, fall to ruin, when the winds blow, and the floods of temptation come. Refusing to come to him, to accept his terms, men must *die in their sins*. For no other *hath the words of eternal life*. Coming to him is to take his yoke upon us—to learn of him who was meek and lowly—having every thought brought into captivity to him. The Spirit of life in Jesus Christ hath made such free from sin, and servants of righteousness. Having the fruit unto holiness, the end is eternal life.

It was proposed, *SECONDLY*, To consider the enquiry in the text in a more *general* view.

Should it be asked, What is meant by eternal life? an apostle has answered, *It doth not yet appear*. Another apostle hath told us, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them who love him. We see through a glass, darkly. We know in part.” Eternal life is opposed to death, the wages of sin. “This corruptible shall put on incorruption; and this mortal, immortality.” The image of the earthly Adam shall be exchanged for the image of the heavenly—*fashioned like unto his glorious body*. “We wait for the redemption of the body from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. When he shall appear, we shall be like him, and see him as he is.” As an earnest of this, the believer is born of incorruptible seed. He has the witness in himself. Eternal life is begun and abideth in him. The seal of the Spirit is the earnest

of the glories of immortality, as the first fruits were of a full harvest.

“Eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought immortality to light.” The blessed God and the Redeemer of the world solicit our acceptance of this gift. Will you go away from him who gave his own life to save your souls from eternal death? in whom you may have life abundantly? What do such despisers forego? to what trifles do they sacrifice the great salvation? They set the highest value on temporal things, which satisfy not; and account eternal things as of no value.

On the credit of history we believe things long since past. On the testimony of others, we believe things which we never saw. Now the witness of God is greater than that of man. “This is the witness of God, that he hath given us eternal life in his Son.” He hath set his seal to the mission of Jesus. Shall we not, by believing this record, set to our seal that God is true? Shall we not consent to have life through the name of the only begotten Son of God, giving himself a sacrifice for our sins, and now ever living to make intercession? alike able and willing to save to the uttermost? Could we look up, and see him at the right hand of God, it would be insupportable. God dwelleth in light to which flesh and blood cannot approach. We may believe what we see not; and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable. We may believe him who came down from the excellent glory. If we patiently wait for that we see not, and, by continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honor and immortality, we shall inherit eternal life. Shall then the prize of our high calling be forgotten, in an anxious care for the body and time?

Viewing man as fallen from original uprightness, who will *show unto him his transgression*? how or whether the heirs of death and wrath may be restored? The best informed among the heathen, whatever their

idea that the Deity may be propitious, devised means of atonement which are rather calculated to incense than to reconcile him. God might have abandoned sinning man as well as the angels that sinned. We learn not from the oracles of human wisdom, but from those oracles to which the seal of heaven is set, that dying sinners of our race may live. The language of God is, I have found a ransom. The Ransomer, was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Neither is there salvation in any other. The faith which receives the record God hath given him, faith unto life, worketh by love—such love as accounteth all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—that we may be found in him, having the righteousness which is of God by faith—may be crucified to the world, and the world to us—may press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling. The believer, renewed by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, sees in him adequate provision for the removal of the guilt, pollution, and all the effects of sin. The pardoning voice of God, by his word and Spirit, is to him as *life from the dead*.

As fallen creatures, accountable, designed for a future, eternal existence, and placed upon probation under the dispensation of a Mediator, it highly concerns every sinner to receive it as “a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—to secure an interest in him—to embrace him as offered in the gospel. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” This work of faith, as appears from the connection, is to labor for the meat of eternal life, not for the meat that perisheth. The latter compared with the former scarce calls for our labor. For that is the *one thing needful, the good part which shall never be taken away*. “If Christ is yours, all things are yours;

“the world, and life, and death, things present and “things to come.” He is the only object on which the soul can fix, and find rest. There is a fulness in him for all its wants—a fulness of light and truth, pardon and peace, grace and glory. To know him, to be conformed to him, to take the dimensions of his love, is *to be filled with all the fulness of God*. The Spirit which Christ giveth to every believer is *as a well of water springing up to everlasting life*.

But how can they believe, who prefer the honor of men to that of God? How can they believe who make earthly treasures their hope and confidence? How can they believe who are given to pleasures? Neither of these classes will take up the cross, and follow Christ: Self-denial would imply an entire change in their character. None ever found, but in religion, that good which answers to the desires of the heart. Observe the various and ardent pursuits of worldly men—their inquietudes, the vain show in which they walk. See the folly of seeking a portion in this life.

It is an error, on the one hand, to suppose that we have *nothing* to do, in order to obtain eternal life. It is an error, on the other hand, to imagine that we can *merit* it by any obedience of ours—or indeed that we have any ability, either to will or do, independently of power from on high. All we have or hope for is of grace, without and contrary to merit. We have merited death and wrath. But the God of all grace “hath “no pleasure in the death of sinners. He so loved the “world, that he sent his only begotten Son to be a “propitiation for sin. Whosoever believeth in him “shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Spirit of life in him is given to begin a good work, and perform it until the day of Christ: It operates on our reason and conscience, hopes and fears: It *quickens the dead in trespasses*: It *breathes on dry bones*, and *they live*. *All our sufficiency is of God*. Without his preventing grace, sinners make no enquiries about eternal life:

They would not frame their doings to turn to the Lord—would not consider at all. The gospel offereth every motive to persuade, every argument to convince, and every assistance to enable us to comply with its terms. Sinners must *labor for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life*. They must *strive to enter in at the strait gate*. The means of grace have not been ordained in vain. It is not in vain that God calleth upon sinners, “Seek the Lord while he may be found. Consider your ways. Search the scriptures. Receive with meekness the ingrafted word. Watch that ye enter not into temptation. Quench not the Spirit. Wait at wisdom’s gates.” They can contemplate God in his works and providence, and in redemption—can deliberate on the consequences of their own volitions and actions. Among the gracious words of him, who spake as never man spake, are these: “Ask, and ye shall receive: Seek, and ye shall find. Your heavenly Father giveth the holy Spirit to them who ask him, much more than” an earthly father giveth bread to his children. Saith the divine Redeemer, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.” Open to him, therefore, while he waits for admission: Otherwise you do but treasure up wrath. How can those escape, who neglect so great salvation? The great worth of the soul appears from the price of its redemption. But the unbeliever thinks the terms of the gospel severe, though its author gave his own life to save a lost world. When we consider him, who was in the form of God, and yet humbled himself, and became obedient unto the death of the cross for our redemption from sin and death, we certainly could not object, if he called us to lay down our life for his sake. Eternal life will compensate the loss of temporal. Unsatisfying and transient as worldly gain, glory and pleasures are, they are pursued.

through all obstacles and perils. Yet it is matter of complaint, that there are difficulties and self-denial to encounter, when eternal life is the end of our faith. The cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, stifle any conviction of the diseases of their hearts—any impressions of eternal realities. The soul is given in exchange for every vanity.

Have any imbibed, from their early days, a tenderness of conscience? Have they had a character for good morals? Have they, at some seasons, had awakened in them a lively sense of the value of gospel blessings, and much solicitude for their spiritual state? They may not therefore conclude that they lack nothing. It is well that they have been kept from visible scandal, and inured to any seriousness of mind—have been led to enquire, What shall I do to be saved? But what must we say, if, when the terms of salvation are faithfully declared, they wish to have them abated, or altered? or think of pleading their exactness in other points as a reason for indulgence in their own iniquity? Or because they may not be indulged in this, think Christ an hard Master? They know not what they ask, when they request such indulgence. When they prefer some earthly good to eternal life, they judge wrong. They choose perdition. We may not expect to enter into life without difficulty. We must determine, *if it be possible*, to enter in. Those who engage in any worldly business of moment, arm themselves against difficulties and hazards, and are not diverted from their purpose. Those who are indeliberate, unprovided and unarmed in worldly pursuits, are discouraged when obstructions and dangers arise. The end with them is shameful, however engaged they were in the beginning. Thus it is in the higher concerns of another life. The multitude, who saw the miracle of the loaves, cried out, “This is of a truth “that prophet who should come into the world.” But they soon went back, and walked no more with Christ.

The reason was, they were intent on the meat that perisheth, not on the meat of eternal life. When our Lord turned to the twelve, and demanded, "Will ye also go away?" observe their constancy—how they preferred the life which he giveth. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." If the scriptures, which convey to us the hope of eternal life, are the word of God who cannot lie, then every sacrifice ought to be made to this hope. It is the height of folly and madness to object to the way or terms of life—to beg to be excused at present—or to consent to part with Christ and lose our souls on any consideration whatever. If the soul's immortality is not in our thoughts, or is thought upon with indifference;—if that which demands all our thought and care, is either excluded from our thoughts, or makes but a feeble and transient impression, we are like the beasts that perish.

Affliction, danger, or the near view of death awaken the sentiment of eternal judgment. If the sentiment be a just one, why should it not be cherished when the mind can best attend to the weight of it?—so attend as to lay a good foundation of support and comfort in the evil day? We know not the day or hour when we may be swallowed up in eternity. The choice we now make, the course we now pursue, will determine whether our eternity shall be happy or miserable. If we will not come to Christ, and consent that he should reign over us, we judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life. "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

The stages and situations of life, which might favor the great enquiry in the text, are wont to be wasted in other enquiries. The morning of life, superior rank, health, plentiful circumstances, are often neglected and abused. The best seasons and advantages for gathering fruit to life eternal, are devoted to criminal or to empty pursuits. A view of the high importance

of the subject before us, impressed on those in early life, in elevated stations, in affluence, on influential characters, on those in health, would persuade them to attend seriously, and above all things, to the good part, which shall never be taken away. Why should they forget it, or be indifferent to it? They enquire, "Who will shew us any good?" All their enquiries must be fruitless, until some satisfying, permanent good is the centre of their wishes. Eternal life is this good. All sources of comfort short of this are broken cisterns. We have an unquenchable thirst for enjoyments superior to sensitive—immortal enjoyments. This thirst was not implanted in us in vain. Enjoyments suited to it are provided. "Whosoever will, may come and take freely of the waters of life."

Favorable intelligence respecting our secular concerns is *as cold waters to a thirsty soul*. Sinners, fainting for the wells of salvation, seeing that they are ready to perish, receive with lively joy the glad tidings to all people, "Peace on earth, good will towards men." With lively faith and gratitude should every soul contemplate the ransom provided by God for our guilty race—the provision for our renovation after his image, and the eternal redemption obtained for us.

Placing before us the end of life, and the second coming of our Lord, our conversation will be in heaven, from whence we look for him. In the day of death, our faith in him giveth the victory. Humble faith and hope appropriate the language, "I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." The present union of soul and body must soon be dissolved. But after this dissolution, they will be reunited, in the resurrection at the last day, never more to be separated. Their final state thenceforward will be according to the deeds done in the present state of union. An indescribable interest is therefore committed to our care in this short and precarious state of probation.

When we have been contemplating the emptiness and uncertainty of our most valuable enjoyments on earth and our own frailty, the sorrows and miseries to which we and all mankind are subject, we can be relieved only by turning our reflections on the hope of the gospel. All ambition is vain, compared with an ambition to be joint heirs with Christ to the inheritance reserved in heaven. In a well grounded hope of eternal life, our apostle, speaking of a time of persecution, faith, “ Our light affliction, which is but for
“ a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding
“ eternal weight of glory: While we look not at the
“ things which are seen, but at the things which are
“ unseen. For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are unseen are eternal.” Were this uncertain life to finish our existence, how gloomy the prospect! It must embitter every present delight; joy must wither in the midst of all our pleasant things. But why should our heart be troubled, if we believe that perfect health and rest, glory and joy, shall succeed to present pain and languishment, sorrow and reproach? If such health and soundness, joy and glory shall be immortal, we may welcome the temporary pain and languishment, grief and reproach which are the requisite means of qualifying us for that world where there is nothing to offend.

When we attempt to speak of eternal life, language and imagination fail. The same must be said, when we would speak of the price paid for our eternal redemption—the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, to purchase eternal life for the heirs of sin and death. Can we have a sense of human guilt and misery, if we reject his invitation to come to him, that we might have life, and that abundantly? if we have not learnt to account all things loss for Christ? The troubles of life fall with double weight on those who have no hope in him. Crosses and disappointments, pains and diseases, things not joyous, but grievous, are to

be expected, and death is certain. But can we look for them, or meet them, without amazement, if we have hope only in this life. Some run the hazard of ruining themselves in this world, for the sake of a few days gratification. Mankind agree to condemn their folly and rashness. Shall the like folly and rashness with reference to a much higher, an eternal interest, be approved and applauded? approved and applauded, I mean, by the *conduct* of men? Shall immortals, under hope of the heavenly Canaan, abide in Egypt, because a wilderness lies before them? or would they perish in the wilderness, despising the land of promise? You admit that we are now on trial for eternal retributions. The greater difficulties and temptations we now surmount, the greater will be our reward hereafter. Immortals should not be taken up with cares for a momentary state; but lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. Others pass before us to the world of spirits, as friendly monitors that we must soon follow after. Let us not think of a more convenient season, when the time is so very short and uncertain.

May high and low, rich and poor, old and young, be excited to an immediate, earnest pursuit of this object of universal concern, eternal life. It is equally attainable by all. None who seek it will fail of finding it: And all other things shall be added to them. Take up your cross, and follow Christ; for he will give you rest.

SERMON III.

RELIGION OUR OWN CHOICE.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE.



JOSHUA had conducted Israel into Canaan, and divided to the respective tribes their inheritance. Far advanced in years, he assembled them to receive the last, the best counsel, which a pious ruler and father of his people, in the view of approaching death, could give them. He begins with a recapitulation of distinguished mercies to them as a nation, from the call of Abraham to that time, many of which displayed the dominion of Jehovah over pagan superstition. He hence infers their obligations to fear and serve the living God in sincerity, and “put away the gods their fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt :” (v. 2; 14.) Nor less the gods of the Amorites, whose land Israel possessed.

Every country at that time had their appropriate deities. It seems to have been adopted as a rule in each nation, not to deride the gods of other countries, whom, in special exigencies, they invoked as well as their own. Ignorance, craft and state policy consecrated deities without number, at the expence of reason, morality and humanity.

The Mosaic institution was expressly founded in the unity of God. He chose the posterity of Abraham for his peculiar treasure. They acknowledged him as

the only God of the universe, and solemnly covenanted to cleave to him; but they apostatized on every occasion.

Religion being grounded on personal persuasion, must proceed from choice. Joshua, in the words before us, recommends and enjoins, *Choose you this day whom you will serve*. He used the following arguments, among others, to persuade to an instant and wise choice. The proofs of true religion constantly before them—obligations resulting from signal salvations—their explicit engagements—the promises to fidelity and steadfastness in the covenant of their God—the threatnings, if they revolted—the reproof contained in their being reminded of their inconstancy and duplicity.

In the words of the text, we remark, FIRST, It is taken for granted that men will make choice of *some* religion, either true or false. Choose whom you will serve. This was not giving a licence to cast off all religion: Nor was it a licence to fix on any superstition, as might seem right in their own eyes. Joshua does not intimate, that Israel would revolt to atheism.—This would be to suppose what never has been the case with any nation. *All nations will walk every one in the name of his god*. The demand, “Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods?” implies that the thing was unknown among the Heathen. The ancient and modern history of nations shews what hold superstition has of the mind. But the chosen people were ever prone to change the true religion for any form of idolatry. This versatility of character is expressed in the address to them: “If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell.”

This enlightened age exceeds in irreligion the nations who in times past walked in their own ways. It has become fashionable to treat religion in general with

contempt—Whatever sanction the sentiments and example of modern philosophers have given to this impiety, it stands condemned by all the most eminent philosophers, legislators and moralists of antiquity. Is there no medium between persecution for religious opinions, and an open disavowal and contempt of religious principle? We appeal to the conscience in every man's breast, whether we have not *some* evidence of a superintending providence and moral government? yea, *some* evidence of revealed religion? Whether, indeed, the idea of a God, a providence, moral agency and accountability does not force itself upon the mind? If speculative difficulties tempt him to suspect the fallacy of such an idea, will the supposition of its fallacy lessen, will it not rather increase the speculative difficulties? The sense and consent of all nations must be allowed to have some weight against scepticism. Can the sceptic be wise in renouncing what all mankind confess, the Being and providence of God? in sacrificing this first principle to a vague and sophistical speculation? a speculation which is immediately refuted by reflecting that man's knowledge is imperfect—that though he is not made acquainted with the *essences* of things, the *reasons* of events, yet the articles of his *duty* are plain.

Some religion then is true. Shall any, under pretence that Christianity wants proof, suppose themselves warranted in renouncing all religion? Such an opinion implies that they are unbelievers from *choice*, not in consequence of examination or attention. For suppose Jesus was an impostor; yet there is a God who made and governs the world; with whom we have to do. If Israel, upon comparing the institution of Moses with the forms of idolatry in the world, did not find that the religion he taught was preferable, yea, the only true religion, Joshua did not scruple to leave it with them to choose any other. He wished them deliberately to embrace, and abide in the profession of

the religion which might appear to them to have the best claim to their regard. He had no apprehension that the divine legation of Moses could be doubted, or sink in estimation, if they would attend at all to the proofs of it. Elijah made the like appeal to that people. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Indecision on a subject of such moment, being addicted to change, is a great reproach. It is a matter, in which, if in any thing, it behoves every soul to be fixed. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let not such a wavering character think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. His state of mind is as uncomfortable as it is dishonorable: It lays him open to every kind of imposition.

SECONDLY, we remark the absurdity of *intermixing* different religions.

Israel, prone as they were to idolatry, on every occasion, meant not wholly to renounce the worship of the only living and true God. They would have blended his worship with pagan superstition. But *the temple of God hath no agreement with idols*. Every rival affection is idolatry. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Men would serve two masters. They would reconcile righteousness and unrighteousness. Forms are contended for, while judgment, mercy and fidelity are passed over. Between its wishes and its religious duty a dishonest heart finds means to indulge evil affections, and yet keep all quiet within. An honest heart, on the contrary, resolves to oppose and mortify inward corruption. They who would unite contraries in religion, who are unsettled in it, or rest content with partial and superficial regards to it, resemble Israel who served the gods of other nations, while yet they pretended to worship Jehovah. Joshua's address was the strongest recommendation of pure religion in opposition to all idolatrous mixtures. It was a pointed reproof of them,

that, after having sworn allegiance to the true God, their heart was divided. This was an equal reproach to their understanding and to their hearts. For they had witnessed incontestible proofs of the unity and superintendency of God, and had made frequent and most solemn engagements to cleave to him, and him only.

THIRDLY, religion must be *our own choice* : It must have our own consent.

Give me thine heart. Choose whom ye will serve.—Faith is the assent both of the understanding and the heart. All attempts to compel religious belief are preposterous. A slave may be compelled to submit to the master whom he hates. Religion is the service of a willing mind.

Joshua laid before his people the nature and the grounds of the service God requireth ; the rewards of obedience and punishments of disobedience. He directed them to compare this service with that of other gods, and make their choice. Thus Moses his predecessor. “ I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life.” When the evidences of religion are laid before men, if they make a wrong judgment and choice, they must abide the consequence. Every one must give account of himself to God, and therefore should be fully persuaded in his own mind.

The right of judging and choosing for ourselves in religion is a right for the use of which we are accountable to God, and to him only. It is his command, *Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.*—*Be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in you.* Endowed with rational faculties, our duty is to use them in discriminating between truth and error, good and evil—in the search of truths concerning God, his moral perfections and administration—concerning the Mediator, his person and office—concerning man, his obligations to his Creator and Redeemer, to his fellow-creatures, and what he owes to his own soul—his

fall and recovery—the terms of salvation—the motives to holiness. It is our duty to use all means of instruction in the things of God; the holy scriptures, for instance, and human helps. Conscience, though subject to no human authority, is under law to God; so that we can confide in our choice of religion no further than we are persuaded that HE approves it. This persuasion implies that the oracles of God have guided our choice—that we have *compared spiritual things with spiritual*.

The choice of religion means not an *absolute*, but a *comparative*, neglect of other things. It is to love our God, our Saviour and our souls more than other objects. It is opposed alike to duplicity, inconstancy and indifference. It is a choice grounded on having set down and counted the cost—a choice which will bear a review.

Take heed then that no man deceive you—that ye do not deceive your own selves: For the heart is deceitful above all things. It has recourse to various subterfuges and refuges of lies. In the choice of religion it is liable to consult with flesh and blood, with prejudices, connections, and worldly interests. Humility, a desire to know and submit to the will of God, is the surest guide to saving truth; the surest guard against dangerous error. The meek God teacheth his way. He giveth liberally, and directeth that we ask wisdom of him. Until we are taught of him, we know nothing as we ought to know. The entrance of his word giveth light. If any walk not according to this word, there is no light in them. Those who have chosen the Lord to serve him, meditate in his word day and night: It is more precious than gold. God maketh much allowance for ignorance where the means of information are wanting. Ignorance hath no cloak where these means are enjoyed, but neglected. Those who have the best advantages to become wise to salvation, but yet listen to the instruction which causeth to

err from the paths of wisdom, can give no other than this sad account of themselves, that they have not an heart to improve the price in their hands.

Religion is a reasonable service : The whole of it is comprehended in faith and love. Faith is not grounded on the wisdom or testimony of man, but on the testimony of God. Faith which receives his testimony implies the love of the truth—a *real*, an *earnest* desire to know the way of salvation—a conviction of our natural blindness, and need of supernatural instruction. It sits at the feet of Jesus, and hears his words who spake as never man spake. Ready to receive the law at his mouth, his “doctrine droppeth on the heart as the rain ; his speech distilleth as the dew ; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.” This is to choose the good part, which shall never be taken away.

The friends of religion sometimes justly complain of obscure, weak faith, and languor in their love. On some occasions they have yielded to fear, or shame. They have been overborne by strong temptation, caused grief to the godly, and given occasion of triumph to the impious. But this is not their general character. It therefore may not be hence inferred, that their profession of religion is mere affectation and hypocrisy. The religious character is to be judged of, not from detached parts, not from occasional traits ; but from the uniform tenor and fixed indications of it. It is of importance to cultivate a *present* as well as an *habitual* love to religion. The present exercise of grace is the best evidence of its reality.

Pious persons differ in the degree of their attention to religion, and in their tempers. This difference notwithstanding, the choice of true religion has been really made alike by those who are *weak* in the faith and those who are *strong*—by those who have laid the *foundation*, and those who are *going on to perfection*—by those who are *weary* and ready to *faint* in

their minds, and those who are now *fervent* in spirit—by those who, in a pressing temptation, have been *overcome*, and brought reproach on religion, but have been soon recovered from their fall; and by those who have been *preserved* from any gross sin.

Every person who weighs the subject of religion, must give the preference to some one form. Charity teaches to think favorably of other forms, and to suppose that other minds may be best improved by them; some by this, others by that. Yet whosoever loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity, has reasons satisfactory to his own mind for making his choice among different forms of worship—for selecting some one as best adapted to his own improvement—most agreeable to what he has learned of Christ. He will see, indeed, that the form, which he thinks to be best, is not without defects. He will allow that wise and good men embrace other forms. But the persuasion of his own mind must govern his own conduct. He doth not contend for a particular mode of profession as though he thought it essential to the existence of religion. Nor is he so indifferent, as to be a conformist to every form under which religion is professed.

FOURTHLY, religion admits of no *delay*. Choose you *this day* whom you will serve.

The people who were here addressed could not hesitate whom they were bound to serve, whether the Lord Jehovah, or other gods. To attempt a composition between true religion and false was opprobrious. To procrastinate in the choice must have been equivalent to a renunciation of the worship of the true God. If they were not for him, they were against him. Their government being a theocracy, idolatry was high treason. Joshua enjoins it upon them to make their choice that very day, and while they were assembled before the Lord.

Shall religion, which is the first and supreme concern of every soul, be postponed? If the thoughts of

it pass through the mind, shall they be expelled as foreign to its proper business? Shall youth, manhood, and the meridian of life pass away without any decided choice of it? If a present affliction, or apprehended danger, has awakened the conscience, shall its voice be stifled? Is religion unnecessary, useless and prejudicial for the present? Will another day be more convenient? Is it safe to defer this one thing? A conviction of its importance will not permit us to defer it a single day. We know not whether we shall be among the living to-morrow. Or, if alive, in what circumstances—whether in any capacity to make choice of religion. No reason can be assigned for making this choice at any future time, which does not more forcibly apply to the present day. Suspense, inconstancy, displays levity and giddiness, dishonorable to intelligent, dependent, accountable creatures, bound for eternity, and whose eternity depends on the choice they make in this probationary, transitory world—Possibly eternity may depend on this day's choice.

Ye who have deferred to this day a cordial choice of religion, to you the counsel of God in the text comes addressed. Choose you this day whom ye will serve. The God of patience hath borne with your contempt of him thus long. Let the time past suffice you to have walked in the vanity of your mind—to have left undone the business for which you were sent into the world; and which, if finally neglected, good were it had you not been born. Your earliest care should have been to remember your Creator, Preserver and Father—to remember your Redeemer; to know who and what he is, what he hath done and suffered to save your souls, and what you owe him in return. Were you sensible of the vast importance of being reconciled to God in Christ—were you mindful of the uncertainty of life, you could not put off to another day the choice which you may and should make this day. You do not conduct thus in your

worldly concerns. Yet you have no more evidence that to-morrow will be as convenient as this day in your eternal concerns, than you have that it will be so in your temporal. If your soul should be required this night—or if you may be immediately cast on a bed of sickness—or if God should withdraw his influence, must not the neglect of the present day be pronounced folly? There is no work in the grave. The dead are not called upon to make the choice which you now decline. After death is the judgment. A sick bed is not the best season to acquaint yourself with religion. When pain and disease arrest you, would you lay a foundation for the greater burden of an evil conscience? Would you give your strength and vigor to the world, the flesh and the devil; and appropriate to God and your souls no other than decayed powers, wasted strength? Affliction from without calls for the supports and comforts of religion—a review of a timely choice of the good part, of advantages well improved. Would you have to lay the foundation for eternity at a season when your work should be finished? If not, then hear the Saviour's command, *Go, work to-day in my vineyard*. Make the wiser choice to-day: It cannot be made too soon: It should be made as early as the capacity for moral action commences: From that time there is no excuse for delaying it. The guilt and danger increase with neglect and delay. Can those, who have long procrastinated, make the progress they might have done, had they made choice of religion early in life? Will her path be so easy and pleasant, as if embraced much sooner? Whenever they apply their hearts unto wisdom, they will reflect with grief and shame that they made objections and excuses so long. There can therefore be no reason why any should excuse themselves to-day.

Ye whose faces are towards heaven, look not back. Hold fast the profession of faith, whose end is the salvation of the soul. It claims the united, utmost

exertions of your faculties. Be stedfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Give all diligence to make sure your calling and election.

It is not the will of our heavenly Father, that any immortal souls should perish. Whosoever will may come, and take the waters of life freely. He who giveth these living waters, and who gave his own life to purchase them, hath said, *Ask, and ye shall receive.* Religion admits not of compulsion; it must be voluntary; *not by constraint, but of choice.* All Christ's people are willing. The Spirit of life in him must open and incline the heart to accept his offers: But the operation of the Spirit on human minds accords with moral agency. The attempts of heaven and earth can be of no avail without our consent. *Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.* No means or encouragement are wanting. But sinners *reject the counsel of God against themselves.* Christ would gather them, but they will not. They harden against the voice of the Holy Ghost, calling on them to accept the gospel invitation *to-day.* They grieve, resist and quench the holy Spirit.

If religion depends on our choice—if the divine counsel has interposed no obstacle to our choice of it, but placed before us the highest motives to choose it, the consequence is obvious, that sinners are their own destroyers. There is no pretence for any man's saying, *I am tempted of God.* The truth is, *he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* Heaven will reveal his iniquity; and angels and men will justify the sorer punishment, to which the unbelieving and impenitent under the gospel shall be adjudged.

See then the ingratitude and folly of neglecting the great salvation set before us—of choosing our own ways and delusions. God proclaimeth peace, and commandeth all men every where to repent. All are intreated to be reconciled to God by the death and passion of his own Son. The riches of divine mercy and forbearance lead to repentance. But hear, O heavens;

and give ear, O earth; men will not be persuaded, by the mercies of God, to present themselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to him, which is their reasonable service. They will not account the long-suffering of God their opportunity to fly for refuge. They will hazard the destruction of soul and body in hell, rather than consent to sacrifice their lusts. Felix repels the apostle, *preaching righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.* Though he could but tremble, he answered, *Go thy way for this time.* The same apostle's preaching almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian, but not *altogether.* The young man, who appears seriously to have enquired, *What shall I do that I may enter into life?* went away grieved, when he heard the terms. The hypocrite, content with hearing and professing the gospel, has a name that he liveth; but he will not choose life. Not having the spirit of Christ, an enemy in heart to him, his hope shall perish. "Ye who compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of the Lord's hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow."

Contemplate the dignity of the soul. It claims an union with angels and with God; nor can it find rest in any thing short of this union. When sensible of its own necessities and the divine fulness, it thirsts for the living God. Convinced of deviations from the way of truth, it faints for instruction in the paths of salvation. Man's happiness and dignity consist not in debasing his rational nature to a subserviency to his animal appetites and passions; but in keeping under the body, and bringing it into subjection—Not in cherishing the speculations of a vain mind, presuming, with Lucifer, to be like the MOST HIGH; but in humility and meekness. The eternal God dwelleth with the humble and contrite. Supreme reverence, worship, love and obedience are his due; and man's wisdom consists in cultivating this temper toward the greatest

and best of Beings—in unreserved submission and entire resignation.

When Israel said, “All that the Lord our God shall speak, we will hear it, and do it:” The answer of God was, “They have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.” The holiness and happiness of his intelligent offspring is the earnest wish of the Father of spirits. No means and encouragement, on his part, are wanting to accomplish this great end. With them it lies to choose his service or refuse it, to choose life or death. There is much danger of their departing from serious resolutions, taken up at a season when the mind has been tenderly impressed by the providence and Spirit of God. Men often make good promises, and break them. There is more of the form of godliness than of the power.

Amidst the defections of his people, Joshua determined to be steadfast in the cause of truth. He had made his choice of religion, and would not renounce it. Superiors honor themselves and their station, when they stand up in support of true religion. Their example has great and good influence. When the upper ranks in society are foremost to honor God, he will honor them. But it cannot excuse lower orders in neglecting and reviling religion, that it is neglected and reviled by higher orders. Religion alike concerns all orders and ages. Every one must give account of himself to God. Religion hath an immutable, eternal excellency. It is the only foundation of temporal and eternal happiness, of public and private virtue. There is but one rule of faith. The book of books, the BIBLE, is this rule. *Call no man father or master upon earth: For one is your Father, even God; and one is your Master, even Christ. Search the scriptures. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. The law of the Lord is*


perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold; yea, than much fine gold—Moreover by them is thy servant warned: And in keeping of them there is great reward.

SERMON IV.

INDECISION IN RELIGION.

1. KINGS xviii. 21.

HOW LONG HALT YE BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? IF THE LORD BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM; BUT IF BAAL, THEN FOLLOW HIM.

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THE people of Israel were distinguished for wavering in their religious opinions. Their apostacy was so general in the time of Elijah, that he imagined himself the only exception. "They have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life." This prophet was sent by God to reprove king Ahab, who, with his father's house, led the way in the revolt. The context relates the mode by which Elijah tried the respective claims of Jehovah and of Baal, and the result of the trial. I need not recite it. An idol, that could neither see, hear, nor speak—an idol supposed to be taken up with other concerns than the prayers of the supplicants—supposed to be asleep or absent, was set up, by an whole community, as a rival to the God of their ancestors. A combination of artful impostors deluded the rulers and people. In this case, worthy of a special divine interposition, the true God, by a miracle, removed the delusion. The people could no longer doubt: They could hold but one opinion: They instantly exclaimed with one voice, *The Lord, he is the God.* We

do not enquire how long the impressiion lasted. If it afforded, at the time, just and abundant matter of conviction, it could never afterwards lose any part of its force, as a principle of evidence. The God, who then answered by fire, could not cease to be the only living and true God, because the miracle might be forgotten, or its impressiion impaired or lost.

The subject, to which I last called your attention, was, That religion must be our *own choice*. *Decision* in religion, in opposition to an unsettled, wavering mind, will come under our present consideration. It must be a *fixed*, not a fluctuating choice. Indecision is as inconsistent with religion as compulsion. The text is a pointed reproof of the inconstancy of the ancient people. In applying to their idol the severest sarcasm, the prophet shewed them their enhanced guilt. They preferred a senseless statue to the living God, whose dominion and providence, in the overthrow of idolatry, had been marvellously displayed in the view of the nations. To Elijah's address, in the words before us, they could make no answer.

I. We enquire, first, what is meant by halting between two opinions in religion? and what by being determined and fixed?

II. Secondly, The great absurdity and impiety of a wavering character, and importance of its opposite, will be held up to view.

III. Thirdly, The prophet's exhortation claims special attention. *How long halt ye between two opinions?*

I. FIRST, What is meant by halting between two opinions? and what by being determined and fixed in religion?

To halt between two or more opinions in religion is the reverse of deliberation and a sound mind.—Opinions, hastily embraced, are as hastily given up, as circumstances, books, conversation or company may vary. Such a mind is open to every prevailing error. Or it has in view some exemption, indulgence,

advantage or fraudulent purpose. “He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed—unstable in all his ways.”

Religion is uniform and immutable—to be assumed with the deliberation which our Saviour expresseth by *sitting down and counting the cost*. The nation that goes to war, without previously comparing its own strength with that of the enemy, may expect a disgraceful defeat. The man who begins to build without calculating the probable expence, loses his time and labor; wastes whatever he expends on his structure, and becomes the scorn of spectators. In assuming the profession of religion, we engage in a warfare—a war with inward corruption, the allurements of the world and the hosts of hell. We lay the foundation of a spiritual fabric—a foundation for eternity. We should therefore make an estimate of the conflicts, temptations and dangers in this war—the foes with whom we have to fight, and the armour with which we must be provided. We should carefully attend to the foundation which we lay, and the materials with which we build. A profession, taken up without examination—taken up for convenience, in compliance with fashion, or to answer any worldly purpose, will be renounced in an hour of temptation.

In secular pursuits, those who are wise in their generation keep in view their respective objects, and perseveringly encounter difficulties and opposition. They do not fluctuate between different opinions, either with regard to the general object of pursuit, or the means of obtaining it. Here they are determined, and have but one opinion.

The votaries of science, the several learned professions, the husbandman, merchant, artificer and mechanic have respectively a favorite pursuit, to which they seasonably and sedulously apply, carefully observing the best opportunities. Their decision is manifest from their accurate discernment and great industry—

the fatigues and obstacles which their diligence and patience overcome—the sacrifices they make to final and complete success—their rising above misfortunes. In just and honorable worldly pursuits, men steadily pursue their end by honorable means. In unjust and illaudable ones, they are equally fixed, and can be dissuaded by no considerations of honor or virtue, no exhortations of friends, admonitions of providence, or remonstrances of conscience. When in the concerns of religion, men do not halt between two or more opinions, they have assumed it from deliberate attention to its nature and importance from a full persuasion that the gain of the world is no compensation for the loss of the soul—that any temporal sacrifices and sufferings will be abundantly recompensed, when they shall receive the end of their faith. In this persuasion they abide by their choice of religion amidst all difficulties and hazards.

Many have never considered maturely. They have their choice yet to make: Or they are undecided—one while almost persuaded; soon halting between variant opinions, at a loss what religion to choose, or whether any—or attempting to serve two masters.—Many who begin well do not persevere. Some providence, or reasonable truth, is impressed upon them. But the hour of temptation returns, the cares of this life crowd upon them, and they decline from any warmth of affection which they felt for a time. Such as are determined in religion imitate the twelve; “Lord, to whom shall we go?” whom else shall we follow? “Thou hast the words of eternal life.” Therefore we will not go back from following thee, though we should die with thee.

The spirit of religion may be languid, but never dies. Many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown it. Religion may be assumed from education, or custom, or a reverence of human authority, or transient conviction. Neither of these can suffice.

It is a reasonable service, founded in personal persuasion, and must be taken up on such grounds as that we may see the absolute security of it—that in all events it is our highest duty and only safety. It is of the last importance to be fixed in religion—to fix right. The more fixed any one is in the wrong, the worse is his case.

A wavering mind imagines, that, among various objects of worship, the attributes are so similar, as to make it unimportant to which the preference is given; or that the worship may be divided or changed at pleasure, with perfect consistency and safety.

II. We proposed, *SECONDLY*, to hold up to view the great absurdity and impiety of a wavering character, and importance of its opposite.

To suppose the perfect equality of all forms is to explode every profession of religion. There can be no comparison between the unity of God and a plurality of gods. Finite may not be compared with infinite. To account for all the phenomena of nature, we certainly need not have recourse to two or more infinite Beings: For one such Being could produce and maintain them. And unity of design proves that *one* Being framed and governeth the universe. Religion then is to love HIM with all the heart. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” Shall it be enquired what religion is cheapest? what religion may best accord with human wishes, or best answer a present purpose? The proper enquiry is, What is the religion, in embracing which we shall “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man who may ask a reason of the hope that is in” us? Under what profession may we best improve in the spirit of the gospel? of reformed Christianity? For Christians and Protestants are not enquiring into the merits of pagan idolatry, of Mahomet’s Koran, or of Popery.—They do not hold different opinions on those superstitions.

The religion of Jesus Christ, if true, is infinitely interesting: It best instructs us in the perfections and government of God, the moral nature, accountableness and distinction of man: It shews us the origin of the present corruption of human nature: It reveals a Mediator between an offended God and guilty man—a Mediator who is our ransom and advocate: It reveals the resurrection of the dead, a judgment to come, and eternal retributions according to the deeds done in the body: It enlightens a dark world, and supplies man, who is weak through sin, with strength from on high: It is such a religion as fallen man needed: It adds the sanction of a divine promise to any hope of pardon which the penitent might otherwise be presumed to have—It lays a foundation, *chosen of God and precious*, on which to build our heavenly hopes. Those who cordially embrace it, have strong consolation in two immutable sources, the promise and oath of God who cannot lie. And if his seal hath been set to it—if it was confirmed by miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, what may the rejecters of it look for, but a greater damnation? Between this religion and any other, what man of reflection would hesitate? who that will do the will of God can hesitate?

If religion is, beyond comparison, the most momentous of all concerns, it is then of the highest importance to be *determined* in this thing. Indecision is next to an open denial of it, and naturally conduces to the contempt of all principles of piety. Would you not cast off the fear of God—would you not be found among scoffers, do not waver in your religious opinions. Use the best means of information. Take them ultimately from the oracles of God. Decide as they decide, comparing one part of scripture with another. Be open to conviction; but not to the *slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*.

A wavering mind may be *ever learning ; but never comes to the knowledge of the truth*. Such a state of mind is opprobrious in the things of this life ; but more so in the concerns of religion in proportion to the greater importance of these concerns. It is base to trifle with man. Is it less so to treat as of trivial concern the subject of religion, which lies between God and our souls ? Agrippa was half persuaded to be a Christian. He believed the prophets. From them an apostle had shewn, almost to the satisfaction of Agrippa, that Jesus was Christ. But, while the powerful reasoning of Paul wrought some conviction, there was an halting between two opinions. From this indecision, it is probable, that Agrippa proceeded to give up religion.

Decision in religion is, I am inclined to think, very much the basis of a consistent steady character in *other* respects. We must come to a wise decision here, or be eternally ruined. *Be not deceived ; for God is not mocked*. Let not him, who halts between two opinions, *think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord*.

The best season to determine and fix in religion, doubtless is when the mind in any measure feels its weight, the providence and Spirit of God having excited an attention to it. What reasonable prospect is there, that such as resist providential admonitions and the strivings of the Spirit, from time to time, will at length give serious and earnest attention to religion ?

Indecision in religion is a source of much *uneasiness*. The language of God is, *Give me thine heart*. “ A conformity to his whole will is so much our duty “ and interest, that, if our minds were in a right state, “ we could not have the least hesitation about any part “ of Christian practice. The blessed God is so infinitely superior to every other object, that we ought “ not to desire any thing in comparison with him.— “ Jesus Christ is so good a friend, and hath done so

“ much for us, that we should never think any thing
 “ too much to do for him. We should account his
 “ yoke easy, and his burden light. But our natural
 “ fondness for worldly and sensual objects darkens our
 “ understanding, perverts our judgment, and often
 “ makes things appear quite different from what they
 “ are, or quiets our minds when we know we do amiss.
 “ Those imperfect and undetermined impressions of
 “ religion, which the double-minded man feels, serve
 “ rather to perplex and torment, than guide and se-
 “ cure him. He is ever sinning and repenting, resolv-
 “ ing and breaking his good resolutions. He enjoys
 “ no comfort here ; he can have no rational prospect
 “ of happiness hereafter.”

A state of suspense, in any matter of consequence,
 is most undesirable and painful—and especially in a
 matter of the greatest consequence. Conscious integ-
 rity may support and fortify under embarrassments or
 perplexity from without : But a mind hesitating and
 wavering in religion can find no rest : It is divided be-
 tween light and darkness, righteousness and unright-
 eousness, Christ and Belial, the temple of God and
 idols, faith and infidelity, heaven and earth. See
 then the worth of a sound mind, an undivided and
 fixed heart—an heart wholly devoted to God.

Beside the restlessness of variant opinions, or inde-
 cision in religion, such a wavering mind precludes all
esteem and confidence of our fellow men. Such a mind
 in the concerns and interests of this world, public or
 private, and much more in those of the soul and ano-
 ther world, is despised and detested. Neither talents
 nor station can protect it from contempt. Yea, this
 folly, more than any other, in persons of rank and
 distinction, is *as dead flies in the ointment of the apothec-
 ary*. They forfeit their respectability, whatever it
 might be, were they of any certain fixed character.
 They are watched as unsafe and insidious, or neglect-
 ed as fickle and inconstant. Scarce any character is

thought more ignominious than one *given to change*. His professions are not regarded ; because he does not regard them himself. He would make many friends, and takes the surest course to have none.

Further ; those who are unresolved and inconstant in religion must be odious in HIS eye to whom the thoughts and intents of the heart are open, who hath pleasure in uprightness. Compared with his approbation, it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment. He seeth all the windings and labyrinths of a deceitful heart—whatever divides from him—the variant opinions and professions it embraces to conciliate the favor or avoid the displeasure of man—every refuge of lies to which it trusts—every mode of compounding for the indulgence of some darling sin. There is then infinite *bazard* and astonishing *presumption* in wavering on the subject of religion.

Let us attend to the prophet's exhortation, *How LONG halt ye between two opinions ?*

This exhortation was, with special propriety, addressed to a people whose inconstancy in religion was without example. “ I will plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods ? But according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Israel ! ”

A wavering character in religion was not, however, appropriate to that people ; nor is it uncommon. The like exhortation, therefore, can seldom, if ever, be unseasonable. Here young and inexperienced minds certainly need a caution.

Admitting the general obligation and importance of religion, and that such as halt between variant opinions, such as are inconstant, cannot be religious ; admitting that it requires an undivided, fixed heart ; then we must, sooner or later, come to a determination on this subject ; or abide the consequence of wavering and duplicity.

Permit me then to expostulate with you on this subject, as the prophet did with Israel. How long will ye halt? How long shall it be before you consider the subject maturely, and settle your minds upon it? You will not suffer the vain imagination, that hanging in suspense is chusing. Would you then put off the matter from youth to manhood? from health to sickness? or from prosperity to adversity? There can be no better season to choose and fix, than youth, and health, and the day when God preserves you, sets an hedge about you, and prospers your just pursuits. Religion is not to be undertaken by constraint, and only in the last extremity; but willingly—on ingenuous and rational grounds—in the view of its excellence and immutability—the same in all stages, circumstances and situations—as what equally concerns young and old, high and low, rich and poor, sick and well. *Felix trembled*, as he justly might, when Paul *reasoned* with him *on righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come*. He said, however, *Go thy way for this time*. The present is the only time which we can command. Set down and consider the terms of religion. Then resolve. For while men are *busy here and there*—while they are *halting between different opinions*, their opportunity may be *gone*. The voice of religion to the young is, to be *about their heavenly Father's business*—to do his *work while it is day*—to do it in imitation of the brightest pattern of early piety which was ever exhibited in human nature. Whether we look to the rising beams, the meridian splendor, or evening rays of this light of the world, what divine instruction may we receive? Justly might he, who hath given an example of early, steadfast and unparalleled self-denial, require those who come to him, to deny themselves, forsake all, and take up the cross for him.

It is highly worth while, in the morning of life, to enjoy the smiles of your Creator and Redeemer—to shun the stains which are not wiped away but by bitter repentance.

Moreover, all would die in favor with God. Where is the person that will say, I am willing to die with all my sins uncanceled? Death is ever coming near, whether it does or does not seem near. At this *present time*, when there are with us more funerals sometimes in a week than there are days, shall it be thought that death is not near? Shall this thought be indulged, when we know, that, in seasons of no other than common mortality, more than half die within the age of minority? Why waver then? why postpone preparation for an event which will determine your eternity, and may be at the door? which comes to most at an hour of which they are not aware? You can never be wise or safe, till you have gained an acquaintance with religion, have chosen it unfeignedly and decidedly—till you are at peace with God—have a lot and portion among the friends of Christ. Religion is the principal thing, the one thing needful. Can you then act a prudent part, while unresolved what religion to embrace, or whether any—while wavering and balancing between this and that profession? No; this cannot be prudent. The sooner you determine, the better—the more comfortable for yourselves, more estimable in the eye of man, and more acceptable in the sight of God.

Religion is the true dignity of man's nature: It assimilates him to his God: It acknowledges his own unworthiness and vileness—his infinite obligation for the remission of a debt of *ten thousand talents*. It should be chosen with the earliest capacity for it. It expostulates with you in the morning of life, How long halt ye between two opinions? It gives you no permission to be unresolved a single day. It remonstrates with you on the absurdity and danger of an unresolved, divided mind. It is not an indifferent, superficial or changeable thing: but vastly important, substantial, and, like its author, without variableness, or shadow of turning. There can therefore be no rea-

son or excuse for indecision on this subject at the earliest stage of life. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scorers delight in scorning? and fools hate knowledge? Forfear the foolish, and live."

Religion interferes not with the business of any useful calling, or with what you owe to your natural or civil connections. It directs you to pursue your common employments, and perform your relative duties, with a view to the divine approbation. It recommends, that you reflect beforehand what sacrifices it may call you to make. For, in determining your choice of religion, you may not consult with flesh and blood. It may call you to prove your sincerity and affection in a manner not unlike that of the first followers of Jesus—even to relinquish objects most dear in life—to incur the displeasure of kindred and friends. In all times Christ and his cause must be dearer than houses or lands, parents or children, or bosom friends, or any separate interest. The dictates of conscience must resolutely and perseveringly be obeyed, having used the best means and endeavors for information in religion. Hold fast the well founded persuasion resulting from candid enquiry. Your private judgment, thus formed, must have greater weight than the opinions of others. Just modesty and humility may lead you to question your own opinions, when they may not coincide with those who are much older and wiser, of much longer experience and more extensive acquaintance with religion. But, with reasonable diffidence, your own judgment and conscience must govern. Indeed, in the most essential and weighty matters of religion, the difference of opinion among good men is inconsiderable. They all agree in the spirit of religion—in love to God and man.

Those who have made a deliberate choice of religion, and are fixed in it, esteem all who are like-minded—esteem them *for the truth's sake which is in them.*—

They “honor all who fear the Lord. Pray for the peace of Jerufalem. For my brethren and companions fakes, I will now fay, Peace be within thee.—“Because of the houfe of the Lord our God, I will “feek thy good.”

An emulation to acquire and fupport a decided character for integrity is highly important to young perfons. They naturally wifh to recommend themfelves to mankind, as they come forward on the ftage.—From the manner of their entering on life, an opinion is formed of their after character and behavior. They are efteemed, confided in and improved, or treated with caution and referve, according to the probity or duplicity and ficklenefs of their character. There can be no more amiable trait than the former—nor any that gives fuch affurance of ufefulness, according to the ability and opportunity of the poffeffor. The latter may be expected to be full of all fubtilty and mischief, plotting againft the peace and the rights of mankind. Such a character, fo far as known, will be abhorred by the good, and improved by the bad only to anfwer their own purpofes. To begin life by deliberating on no other than virtuous and honorable purfuits, open to wife counfel, aware of the arts of feducers, deliberate in fixing on a proper employment, and on the ways and means of purfuing it fo as to fill up a place in the world to the glory of God and benefit of mankind, refolved to hold faft integrity, this is wifdom. On the contrary, to begin life with no deliberate plan of conduct, or no good plan—to begin it with rafhnefs, conceit, vanity and ficklenefs, or with craft and impofition, this is folly. Can you not call to mind fome dignified, confiftent and eminently ufeful character, beginning life, and purfuing the courfe of it, with cool and correct difcernment of the great end and various duties of it, fteadily keeping in view that end, and performing thefe duties, without intentionally or allowedly turning afide to the right hand

or left—the same in all relations, situations and circumstances? If you have known any such character, can you withhold your veneration? Could mankind withhold their veneration? Do you feel no ambition, my young brethren, that such may be, according to your measure, your own character? On the other hand, you may have known those who have appeared to have no regular plan of life, no principles, or no just and fixed principles; ever halting between variant opinions, really indifferent to any—conforming to the fashion of the times—or addressing popular prejudices and passions—without dignity, without consistency—practising upon the credulity of others, or open to their wiles. You cannot withhold a thorough contempt of such a character. Can you possibly wish to be altogether such an one? No; you approve of him whose religious opinions are the result of reflection, are harmonious and settled; not of him who hastily forms his opinions, who is constantly at variance with himself—or who, under any studied ambiguity of language, conceals his real sentiments—and that on the most weighty matters, and where the concealment may be followed with the most mischievous consequences.

Let me then recommend, to those who are entering on life, by all means to emulate one uniform, steady character—a character of unwavering love to religion in principle and practice. Be not as those who have no other, no more religion than may be thought to answer the ends of this world. You are hastening to another, for which, in the present life, fleeting, as it is, you are laying the foundation. Death will decide your eternal state. Hold fast the sound principles of religion, faith and a good conscience. Hold them fast; for they will lead you to form the best connections and friendship: They will give you peace always. In adversity your heart will be fixed. In prosperity your moderation, gratitude and munifi-

cence will be known. You will cheerfully fulfil your duty to God and man. You will be kept in the hour of temptation—and in the hour of death. You will make glad your fellow-men, and the city of God. But if you waver in religion, it will be a sure source of vexation. Prosperity will be the snare of your souls. You will forfeit the only support of affliction. Your duty, if attended at all, will be by constraint. You will lie open to the tempter. Man will despise you. God will abhor you. How will you meet the last enemy? How will you stand before the Son of man, when he shall come in his kingdom?

I can think of nothing so important to those who are beginning life, nothing so estimable, as stability of character—nothing more ignominious, or of a more baneful aspect on the whole business, intercourse and enjoyment of life, than instability, or having no opinion of your own, or none to which you will be constant. *He that walketh uprightly walketh surely.* His opinions and his hope have a sure foundation. His steps are ordered by the Lord. God will guard where he leadeth. The path of the just shines more and more. To him there ariseth light in the darkness. His end is peace. But the dissembler, he who halteth between variant opinions, “leaves the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness. His ways are always crooked and froward. He hateth the light. His way is as darkness, he knoweth not at what he stumbleth.” Dissemblers, prevaricators, double-minded men, grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. They are as the troubled sea. They are driven away in their own wickedness.

Is not a character for unblemished, inflexible integrity to be preferred to ostentation, formality, artifice, inconstancy and circumvention? If it is, then halt not between two opinions. Think not that you can have made choice of religion, if you are not fixed in your choice—if winds and floods will overthrow your foun-

dation. The arts of deceit and fraud may procure the dissembler such things as his soul lusts after—wealth, fame, power. But his triumph is short. What is his hope, when God taketh away his soul? He has an inward consciousness of the baseness of his own views; or would not take so much pains to conceal them. Frequently, when he thinks himself safe, and therefore is unguarded, his dark designs are brought to light. His subterfuges cost him much trouble. After all, he does not think himself safe.

Make a decided choice in religion. Commit the keeping of your souls to Christ, to be saved on his terms. Do not indulge a single wish that these terms may be lowered and accommodated to your appetites. Stand fast in the Lord. Let your unreserved respect to the doctrines and duties of religion, your steadfastness and abounding in the fruits of it, shew that you assume the profession from deep conviction and strong affection, as to God, and not to men. You believe that it has God for its author, and will train you up for fulness of joy in his presence. Why should you waver? why be ashamed? why be weary, faint and decline? *In due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and his reward is with him. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

SERMON V.

THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF VIRTUE.

COLOSSIANS iii. 23.

AND WHATSOEVER YE DO, DO IT HEARTILY, AS TO THE LORD, AND NOT TO MEN.



THE design of the present discourse is to explain and establish the true principle of virtue. The text now read recommends an unfeigned, supreme regard to the approbation of God as this principle.

We will, *FIRST*, explain the subject before us. *Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men.*

This is a principle of universal extent, and invariable influence. It alike respects great and small duties: It is a principle of fidelity to God, and men, and our own souls—fidelity to one talent, two or five. Whosoever allowedly commits any sin, or omits any duty, under an apprehension that it is small, is not governed by the fear of God in other and greater matters; and is, moreover, in much danger of proceeding from small to great sins.

Further, the precept before us inculcates acting from *Christian* principles. “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”—as his servants, in obedience to him, with a view to the divine acceptance through him, in an humble dependence on his strength, in imitation of his pattern. *For ye serve the Lord Christ.* Actuated by the principles of his religion, all ranks of men consider themselves as under law to him, indebted to him as Mediator for their privileges and hopes, and under the strongest en-

gements, in all things, to seek the glory of God by him. A cup of cold water may be given in the name of a disciple. Our Lord knoweth what is in man. For he searcheth the reins and hearts. He observes whatsoever we do, whether we do it heartily, and in his name. Our attention to, or neglect of his disciples, *as such*, he particularly considers as shewn to himself.

A supreme regard to the approbation of God, thro' the Mediator of his appointment, our Prince as well as Saviour, is the principle of Christian virtue. By him we believe in God, whose messenger of grace he was—"whom he raised from the dead, that our faith and hope might be in God"—whom all men are commanded to "honor even as they honor the Father." To live by the faith of the Son of God is to do whatsoever we do, in word or deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus—or, in other words, to do it heartily, as to the Lord.

With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. If we believe in Jesus as the Son of the Blessed, and reverence him accordingly—if we cultivate toward the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the reverence, love and gratitude which he claims, the principles and hopes of the gospel will have commanding influence in all relations and circumstances of life—far other principles and hopes than earth and time suggest—as much superior as are the immortal interests of the soul to those of a mortal body.

Our inward principles, motives and affections are of utmost moment. Religion regulates these as well as the visible conversation: It supposes that we are accountable to a Being glorious in holiness, to whom all things are naked and open, even the thoughts and intents of all hearts; whose glory should be our great end, whatever we do. In the view of his tribunal, it is indeed a small thing to be judged of man's judgment.

Doing whatever we do as to the Lord, does not imply an indifference to the opinion and esteem of our

fellow men. The latter may extend the influence of our example—our opportunity to do good. But to human considerations we can allow no other than *subordinate* and *subservient* influence. The servant of God, the disciple of Jesus, whatsoever he does, pays a superior, unreserved and fixed regard to his Maker and Redeemer. In all his relations and intercourse with mankind, the divine approbation has commanding influence. Whatsoever he does, enjoys or suffers, God is glorified. Worldly hopes or fears cannot seduce or dismay him.

This is not a *fictitious*, but a *real* character. We mean not that any are exempt from imperfection and without sin. The blemishes which have been found in some of the best characters afford this caution, “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” This notwithstanding, they could appeal to the searcher of hearts as a witness of their general integrity. “Conscience testified, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, they had their conversation in the world.”

II. We proceed to *establish* the proposition, that an unfeigned, supreme respect to the approbation of God is the true principle of virtue.

The existence of a superior power, supposed to be perfectly acquainted with the springs and principles of our actions, and to whom we must give account, is a point in which all nations consent. With this is necessarily connected a sense of moral obligation. To fulfil such obligation is to act from principles, and pursue ends, which the Being with whom we have to do will approve. Being moral agents and probationers, it is a clear and indispensable duty, that we act from such principles, and pursue such ends.

If reverence of a Deity and moral Governor be taken away, where is public faith? On this supposition, an oath for confirmation is altogether unmeaning, or in the highest degree impious. “Where is the security

“ for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of
“ religious obligation desert the oaths which are the
“ instruments of investigation in courts of justice ? ”
An oath must cease to be the bond of society, if his
may be admitted, who maintains, that the fear of God
has not, and never had, governing influence with any
mortal. Such an one subverts the basis of society. For
no dependence can then be placed on the most solemn
testimonies and engagements of any man. The atheist
thinks it not enough to tell the world, that he himself
fears no God, and believes in none : He adds insolence
to profanity, and insists, that such is the true language
of every man’s heart, whatever his professions may be.
We maintain, on the contrary, that there are those
who habitually set God before them—who fear his
frown more than that of the world—who seek the
honor that cometh from him more than honor from
man—who are not less afraid to sin in secret than in
the view of mankind—who are as attentive to secret
duties as to any others—whom the recollection of sins,
known only to themselves and their omniscient Judge,
fills with confusion and contrition—who would lay
down life rather than make shipwreck of faith—whose
own hearts bear witness, that whatever they do is as
to the Lord, not to men. There have been those who
have forsaken every thing, and suffered every thing,
from a principle of conscience. There are living char-
acters, of whom the same may be said. Little as there
is of faith upon earth, let it not be said that it is, and
always was, a mere name. This would be to contra-
dict the universal consent of mankind in all ages.
Leaving the sceptic to contest this first dictate of rea-
son, the existence of religion, with all the human race,
and even with the conscience in his own breast we
will endeavor to evince the importance of religious
principle, or a supreme regard to God, in discharging
our social and relative duties.

If there be an eternal, self-existent Spirit, the source of all other existence, infinitely wise, powerful, holy and good, his perfections are the just object of supreme veneration and homage, love and confidence. Conformity to his moral excellences is the true dignity and felicity of all intelligent moral agents in all worlds. He can require no other than a reasonable service. His laws are a transcript of his purity, wisdom and love: None of them may be accounted grievous. His approbation is better than life. Shall this be lightly esteemed, and yet an high value set on the favor of man? Shall we be afraid of man who shall die, and of the son of man who will be made as grass? but forget him in whom we live, move, and have our being? who can save and destroy? who knows and can fulfil the desire of our hearts? Or shall we satisfy ourselves with an exterior of piety? It is his command, *Give me thy heart*. The author of our faith declared, “My meat is to do the will, and finish the work, of him that sent me.” Those who have the spirit of Christ, shew their love to his religion, when it is neglected, vilified and persecuted: When it peculiarly requires its few friends to appear in its defence, their hearts glow with warmer affection and zeal. A commanding sense of religion and lively hope of immortality alone can secure an adherence to the cause of virtue when depressed—can ensure the fulfilment of our obligations to society, or to any of our connections, when that duty requires the mortification of a sin that easily be-fets us.

To what purpose does a philosopher in his study draw a fine picture of virtue—its abstract beauty and intrinsic charms; and insist that it is its *own reward*? Separate from its present peace and future recompence, its friends are left in the condition of the ship-wreckt mariner, who, as he was sinking, saw the variegated colors of the rainbow: “This is mighty fine,” said he; “but what is it to me, who must instantly be buried

“in the ocean?” Virtue must be fastened to the throne of God, the rewarder of them who diligently seek him, the immutable lover of righteousness, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The obligations of morality are unchangeable; because it has its foundation in the authority of a perfect moral Governor, who will make the uniform and steady practice of our duty our interest upon the whole—who hath annexed to it peace which passeth understanding, and the hope which maketh not ashamed. To patience in well-doing, amidst all temptations and sufferings on earth, he hath promised eternal life, through Jesus Christ.

We will more distinctly examine the force of religious principle, first, with reference to *society*, and the duties of our various relations.

Other principles, such as natural affection and benignity, desire of esteem, regard to health, may be productive of many good effects. But such good effects, with other and greater, proceed from a principle of piety. The natural and friendly affections are of great use; and should be carefully cultivated, as incentives to a constant interchange of good offices. From these we cheerfully do and suffer for our connections. The members of the same family or neighborhood, those who are in habits of intimacy, (whatever might be the occasion) improve all opportunities to serve and oblige one another, when they are united in affection. Mere affection, however, may change, from a variety of causes; and then the alienation is in proportion.

But suppose that to the natural and friendly affections you add the fear of God, and faith in his Son. These will give strength and vigor to every wish and endeavor for the welfare of those endeared to us in the bonds of nature, by past favors, or by any particular connection. Religion teaches superiors condescension and mildness: It enforces on inferiors due reverence to those above them: It permits not an alienation of

affection, or the violation of duty, upon any affront or dislike: Nor will it permit a neglect of their supreme good in compliance with their humor, or from the fondness and partiality of affection. Nor will it be reluctant to any steps for their recovery, when they go astray. The force of religion will be sufficiently strong, where affection may be weak.

Public spirit, far from being impaired, is improved by religion. Reverence of HIM, who ruleth in the kingdom of men, and whose command it is that we seek the good of our people, improves and elevates the patriot. By endeavors to conciliate the favor of Almighty God to our nation, we best promote the public welfare. The fearer of God is a prevalent intercessor for his people—instrumental in preventing or removing calamities, and procuring the blessings of providence.

It further improves our idea of a patriot to consider him as a believer of Christianity and possessing the spirit of it. Its author exhibited an example of benevolence beyond comparison the brightest that ever appeared in human nature. He descended from the excellent glory to this wretched world, and appeared in the form of a servant—went about doing good—was eminent for filial duty, private friendship, and national affection; nor less for the love of enemies and forgiveness of injuries. To perfect the character of philanthropy, he gave his life a ransom for all mankind. The same mind being in us, we shall not look on our own things, but on those of others. Nor will our kind affections be restricted to natural, civil or religious connections; but will extend to the whole human race, in imitation of Jesus Christ. The story which he related of a Jew who fell among thieves, and found mercy from a Samaritan, is a striking illustration of the prevalence of benevolent affections over many and strong prejudices: It teaches us to regard as our neighbor every man who may need our help, and whom

we may have power to befriend. That affection to kindred, friends and country, or to those of our own persuasion, which interferes with extensive benevolence, and even with the best good of the objects of such affection, is ill-judged, partial and injurious. Religion corrects such partial regards, rectifies such mistakes, and directs to pursue the highest good of those whom we love.

Moreover, mere affection may be, and is, overbalanced by views of ambition or avarice, by lust or sensuality. Temptations irresistible, except by such as are well grounded in religion, frequently occur in every station and connection in life, whether private or public. The tenderest ties of friendship, affinity and blood are violated, where the fear of God is wanting. What other effectual security is there against secret fraud and falsehood, a false balance and false measure, theft, perjury? against betraying our country, and even our best friends—yea, parents, and children, and our own flesh? Or (which is equivalent) doing that which must destroy their comfort, and entail upon them infamy, poverty and wretchedness?

Thus when temptation presseth hard, if religious principle be wanting, every duty will be violated. Upon a change of circumstances men are wont to change their friends. Job, in the day of his adversity, complained that his brethren and acquaintance were estranged, that his kinsfolk and familiar friends forgot him, and his domestics treated him as an alien—yea, that his bosom friend was alienated—that children derided him, and the basest of men made him their song. Whereas in his prosperity the aged rose before him, and princes were silent. *When the ear heard, it blessed him, &c.* An eminent lover of his nation, speaking of the oppressions of former rulers, said, *So did not I; because of the fear of God.* He had the same opportunity, by arbitrary exactions, to distress his people, and aggrandize himself: But in the fear of God he resisted

every temptation. Public spirit, without this principle, is but another name for private convenience and interest. Without this principle, who would forego advantageous worldly prospects, and suffer, as Moses, for his people? He refused the honors and treasures of a court, and engaged in the cause of an oppressed people, because *he had respect to the recompence of reward*. The considerations of an omniscient Judge and a future reckoning are sufficient, and these alone are sufficient, to stand the shock of temptation. These considerations influence to every part of duty, and have the same influence in all times and situations.

Of what importance then is religious principle with reference to society and this world? Where there is reason to suppose that this hath commanding influence, we have all the assurance which we can desire, that those we are connected with will, according to their best knowledge and ability, fulfil the duties incumbent on them. We may place all that confidence in them, which can reasonably be placed in fallible, imperfect mortals. But where there is little or no reason to believe that religious principle hath influence, there can be no security that they will not break over every engagement in a time of temptation. The fear of God teacheth how to be abased and exalted, how to abound and suffer need—to pass through honor and dishonor, accounting it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment.

Secondly, this principle is of the highest importance, as the *peace of our minds* depends on the exercise and consciousness of it. Till we find this way of peace, in vain do we enquire, "Who will shew us any good?" Is there peace to any who are in the bond of iniquity? And is not this the state of all who refuse the gospel offers? Hath God revealed any way of deliverance from the guilt and dominion of sin, except through the redemption in Jesus Christ? They who are justified by faith, and they only, have peace with God. None are

thus justified, but those in whose hearts Christ reigns—who, whatsoever they do, do it heartily, and in the name of the Lord Jesus. He tries the reins and hearts. Peace is his gift—his most inestimable legacy to his disciples. He knoweth them that are his, and manifesteth himself to them so as he doth not to the world. All others, with the demoniac, walk through dry places, seeking rest, but find none. Ye who would have peace of conscience, commit the keeping of your souls to Christ. If in him you have peace, why should you fear the men or things of the world? Enjoying this peace, though sorrowful, you will always rejoice; and having nothing, yet possess all things.

Lastly, that there is *another life*, and that our state hereafter will be the consequence of the character formed here, are obvious dictates of reason and revelation. Is it then of small importance what our inward principles and affections are? At the judgment day every work, and every secret thing, will be tried, and the counsels of all hearts disclosed. It will be enquired what we have done, or left undone, and why. Where will the hypocrite then appear? where the openly vicious and impious? where the contemptuous infidel? The Lord cometh, who knoweth the intents and thoughts of all hearts. It concerns us so to act, that he may confess us on that day. To have stood fair with the world will then be of no avail, if the Judge and our own hearts know, that we rest in the form of godliness.

The force of this principle cannot be impaired by any possible alteration of circumstances. Having an impartial respect to the whole law of love, and to every point, it restrains from all violations, and excites to the faithful cultivation of the affections, and performance of the duties, of every relation, public or private, natural or civil. The high and low, superiors and inferiors, persons in all relations and circumstances, are alike obliged to cultivate the fear of the Lord, as they

would fill up their place in life. In the treatment of their kindred, friends, neighbors, fellow-citizens and fellow men, all are obliged so to demean themselves as to be approved of God. Difference of situation, a time of trial, alters the dispositions and views of such as fear not God, so that they sacrifice honor, gratitude, patriotism, friendship, and the nearest ties in life. Yea, lust and passion prevail to the ruin of reputation, health, substance, and every comfort. But where the fear of God is implanted, every call of duty, to ourselves or others, is attended regularly, in a steady course, whatever the obstacles, snares and dangers. This principle is a ground of esteem and confidence: *It is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.* Worldly and temporal motives, or affection and propensities to benevolence, may stimulate to the duties of married persons; of parents and children; of masters and servants; of rulers and people. But a regard to the authority and approbation of God has weight and influence superior to all other considerations: It strengthens all other incentives to duty. He hath placed us in different relations, ordained the subordinations of society, enjoined the duties of every rank, and observes how these duties are attended, and from what principle. If they are discharged as to the Lord, we then shall be found faithful in every relation and station—alike so in all circumstances, at all times. *As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.*

Need we take pains to evince the reasonableness and wisdom of this principle of action, the fear of the Lord—of referring all we do to his glory, pursuing his favor as our chief good! What end, other than this, can be worthy of our rank in the creation, formed as we are to know, serve and enjoy the greatest and best of Beings? If our existence, with all our faculties, enjoyments and hopes, are from him, they should be acknowledged and improved to his glory. The low-

er animals have no knowledge of the power that made and preserves them ; nor any apprehension, except for the present moment. Why have we a presentiment, that the consequences of our present conduct will extend to a future life ? Are we then on probation for eternal retributions ? Scarce any thing can be thought important, but in its reference to eternity. It highly concerns every soul to act from such principles, and to such ends, as will be approved in the day of accounts. *Study to shew thyself approved unto God. Resolve, My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

The commendation of the discerning and virtuous is justly preferred to that of the undiscerning and vicious. Is not the praise of God, the honor that cometh from him, to be preferred to all praise and honor ? He cannot mistake our true interest. His judgment is according to truth, and cannot change. His perfections are the standard of excellence. He is able to do for us above all we can ask or think. The glory and perfection of man's nature is advanced, in proportion as his soul is conformed to the image of his Creator. Every other principle, except this of supreme regard to the unerring approbation of God, is precarious. This is firm as his throne, secured by his promise, has respect to all his commandments, and hates every false way. It is reasonable, it is highly important, that this principle bear sway, and regulate all others. When it doth, it is happy for the subject, and for all with whom he has any connection—happy on account of its immediate good effects, and by way of example.

Specious *pretensions* to piety may serve temporary, partial purposes : But the time hasteneth, when the *reality* only will be of any use. The great question is, What will avail in the day when the counsels of all hearts shall be disclosed ? How are we viewed by HIM *with whom we have to do* ? Follow the hypocrite to his

final hour, which is not far off. Follow him to the judgment-seat. What is his hope! If the fear of God is the foundation of social virtue, let us examine, not merely how we demean ourselves in different situations of life; but also by what principles we are actuated? whether indeed the sanction of religion accompanies all we do? Do we take pains that others may think well of us? If we take little or no pains to be approved of God, we have the greatest reason for inward blushing and confusion. If the *appearance* of virtue conduces to our present worldly interest, the *reality* might more. Be this as it may, we are under the eye of God, who is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things—who will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing. To him our obligations are infinite. The only enquiry of any moment is, How may we be accepted with him? To this end we must be settled in the faith of Jesus Christ, rooted and grounded in love.

There is indeed much mixture of unbelief, and favoring the things of men, in real Christians, notwithstanding which their praise is of God. Imperfection and corruption are blended with their virtues. In many things they daily offend; in all things they come short of the glory of God and their duty. Still they walk in integrity. Have we this principle? Do we set the Lord always before us? Are we accustomed to acknowledge him in all our ways? Are we afraid of sinning in secret? and do we make conscience of secret duties, because he seeth in secret? Have we no allowed reserves? Do we study to improve in virtuous principles? to grow in grace? Are we patient and unwearied in well doing? We should often ask ourselves such questions as these: Nor should we dismiss them without being able to give a satisfactory answer to them.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: For the Lord pondereth the heart. The presence of an earthly superior has a sensible restraint and influence. The presence of

an angel would have more. What restraint and influence ought the contemplation of an ever present and omniscient DEITY to have? He is invisible; but he seeth us. He penetrates the inmost recesses of the soul. On him our state in this world and the future depends. Is it fit that his eye, and his authority, should excite less awe and reverence than that of man? Shall we fear where the ground of fear is small, and as nothing upon the comparison? and yet conduct toward him who is greatly to be feared, as though we were made without fear? Has man an arm like God? Shall he strengthen himself against the Almighty? Can he harden himself, and prosper? The deference which a child, servant or subject pays to the parent, master or ruler whom he sincerely loves, reminds us of the superior reverence due to our Father, Master and Law-giver in heaven. In the former case, the will of the earthly superior is no sooner known, than obeyed and submitted to. If we love and revere the authority of heaven and earth, we submit to it without repining, our heart loves its precepts, and bows to its pleasure.

Let those, who are entering on life, be persuaded to begin it in the fear and favor of God. Would you choose the safest, the pleasantest, the most useful and honorable course? be assured that true piety is this course. Keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men. Wherever you are, however you are employed, whatever your connections or circumstances, bear in mind this thought, *Thou, Lord, seeest me.* It will preserve you from sin, make you watchful against temptation, prompt you to the duties of your place, to the improvement of every talent: It will support and comfort under every trial, and fortify you in the hour of death. Under the influence of this serious, solemn thought, you will consider the end for which you were sent into the world—who appoints your place and lot in it—where your chief good lies,

the way that leads to it, and that will comfortably close life. *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long*—all thy life, from the first to its last part and close, in all the relations, circumstances and vicissitudes of it. I repeat the sentiment, *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all thy life long.*

SERMON VI.

GOD'S GLORY MAN'S SUPREME END AND HAPPINESS.

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I. CORINTHIANS, x. 31.

WHETHER THEREFORE YE EAT OR DRINK, OR WHATSOEVER YE DO, DO ALL TO
THE GLORY OF GOD.



THESE words are parallel to those which were the subject of the morning's discourse. They have been chosen with the view of further inculcating the necessity and importance of religious principle in whatsoever we do—that principle which forms a consistent, uniform, fixed character. It is of great moment, that those who are beginning life be emulous of such a character—a character which will support through all situations and changes in life. What I have further to offer on this subject will comport with the design before mentioned of adapting a number of discourses to younger life—but in such a form as may be of use, by the blessing of God, to the other classes of hearers.

The similarity of the text to that which was last under our consideration, will supersede a number of observations which would otherwise be proper.

Reference is had to a custom among the heathen of feasting upon the residue of the sacrifices offered to their idols. Whether it were lawful for Christians to eat of the residue of those sacrifices? was a question among the primitive disciples. To avoid every occasion of idolatry, every approach to it, the apostle adviseth not to accept an invitation to those feasts. A

Christian, indeed, might join in them with no desire or intention to do homage to an idol. But this action of his might offend the conscience of his fellow-disciples: They might view it as idolatrous worship. In such case, instead of following his own opinion, he will condescend to them who are weak. With just sentiments, he knows, that "an idol is nothing;" that "every creature of God is good." But, in the use of his liberty, he pays respect to the religious scruples of his brethren. "Take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them who are weak. For if any man see thee who hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered unto idols? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ." The apostle enjoins, upon the whole, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

Let it suffice to have mentioned the occasion and connection of the words. The principle laid down, and the duty exhorted to, is general. *In all things, our supreme end should be, that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*

Religion regulates the inward principles and affections not less than the external conversation. We are indispensibly bound to act from such principles, and pursue such a course, as may be to the glory of God, whose we are.

What is it then to seek his glory? The determination of this question depends upon our rightly understanding wherein he placeth his glory. When men mistake in this point, they are found *fighting against God*, while they *verily believe that they do him service.*

He hath revealed himself as a God *glorious in holiness, a God of truth and without iniquity—exercising loving-*

kindness, righteousness and judgment in the earth—a just God and a Saviour—abundant in goodness—delighting in mercy—multiplying to pardon. There is none good, but one, that is God. The Father of the whole family in heaven and earth: The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom grace hath superabounded where sin did abound—in whom he hath magnified the law; and dispenseth pardon and peace consistently with moral rectitude. As seemeth meet to him, he distributeth to one five talents, to another two, and to another one. May he not do what he will with his own? With whom shall he take counsel? who shall instruct him?

God is glorified, when we imitate his moral perfections—make his will our end—take his holy word for our only rule of faith and practice—and seek his approbation as our chief good—when we love him with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind—love his whole character, and joy in his government.

We glorify God, when the same *mind is in us which was also in Christ Jesus*. He sought not his own glory, but the glory of his Father. “I delight to do thy will, O my God! yea, thy law is within my heart. “I must work the works of him that sent me, while “it is day.” This was his *meat, which the world knew not of*. He “humbled himself, and became obedient “unto death,” that he might glorify God, and finish the work given him to do. The same mind is in us, when none of the commandments of our God are grievous—when we learn obedience by what he calleth us to suffer—when we seek not our own things, but those which are Jesus Christ’s.

We glorify God, when we honor all his attributes, sanctify his sabbaths, and walk in all his commandments and ordinances—observe the footsteps of his providence—have none in heaven but God, and none upon earth that we desire beside him—study the edification of our fellow-Christians, rejoice in their gifts,

acceptance and usefulness—when the advancement of the kingdom of God lies nearest our heart.

As the end to which human actions should be directed, some have proposed *happiness*. Others have called this a mercenary principle, and pronounced it inconsistent with the nature of virtue. They have therefore argued for *disinterestedness*. Or the sentiment may be expressed more intelligibly thus: Virtue should be chosen, not for the advantages which may or do accrue from it, but from an abstract view of its intrinsic excellence. Others found it on the sanction of *divine authority*.

Many speculations and refinements on this subject have conduced to bewilder it. May we not maintain, that virtue, in the moral and religious acceptation of the word, is a conformity to the will of God, however made known—that it has respect to him as governor of the world—that his government and laws are founded in wisdom and rectitude—and that he will make virtue the happiness of the virtuous; and, of consequence, vice the ruin of the vicious? If these things must be admitted, shall we separate what God hath joined? There is no virtue without obedience and submission to him. We are under law and accountable to him. Our powers, faculties and advantages are his gifts. He seeth what use we make of them—whether our opportunities to get and do good are improved or neglected—whether they are used to subserve his glory, or abused in the service of our lusts. If we are found good stewards, we shall *enter into the joy of our Lord*. If slothful and wicked, we shall be doomed to *weeping and wailing*.

We will then suppose that true virtue denotes a supreme reverence of God, according to the manifestations he hath made of himself; and supreme delight in his law and government. This implies our belief that *he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him*—a truth intimately connected with his existence. In

this view, the beauty of holiness, the glory of God, and a respect to the recompence of reward, are principles of action which do not in the least interfere. The divine perfections are infinitely amiable in themselves, the just object of supreme delight, homage and trust. His laws are all holy, just and good. In keeping of them there is a great reward. *We love him, because he first loved us.*

Here it will not be improper to remark, that God hath interwoven in the nature of man a strong desire of happiness. The enquiry is, *Who will shew us any good?* The difference between the religious man and men of no religion is not, that the latter seek their own happiness, while the former does not. The true difference is, that he sets his *affection on things above*; whereas *their affection is set on earthly things. He seeks first the kingdom of God: Their heart is set on riches, and honor, and sensual delights. His heart's desire and prayer is for the light of God's countenance.—Their portion is in externals. He delighteth himself in the Lord. God is his chief joy, his rest forever. They forsake the fountain of living waters, and have recourse to broken cisterns. They "walk through dry places, "seeking rest, but finding none. Surely they are disquieted in vain."* But "*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth his heart and mind through Jesus Christ. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.*"

From false notions of happiness, it is sought in the creature. When we have just ideas of happiness, we seek it in the Creator. The connection between seeking the glory of God and true happiness is inseparable. He placeth his glory in the moral perfection and happiness of his intelligent offspring. *All who have died in faith, sought another, an heavenly country. All who*

suffer in the cause of truth, who love not their lives to the death, have *hope of a better resurrection*. Whatever the self-denial to which we are called, if we suffer as animated by the joy set before us, the same mind is in us as was in Christ Jesus.

The opinion that a good man is *willing to be damned*, may it be for the glory of God, is inadmissible. Does it not suppose that the damnation of a good man may be for the glory of God? No one, probably, will affirm, that this is possible. And if not, why should it be put as a supposable case? Does a good man then acquiesce in what cannot be for the glory of God? Is this any proof of his entire devotedness and resignation to him? Let no groundless, self-contradictory, presumptuous hypothesis be made; nor a self-contradictory opinion be built upon it; nor the defence of such opinion be attempted; nor the admission of it be represented as a necessary evidence of a good estate.

We submit to consideration the following propositions. First, no good man will be damned. Secondly, it cannot be for the glory of God that he should be. Thirdly, a good man cannot consent to that which he believes would not be for the glory of God. Fourthly, a view to the glory of God cannot therefore make him willing to be damned. Fifthly, a willingness to be damned, if such a case were possible, can be predicated only of an abandoned sinner.

Contemplate, for a moment, what it is to be *damned*, and what a *willingness* to be so must mean. To be damned is to spend an eternity in blaspheming the God of heaven and the Redeemer of the world. A willingness for this is a cordial consent to associate forever with infernal spirits, in unutterable and interminable woe, in ceaseless execration of the author of our being. Could any creature possibly consent to such a doom, to such employment, he must be a child of the devil, and could not escape the damnation of hell.

No good man ever consented to forego his personal interest in Christ—to be eternally separated from him. The disciple of Christ consents to any tribulation in the way to the kingdom—any sufferings for, and in imitation of, Christ; any which may turn to the furtherance of his cause, and conduce to purify and refine the soul for the joys above. He can forsake all for Christ, and even lay down life for his sake. For he trusts the promise, that such as lose life in this world, for the sake of Christ and the gospel, shall find it to life eternal. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him. Without this hope, his persecuted followers would be of all men most miserable. Paul could rejoice, though offered on the sacrifice and service of the Christian faith. For said he, *There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.* Would we not make the apostle contradict himself, we must understand, in perfect consistency with his assured expectation and hope of the crown of glory, that extraordinary declaration of his, *I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.* The original text admits, and perhaps requires, a different translation. If we construe these words to extend beyond *temporal* sufferings, we not only violate the general analogy of faith; but take occasion, from a warm expression of concern for his nation, uttered in the depth of grief and heaviness, to infer, that he could wish to forego that ONE THING, to which he continually *pressed forward*, even *the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* We think the man insane, who dies by self-assault. Yet it is more than intimated, that the destruction of soul and body in hell may be consented to, from the most pure, deliberate regard to God's glory; that it is indeed necessary to prove a filial relation to him. Attend to the meaning of the expression, *Willing to be eternally miserable!* I add no more on this point.

The sovereignty of God is always to be viewed in connection with transcendent moral excellence. He cannot fail to make the cause of truth, righteousness and goodness finally triumphant. The sanction of his authority, and the hope of eternal life which he hath promised, irresistibly enforce every personal and social, divine and christian virtue. To make his glory our end, is to provide for our true happiness here and hereafter.

That we may more clearly perceive the force and extent of this principle of action, or of a fixed regard to the glory of God as our chief end, it may be illustrated by observing how those conduct, who pursue worldly things as their *end*.—They reflect on the ways and means of attaining the end proposed—for instance, gain, power, fame, or earthly delights. Their favorite object employs their thoughts night and day. They prosecute it early and late, through labors, watchings and fastings, amidst every obstacle and hazard. They observe favorable opportunities. Any occasional negligence, inattention or remissness, is succeeded by renewed ardor, double diligence and circumspection. Through an habit of assiduity and vigilance, they pursue their end, when it is not expressly in their thoughts, as really as when it is. Thus are *the children of this world wise in their generation*.

Now those who make the glory of God their end, are engaged in like manner—concerned in all ways and by all means, according to their measure, to glorify him—to know, do, and suffer his will. They improve their youth, health, the advantages of their rank in life, (greater or less) providences, and impressions of divine truth. Their possessions, talents, authority and influence are consecrated to the promotion of piety and good morals. Amidst difficulties and snares, they are fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Their faces are heavenward, and they are not ashamed or dis-

mayed. Their love and zeal kindle into a more lively flame under trials. They set themselves against the snares and allurements of the world, of the hosts of hell, and of inward corruption. They are, indeed, liable to despondence, sloth, and the temporary prevalence of carnal motives. *In many things they offend: In all things they come short of the glory of God.* They may fall, but they shall not be utterly cast down. Recovered, they give greater diligence to make their calling and election sure. The general and habitual tenor of their life is supremely directed to God's glory, and the service of their generation by his will. When this end is not *expressly* in their thought, it is still pursued from an *habit* of attention. With determined virtue the enticement of unlawful pleasure is withstood. *How can I do this great evil, and sin against God?* Does human authority forbid what HE enjoineeth? their answer is, *We ought to obey God rather than man.* Does it enjoin what HE forbids? *Our God will deliver us: But if not, be it known, we will not serve thy gods.* Might they come to great wealth and honor, by violating conscience, or turning aside from the word of the Lord, their resolution is unaltered. *Though Balaam would give me his house full of silver and gold, how can I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom HE hath not defied? What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Might they sin with perfect security that their sin would be concealed from the world, they are awed by that eye which looks on them, on all. Would a deceitful heart suggest, that some one sin may be indulged, provided they refrain from others? The suggestion is resisted thus: The [allowed] offender in one point is guilty of all. *No man can serve two masters.* They are steadfast.—*Their light shineth more and more. Men see their good works, and glorify God.*

This great principle of doing all to the glory of God, regards him in the common actions and inci-

dents of life. The pious soul is a careful observer of divine providence in the natural world, and in the affairs and circumstances of men—especially his own circumstances. Whether he lies down and rises up, sits in the house and walks by the way, wherever he is or however employed, the things of God employ his heart and tongue. The affairs of his civil calling are ordered with a reference to his high calling of God. He receives every outward and common mercy as from above, and is temperate in all things. In the morning and at evening, in prosperity and adversity, his prayer is addressed to the hearer of prayer. He *sets the Lord always before him*. From the bible he learns what to believe concerning God, and what God would have him to do. Not receiving for doctrines the commandments of men, he honors the authority of the sacred scriptures. These point out the various ways in which God is either honored or dishonored. They furnish perfect directions for our moral conduct, in every station of life and article of duty. They instruct us to look for acceptance with God through the Mediator only, in whom he is well pleased. “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God. The fruits of righteousness” in the Christian, “are unto the praise and glory of God by Jesus Christ.” By him we are emboldened to approach the throne of grace for pardon and assistance. They who worship God in spirit and truth, as he requireth, rejoice in Christ Jesus. They glory in his cross, and have no confidence in the flesh. It is their concern, in all things, to adorn the gospel of Christ. “Whether they live, they live unto the Lord; and whether they die, they die unto the Lord.” Faith in his precious truths and promises is the vital spring of all holy conversation. Thus *God in all things is glorified through Jesus Christ*.

We profess to believe that God is not far from us—yea, that he is intimately present with us: For *in him*

we live, and move, and have our being. Were he visible to us, what awe? what restraint? what communion with our own heart, and what diligent search, would be the effect! All within us would be stirred up to give him due glory. It would be a small thing with us to be judged of man's judgment. Though no man hath seen God, we are yet assured, that he compasseth our path, is on our right hand and left, before and behind us, and understandeth our thought afar off. He weigheth our actions, with all the principles and motives of them. He will judge the righteous and the wicked. The approbation of mankind proceeds upon the supposition that our motives and principles correspond to our professions. We would have them think so. We take pains to save appearances. We should much rather take pains to be approved of God. If we knew, by any means, that a fellow creature, venerable for wisdom, dignity and goodness, had his eye upon us, and observed us with attention, though we saw him not, it would make a similar impression as if we saw him. An ever present DEITY should then be realized. The solemn truth should be familiar, and constantly influential.

Frequent contemplations on the presence, perfections and government of the only wise and eternal God, the King immortal and invisible, are of great moment. His excellencies and the nature of man plainly shew it to be our highest duty, glory and felicity to contemplate, supremely adore, love and trust in him; to give our heart to him—to thank him for past and present mercies, and apply to him for future; to commit ourselves and all our interests to him—to resign ourselves to his pleasure—to be followers of him as dear children—and to look to Jesus, the brightness of his glory.

It should be our care to cultivate a supreme reverence of God, first, in the *general* tenor of life. Secondly, in the *actual* and *present* exercise of this temper.

Thirdly, in an exprefs view to his glory in thofe things wherein the great interefts of religion are nearly concerned—fuch as the union and edification, the moral and religious improvement, of our fellow Chriftians—cutting off, from the enemies of Chriftianity, every occafion to reproach it—recommending it to them by our beft endeavors for the conversion of fuch as err from the truth—deeply affected with the vices and ftate of thofe who vilify divine inftitutions, and revelation itfelf—and letting the light of our own Chriftian example fo fhine as that others may glorify God.

Upon the whole: It highly concerns us to have principles and ends of action worthy of intelligent and accountable creatures—to feel a fenfe of moral excellence—to regard the temporal and eternal welfare of others—to cherifh a fervent defire of ufefulness, warm impreffions of the moral perfections and providence of God, and a fupreme care of our own fouls. It therefore highly concerns us, whatfoever we do, to do all to the glory of God.

It is a very proper enquiry, reflecting on what has been faid on this fubject, Have we kept in view the end of our creation and redemption? Have we glorified God, in our various places, according to our feveral ability? God is love. He is good, and doeth good. The more we love and do good, the more we refemble and glorify God. The more extenfive our love to men, the better is the evidence that we are his children, whose fun fhines on the evil and on the good, and whose rain falls on the juft and unjuft. Therefore “love your enemies, blefs them who curfe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who “defpitefully ufe you, and perfecute you.”

We profeis to build our immortal hopes on Jefus Chrift. Are his things then dearer to us than our own? Does the advancement of his caufe and kingdom lie neareft to our heart? Do we every one of us ftrove to pleafe our neighbor for his good to edifica-

tion? Or do we, through want of humility and condescension, cause our good to be evil spoken of? Professors walk worthy of their vocation, when they endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; are meek and lowly, forbear one another in love, and forgive one another. "The wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

Would to God that our *young people* may realize the present truth! To glorify him, and finish the work HE hath given them to do, is the end for which they were born and sent into the world. This is the earliest lesson they were taught in their tender years. To this great duty they are bound to attend first of all, and above all things. In the gifts of nature and providence, and in a Christian education, they have received much from God. The spirit of gratitude saith, To him be glory.

Have you then made choice of God? Do you seek his glory, by devoting to him every power, enjoyment and business? Are you ambitious of a reputation for early sobriety? And if so, does conscience testify that you really are, what you would be thought to be, most of all concerned that God may be glorified in and by you? If you draw nigh him in acts of worship, do you consider that he will be sanctified in them that come nigh him?—that he is not glorified by the mere form of piety, the heart being far from him; but when you worship in spirit and truth? Have you considered, that your labor in the things of this life, all laudable pursuits and industry, and all enjoyments of life, should be *holiness to the Lord*?—that whether you eat, drink or converse, or wherever or however you are employed, God requireth you to keep his glory in view? He is glorified when every man minds his own business; abiding in that calling wherein God hath called him, whether rich or poor, high or low. God will be glo-

rified, not only amidst the business, but also amidst the amusements of life. He will be glorified in all the relations and connections which you form or sustain. He will be glorified in the day of prosperity and in the day of adversity. O that there were such an heart in all young persons! that they might begin life with such sober reflections; and resolve, by divine grace, to form themselves upon a plan of life at once so reasonable, useful, dignified and comfortable.

A life thus referred to the glory of God is actuated by a principle immutable as his perfections—a principle which teaches how to pass through honor and dishonor, affluence and indigence, joy and sorrow; and will support in all afflictions. Swayed by this principle, with this supreme end, every benevolent affection is cultivated on a sure basis, and exerted on all occasions. It operates by universal love: It overcomes the world: Under the government of it, men dare to be singular in a good cause, are not ashamed of the gospel, nor do they fear what they may suffer for it, while they make it their care to give no just offence.

The example of the Saviour, beyond all others, unites glory to God and good-will to men. And if he was actuated by *the joy set before him*, let no one pretend, that his disciples, while actuated by the hope of the heavenly retributions, do not seek the glory of God. *May this mind be in us which was also in CHRIST JESUS. AMEN.*

SERMON VII.

SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENT TO EARLY SEEKING.

PROVERBS viii. 17.

----- THOSE THAT SEEK ME EARLY SHALL FIND ME.

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THE former clause of the verse is, “I love them “that love me.” To *seek* God therefore denotes the same as the *love* of God; and to *find* him the same as to be the objects of his special love. Every thing which interferes with his approbation must be renounced. An ardent, supreme and steady desire to please him, a diligent use of the means he hath ordained, and endeavors to serve him with all our heart, are included in seeking him. Thus to seek him is to have none in heaven but God; none upon earth that we desire beside him.

The text especially recommends *early* seeking. In the holy scriptures we have many commendations and examples of early piety, and exhortations to it.

The least reflection will shew our young people, that they could not be the authors of their own existence; nor are able to preserve it one moment—that the inspiration of the Almighty hath given understanding to man—that in him all live, and have their being—that every good gift is from him. They feel an immortal principle within them. They have the power of deliberating and choosing, of acting or suspending action. Some things, which, at first view, may seem to be for their worldly interest, are found, upon reflection, to

be injurious to it. Capable of enjoyments superior to those of the animal life, and which depend not on any thing external, it must be wise, for the sake of these, to forego sensitive enjoyments, and hazard external sufferings.

No enquiry can be so just and proper as this: What shall we render to the infinite Being, who hath formed us to shew forth his praise? who holdeth our souls in life? who heapeth his favors upon us, though unworthy of the least? and who, above all, hath given his own Son to ransom us from sin and death; and promised in him greater things than eye hath seen, or ear heard, or have entered into the heart of man? Where is God my Maker, Preserver, Benefactor and Father? the God of all grace? that I may know and fear him, love and trust in him? O that I knew where I might find him. Am I one of the human apostacy, who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Emmanuel? This mercy demands that my forfeited, ransomed life be consecrated to my God and Redeemer. To the command, *Seek ye my face*, may my heart answer, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek*.

What I have now in view is to point out the special *encouragement of SUCCESS to early religious enquiries and endeavors*. This encouragement may be argued, first, from the influence of early habit. Secondly, from the instructions and declarations of the sacred scriptures.

First, from the influence of early *habit*.

Habits of thoughtfulness or inattention, circumspection or carelessness, deliberation or precipitancy, diligence or sloth, frugality or profusion, are early formed—Also propensities to truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, benevolence or malevolence, purity or impurity, things honorable or infamous, a reverence or contempt of God and providence. We are attached to the ways and manners of our education. Superstition has strong hold of minds educated in it. May not an acquaintance with true religion, in early life,

form a like attachment to it? If so, then they who seek the Lord early shall find; for he loveth those who worship, as he requireth, in spirit and truth.

In religion, as in other concerns, some seasons are more favorable than others. Who questions but the first opportunity for any useful purpose is the best? Men uniformly proceed upon this supposition in things of the present life. Those at least do so, who have any claim to be thought wise and prudent. If therefore the young have the means of religion, and a capacity for it, what period can be so convenient and promising as theirs? Native depravity will otherwise "grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength." As was just observed, some habits will be formed—some principles and manners: Whether they be good or evil is not of small moment. Timothy's early and rare proficiency in divine knowledge, his improvement of instructions imparted in childhood, and imitation of the faith and piety of parents who guided his tender years, afforded the highest reason to believe that he would prove a friend and distinguished ornament of the Christian religion.

Those who begin life in any occupation, art or science with good advice and consideration, and with proper application to the employment they have chosen, bid fair for success and eminence in their favorite pursuit. Suppose then that the mind is early stored with virtuous and Christian principles, that it is early turned to the things of God; is there not a well founded hope that its path may shine more and more. But suppose that early culture in such principles is neglected; may it not be presumed that the mind will be poisoned with baneful principles, resembling the soil overgrown with briars and thorns, not to be eradicated without the greatest difficulty, if indeed they can ever be eradicated? The first stages of life are best adapted to the acquisition of any useful knowledge, and especially of religious knowledge. They have not to encoun-

ter the prejudices and contrary attachment resulting from habit, connections and fashion. Where early instruction in the principles of knowledge, human or divine, has been neglected or slighted, the need of it may be afterwards felt very sensibly ; but the proper season for it having been misimproved, those who have misimproved it are ashamed to confess their ignorance ; they neither receive nor seek instruction in the things which concern them. Youth is apt to learn—open to advice—diffident—conscious that it needs direction. At least these qualities are found at that period, if at any.

A principal design of the proverbs of Solomon was, to *give to the young knowledge and discretion*. They contain an admirable collection of rules for the conduct of life—excellent instructions in morality and piety. They all terminate in the *fear of God*, and *keeping of his commandments*. The study and choice of sound wisdom are recommended to the young, by various considerations, which remind us of the aptitude of their period to learn ; the special reason to hope that their enquiries after saving knowledge will be crowned with success ; and the folly and danger of refusing it in youth.

There are many obstacles in religion. The gate of heaven is strait, and the way of life narrow. Inward corruption, worldly allurements, invisible foes call for great vigilance and firmness. They call for the whole armor of God to withstand them. They are more easily vanquished, before they have weakened our strength, damped our courage, and taken away any part of our armor. The errors, indiscretions and excesses of many persons in manhood, middle life, and even in old age, are to be traced to the neglect of early counsel and checks, or the early contempt thereof. As religion is postponed, the indisposition, difficulties and disgust increase. There are but few instances, comparatively, of the reformation of early vicious habits. But do any set their face heaven-ward, while they are

young, while their mental powers are ripening, before they have imbibed prejudices against the way of truth, before they are overcharged with worldly cares, may it not be hoped that they will obtain favor of the Lord? that, waiting on him, they will renew their strength?

If from the tendency of habit, there is reason to suppose that those who seek early shall find, and grow stronger in pious paths, it follows, from the same consideration, that a neglect to seek God early exposes to be forsaken of him. Youth is the time to learn whatever is good and useful. Those who neglect this season for the acquisition of the sciences, or knowledge in any useful art or business, usually remain ignorant; and are usually a burden on the community—often a pest to society. There is an analogy in religion. Those who grow up ignorant and thoughtless of the great duties of morality and religion, are in the way to die without instruction. Or admit that they may be reclaimed, and embrace the wisdom of the just, they are now making work for bitter repentance. The preservation of innocence is preferable to repentance. A sound constitution is more easily preserved than a disordered one is cured. No man in health, and in his senses, would voluntarily bring on himself a painful and malignant disease, because it is possible he may recover.

The attainment of the wisdom, which we exhort the young to seek, depends not on native strength of genius, or proficiency in science. All the meek and humble, all who consent to be taught of God, attain it. And the sooner the foundation is laid, the more opportunity will there be to build thereupon—to *go on to perfection*—to gain the most clear and just conceptions of God, of your relations and duties to him, to the Redeemer and mankind—to cultivate correspondent affections, and demean yourselves accordingly.

But more explicit and sure grounds of encouragement to early seeking are to be found in the holy scriptures, than any which reason and the doctrine of habit suggest.

The first argument in behalf of success to early religious enquiries, which I shall adduce from the instructions of the sacred oracles on this head, shall be taken from the words of Christ, Matth. xiii. 12. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: But whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that he hath." The same words we meet with at the close of the parable of the talents. Similar declarations occur frequently in the gospels and epistles. By *having* our Saviour plainly meant *improving* religious advantages, or original talents, whether five, or two, or one: By *not having* he therefore meant the neglect or abuse of original talents. In the parable of the talents it is observed, that the Proprietor, in the distribution of them, *gave to every man according to his several ability*. With this accord the words of an apostle, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted—according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not." Such a mind is alike faithful in little and much; as he that is unjust in a little would be also in much. He who received one talent, went and hid it; and, in excuse for his making no improvement with it, offered this plea; "Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not sowed." Was this servant's case an instance proving that his Lord expected to reap where he had not sown? Observe this servant acknowledges the receipt of a talent; and when called to account, said that he had buried it. No more was required of him than the improvement of that neglected talent.—He had the same ability to improve this as the other servants had to improve the two and the five. His conduct shews, that, had more been distributed to him,

he would not have improved them. The attempt at his own vindication furnished the ground of condemnation. It was but just and equal that he should be required to improve, as a good steward, what he received. He would then have been accepted. More would have been given him. The doom of this slothful, unprofitable, complaining servant was just. Otherwise you must say, that the receiver of alms has a right to prescribe to him who giveth them; to direct him in what proportion to give, and to whom.—“May I not do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” Will any man presume to say, that God might have done more, ought to have done more, for his vineyard? If it be presumption to speak of HIS rights and duties, or to censure HIS distributions, then let us admit, that whosoever hath, to him shall be given.

Apply this to the subject of our enquiry. Those in the morning of life have a price in their hands—a talent of which they must give account. Shall this be questioned, even with respect to such as have been educated in a Christian land? They, compared with others, may be said to have received five talents.—And, upon the principle laid down in the words of the Saviour above quoted, have they not the fullest reason to conclude, that nothing, but the want of an heart to improve their advantages, can prevent their being approved of him? Improve the light you have, the influences and restraints of grace you enjoy, not doubting but God will impart more. “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.” From the womb of the morning give him the dew of your youth. Your early enquiries, and humble application to him who giveth liberally the wisdom which you want, your vigor, your strength, your bloom devoted to your immortal concerns, will not be in vain, if to every one that hath shall be given.

Secondly, we argue the special encouragement of success to early enquiries and endeavors in religion, from the directions and motives addressed to parents and others who have the education of children and youth, to *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—to train them up in the way they should go, in the hope that when old they will not depart from it.*—These and similar scriptures corroborate what has been remarked on the tendency and force of habit.

There are exceptions, indeed. Some who have been educated in virtuous principles, revolt from them. Some resist all the attempts of parents and others to imbue their minds with such principles. A Samuel may have children who *walk not in his ways*; and an Eli, sons who *make themselves vile*. But better things may generally be hoped for from those who have been favored with early pious counsel, enforced by correspondent example.

There are, on the other hand, those whose childhood and youth have been neglected, who have early wandered from the paths of truth and virtue, and afterwards been reclaimed: But such instances are rare. Though there is no certain connection between early religious instruction and eventual success; or between the neglect of it and fatal consequences which may be apprehended from such neglect; there is yet all reasonable encouragement, that such instruction will not be in vain—the justest reason to fear, that such neglect may be followed with the worst effects. Therefore let those, whose place and duty it is, make it their care to impart good doctrine to the rising generation, in the hope that God may open their heart to receive it—that they may seek and find him. Let not the guides of children and youth, through any remissness, incur the guilt of not *restraining* them, when *they make themselves vile*, lest God be provoked to judge their *house forever, for the iniquity which they know*.

Q Thirdly, the encouragement to early religious enquiries may be deduced from the commendation the scriptures bestow on those heads of families, who paid attention to the religion of their household. "I know him," said God of Abraham, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment: that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Fourthly, the words of the text are explicit, *Those that seek me early SHALL find me.* If any shall find, early seekers are of this number. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." The encouragement and promises in the bible to human endeavors may especially be applied by such as pay early attention to religion. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find. Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them who ask him?" Ponder in your hearts these gracious words of the Saviour. View God in the character here ascribed to him, as the Parent of mankind. Observe that he is much more ready to give the holy Spirit to them who ask him, than earthly parents are to give outward good things to their children. What room can be left for you to express a suspicion, that HE will deny you his grace and assistance, notwithstanding all

your enquiries, earnest endeavors, and importunate prayers? To stifle every such suspicion, I entreat you to consider, first, that this same heavenly parent hath given his only begotten Son, to redeem you by his precious blood; and will, with this greatest, this unspeakable gift, freely give you all things. Secondly, he is beforehand with sinners. He giveth his Spirit before they ask him, or they would not seek or ask. None frame their doings to turn to God, none consider their ways, but through his previous influence. Nor could any *quench, resist or grieve* the Spirit, had they not received a measure of its operation in a conviction of sin. The argument to work out our own salvation is this: "It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." Our working is not the reason which induceth our Father in heaven to co-operate with us; but he worketh in us as an incentive to our working. He giveth his Spirit to awaken our attention—to reprove of sin, righteousness and judgment—to quicken us to seek him, and call upon him. We are admonished, "Receive not the grace of God in vain." As the consequence of receiving grace, the prodigal came to himself, and resolved, *I will arise and go to my Father*. As the consequence of receiving grace, the publican prayed, *God be merciful to me a sinner*. To the case of such as admit a conviction of sin, we may apply the words before recited: Whosoever hath to him shall be given.

Have men less reason to expect the divine concurrence and help in their spiritual than in their worldly concerns? Doth our Father in heaven know that we need outward supplies? And doth he not know also our spiritual wants? that we need grace to help? Or doth he attend to the former, and not to the latter? Hath he encouraged our labor for the meat that perisheth; but not our labor for the meat which endureth to everlasting life? Verily those who seek him early, shall find him.

Not to enquire whether there are *promises* made to the strivings of awakened sinners, we observe, that the good Spirit, which hath awakened their consciences, is ever ready to cherish any impressions of divine truth which it hath made upon them. *Encouragement* from God is equivalent to a *promise*. Every divine command seems to carry in it a reason to expect divine assistance to enable us to do the duty commanded.—“God is with you, while ye be with him: And if ye seek him, he will be found of you.”

You may ask, Shall not *all* who seek, find, even though they do not seek early? If the meaning of your question is, whether those shall find, who do not seek but in the last extremity—that is, after long refusal of all God’s counsel and contempt of his reproof—who do not seek until impelled by present affliction and danger—If such be your meaning, you have the answer, Prov. i. 27—31. “When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel: They despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.” Those who have wasted their best days in folly and infamy, shall “mourn at the last, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof! and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly.” Our Lord saith, that *many shall seek to enter in* at the strait gate, *and shall not be able*. He immediately assigns their delay as the reason of their not succeeding. “When once the master of the house has risen up, and shut to the door, and ye begin

“ to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, “ Lord, Lord, open unto us ; and he shall answer and “ say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.” The scriptures, far from encouraging procrastination, teach you, “ Now is the accepted time, now is the day of “ salvation. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be “ at peace : Hereby good shall come unto you.” The scriptures admonish you, “ To day, if ye will hear his “ voice, harden not your heart.” They exhort you, “ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy “ youth, before the evil days come. Seek the Lord “ while he may be found ; call ye upon him, while he “ is near. Go, work to day in my vineyard.”

Do you think to urge in excuse for delay, that the laborers, who went in at the last hour, had the same reward as those who went in early in the morning ? Remember that they who entered the vineyard last, entered as soon as the owner called them. You have been educated in a land of light and liberty. From your childhood you have had the advantage of private and public instruction in the things of the kingdom. It can be no comfortable reflection, at a future period, to review the follies and excesses of your early days, committed against the best advantages to know God, and do his will. Your period of life especially is the time when God will be found, if you seek him. He will accompany your study of his oracles, and meditations upon them, your humble suit for wisdom from above, with his illuminating influence. You will then have every reason to hope, that his Spirit will write his law in your heart.

An early beginning in religion, though final, may be the first fruits of a plentiful succeeding crop. The example may have much good influence. To be truly wise, at a period frequently distinguished for folly and vanity, is the highest commendation.

Sobriety of mind is by some accounted mere affec-

tation—and especially in youth. Is it affectation to be confiderate? to reflect that they have souls, and are accountable? Is it affectation to reverence their Creator and Redeemer? to be impressed with their infinite obligations? To such as represent this to be no other than hypocrisy, every thoughtful youth will say, Depart from me. The way of sinners, the seat of the scorner, the counsel of the ungodly, be far from me. Ye rising hopes of parents, your country, and the Israel of God, shew yourselves men by taking this resolution. You will then be to the Lord for a generation. This will be remembered in your behalf in time to come. You have a time to seek and serve the Lord—to lay a good foundation for eternity. Your heart shall live who seek God. May he inspire you with wisdom and grace. Be open to his counsel and influence. May the words of eternal life drop on your hearts as the rain, and distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender grass, and as showers that refresh and renew the earth.

The eyes of men are fixed on those who are coming forward, or just entered on the stage. As they act their part well or ill, at first appearance, a judgment may be made of them through the following scenes and acts of life. What is infinitely more than human spectators, HE who is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things, is the spectator of the part you act in early life. His eye is fixed on you at all times, and in every place. He weighs your actions, words and thoughts. His judgment is according to truth. With his judgment are connected consequences of inconceivable moment to you in this world and that to come. Be persuaded then to seek HIM early, who formed you for his praise—sent you into the world, that you might glorify him and do good—and might thus forever enjoy him. His immensity and universal agency—what he hath done and is continually doing for you—the hopes to which you are raised—and your

final account constrain you. Shall he who claims your first regards be last in your thoughts? Shall his works, word and ways, his mercies which are new every moment, be forgotten, or thought upon with indifference? Would you, as Adam when he had sinned, think to hide yourselves from him, and wish to banish him from your mind? Or would you be as those who, having been guilty of the basest ingratitude to an eminent human benefactor, are pained at the sight of him, and are troubled to think of him?

No enquiry is of equal or comparable moment with that upon which the young man came to Christ — “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Our Lord, beholding him thoughtful on such a subject, loved him. Such a subject cannot employ your thoughts too soon, or too closely. Eternal life must be accepted as the gift of God through Christ, and upon his terms. He is “the way, and the truth, and life: No man cometh unto the Father, but by” him.

The discourse will be closed with recommending to the attention of young people the following things.

First, *prayer*. Without this you must be so far from seeking God, that you will live without him in the world. To restrain prayer is to cast off the fear of God. He will be enquired of to give you a new heart. In all your ways acknowledge him, that he may direct your paths.

Secondly, *search the scriptures*. They make wise to salvation. They contain plain directions for every station and relation of life—in every duty you owe to God, your neighbor or yourselves. They are the only rule of faith and practice.

Let me next recommend to you the *observation of the Lord's-day*, and *public worship*. These are the principal means of upholding religion in the world. In his sanctuary he recordeth his name. There he meeteth with his people.

Further, *meditate* on what you read and hear. This

makes religious subjects habitual and familiar, guards and succours in temptation, and supplies armour from the word of God against the foes of religion.

Again, suffer not *amusements* to occupy too much of your time. This they certainly do, when they call you off from any duty of life or godliness. Let them be innocent in their kind, and adapted to your station and circumstances.

Be *industrious*, *temperate* and *frugal*.

Abstain from all appearance of evil. Shun the beginnings of sin—the allurements by which others have been seduced, or you yourselves endangered.

Beware of those, who, in conversation or writing, abuse the powers of language to corrupt you. They put deformity for beauty, and beauty for deformity. They transfer to vice, the charms of virtue. “There is,” as one observes, “a mighty power of seduction in the talent of declamation and of fine writing, which seldom fails to impose upon young persons who have not a more than ordinary degree of judgment or sagacity. And the finer a person’s taste is, so much the greater is the danger of his being enchanted out of his reason—What is *finely* said,” may not “be *justly* said.” Whatever you “meet with, in books or conversation,” against religion and good morals, proceeds from the foes of truth and mankind. “There is a sort of vanity, which has furnished the world with sceptics in every science, and in religion above all others. Other sciences are the attainment of but a small part of mankind, and to triumph over their errors is at best but a limited glory: Whereas religion being the general persuasion of the world, to conquer in this cause looks like universal monarchy, and seems to be the very empire of reason and knowledge, rising out of the ruins of universal ignorance and superstition.”

How fatal are the effects of sceptical principles? They give the reins to the appetites and passions, de-

throne reason, and coolly recommend as an eligible course, what Solomon undoubtedly intended as an irony: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." They scoffingly demand, *Where is the promise of his coming to judge the world?* The wiser Solomon has assured you, *that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.* None can be your friend, who would seduce you into paths destructive of your peace, and of your souls—who would make void the labors, and counsels, example and prayers, of parents and guides, and destroy their hopes from you. *Thus saith the Lord, Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*

SERMON VIII.

SELF-DEDICATION.

ROMANS, vi. 13.

----- YIELD YOURSELVES UNTO GOD, AS THOSE THAT ARE ALIVE FROM
THE DEAD -----



A DISCOURSE on SELF-DEDICATION will properly succeed to that which I last addressed to the younger class of my hearers. Their particular attention is therefore now requested to this important subject—a subject highly interesting to all ages and orders. *Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.*

The apostle describes the disciples of Christ as *dead to sin*, in consequence of their baptism, and raised to a spiritual life. “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. Knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more. For in that he died, he died unto sin once”; or, as the sentiment is otherwise expressed, “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many. But in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord—Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.”

Under the œconomy of grace, the love of the Father and Son in redemption—the faith witnessed in baptism—the example of a suffering and risen Saviour, and our hope through him, forbid that we should ever be forgetful of the mighty sum paid for the ransom of apostates; or that we should take occasion to sin, because grace hath abounded. “Ye are bought with a price: Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. Yield not your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

It is proposed, *first*, to offer some explanations on the duty of self-dedication, and to state the gospel motive to it.

Secondly, To suggest various considerations with a view to impress on the minds of our youth the importance of an explicit profession of religion.

I am, *FIRST*, to explain this duty, and state the gospel motive to it.

The words, chap. xii. 1. are parallel to those before us. “I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” The same argument or incentive to self-dedication, you observe is used in this passage as in the text—even the riches of mercy in redemption.

The original institution of sacrifice signified that God was propitious, and prefigured the great atonement in the blood of Christ. Under the Jewish institution, various kinds of beasts were ordered to be slain with the same view. That people were instructed, at the same time, that those sacrifices, unless accompanied with contrition and faith in the promises, were vain. “I dwell with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Instead of *animal* victims, the apostle instructs us to *present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, ac-*

ceptable to God. St. Peter faith, that the disciples of our Lord “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an
“ holy nation, a peculiar people, to offer up spiritual
“ sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. By him
“ they offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.” They are “not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renovation of their mind.” They present to God a *living* sacrifice: For they yield themselves to him as those whom “the Spirit of life hath
“ made free from the law of sin and death.” This is no other than a cheerful, entire dedication to God in Christ, according to the simplicity and purity of the gospel.

To yield yourselves to God in this manner is but to give him of his own. For your existence, with all your faculties, all you have received, enjoy or expect, you are indebted to him, and therefore bound to dedicate to him all your powers, possessions and advantages. In so doing, you will express a sense of his perfections and mercies; of the excellency of the human soul, capable of the society, service and bliss of angels. To “yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,” is to act the part of the rebel who wrests the sceptre from his rightful prince. “They
“ who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Yielding themselves to God is here opposed to the reign of sin in their mortal body, the dominion of the appetites and passions. The soul, consecrated to God, ascends to him, as sparks to the sun.

As the highest motive to this self-dedication, the apostle would fix your minds on the amazing grace and friendship manifested in the crucifixion of the Prince of life. That he should be appointed to die on the cross for sinners and enemies—that he should humble himself and become obedient to such a death for our sakes—that God is in him, and through his giving himself an offering and sacrifice, reconciling a

fallen world to himself, not imputing their trespasses; is, of all instances, the highest illustration of that scripture, *My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are my ways your ways.* This is the source of every other blessing. It has purchased all outward, spiritual and everlasting blessings for the children of disobedience. The atoning efficacy of the Redeemer's cross extends backward to the introduction of sin, and forward to the end of time. That cross expiates sins of any kind and degree, being repented of: It has purchased grace to enlighten, purify, strengthen, and comfort the soul, and seal it to the day of eternal redemption; when it shall be united, not to a vile and corruptible, but to a glorious and immortal body. For Christ "is made of " God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification " and redemption."

In his stead we beseech you to yield yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead. We might venture to exempt you from this service, or you might excuse yourselves from it, if any instance of love were to be compared with that of God's not sparing his only begotten Son, but sending him to be the propitiation for our sins—if any instance of friendship might compare with that "of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he " was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we, thro' " his poverty, might be rich." Why was not apostate man thrust down to hell with the angels who sinned? *So, Father, it seemed good in thy sight* to provide a ransom for sinners of mankind! Obnoxious as we are to thy judgment, thou hast revealed thyself on a throne of grace, abundantly pardoning, through the redemption in Jesus Christ, all who repent and believe. The riches of thy grace and long-suffering lead to repentance those whose sins are as scarlet and crimson.

Is such the love of the Father of mercies—such the love of the Redeemer of the world, toward the heirs of sin and death? Aggravated must be their guilt and shame, if they are found despisers of it—if all this love

does but prove a *favor of death unto death*. To incense that God, who hath expressed his desire of your conversion and salvation in a manner so astonishing—that Redeemer, who gave himself for you, whose blood is a price infinitely more precious than gold, must argue depravity which language cannot describe.

But I hope *better things of you*; and therefore beseech you to dwell upon the thought, that *ye are not your own*, that *ye are bought with a price*; and to express your sense of the immense obligation, by yielding yourselves to God in Christ, as those who are alive from the dead.

The Mediator between God and men is worthy. However unworthy and sinful in yourselves, you may be accepted in him. His death hath ransomed captives and prisoners. You may plead his merits.—None who “come to the Father by him shall be cast out. God is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake. “He will magnify the law and make it honorable.” Through his obedience many are made righteous. Having reconciled Jews and Gentiles in one body by his cross, he hath consecrated a new and living way of approach to the divine throne, so that you may draw near in full assurance of faith. Wandering prodigals may arise, and go to their offended Father in heaven. Having sent his Son to recover rebels, he accepteth the ransom, overtaketh them a great way off, and embraceth them as the father of the child who had wasted his inheritance. “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” Angels minister for the conversion of sinners. There is joy through heaven over every penitent. Therefore “turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?” The Saviour was lifted up on the cross, that you might not perish, but have eternal life. Go to God by him, that you may be saved from condemnation and wrath—that you may have life, and that abundantly. Confess your own unworthiness and vileness, the sin that

dwelleth in you. Say, with the reclaimed prodigal, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand! But with thee there is forgiveness, and plentiful redemption." Gratitude to God for his unspeakable gift, to Emmanuel, God with us, for his unparalleled friendship, and love to your own souls persuade to present yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead:

A mere bodily service is but to *offer the blind and lame for sacrifice*: It is to treat God with such contempt as you would not presume to offer to an earthly superior. He requireth a spiritual worship. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked." Commit your souls to him. If the blood of Christ hath cleansed you from the guilt of sin, the eternal Spirit hath "purged your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God. If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is at the right hand of God." Those who thus yield themselves to God, are no more "the servants of sin unto death, but of obedience unto righteousness." Their "life is hid with Christ in God." Such is the gospel motive to yield yourselves to God.

I am solicitous to impress on the minds of our youth, that an *explicit* dedication of themselves to God thro' Christ is their highest duty, founded on redeeming love. By this self-dedication, you will understand me to mean, first of all, a personal, solemn consecration of yourselves in secret, entering into the covenant and oath of God. He hath commanded you to enter your closet for this purpose. And if you do it in sincerity of soul, he will accept such dedication, and pardon the imperfection with which it is made. May I not ask, if this is done in secret, in the integrity of your heart, why are you backward to make the like dedication in the assembly of his saints? The Saviour expressly requireth, that we *confess him before men*—

that we remember him in the ordinance of the supper—that we there unite with his friends to shew forth his death. Will you undertake to shew, that this his command is not binding on you, because you are in your youth? It extends to all who are capable of understanding the nature and design of the Lord's supper. And can you be satisfied, that you have really yielded yourselves to God, while you decline joining yourselves to his visible church?—while you refuse the invitation given you to the gospel feast? while you say by your practice, time after time, “I pray thee have me excused?” You would be excused from remembering your greatest friend, and the greatest friend of the whole human race. Is this your gratitude to him who shed his precious blood for your salvation from sin and hell?

Or if you say, that you can remember him, without coming to his table, this is saying, in other words, that you are more competent to judge than he, how he shall be remembered. Doth this consist with the reverence, gratitude and duty which you owe him? He bids you do no great thing, when he saith, Come to my table, to eat of that bread, which is the communion of my body given for you; and to drink of that cup, which is the communion of my blood, shed for the remission of your sins. Would you withhold from the Son of the Blessed, the friend of sinners, so easy and small a testimony of your respect and gratitude? Were you in any measure sensible how much you are indebted for the depth and height, length and breadth of the love of Christ, could you deny him a return so fit as this memorial, the pledge of the highest possible friendship?

Would you abridge yourselves of the privilege of commemorating so precious a friend in the manner he hath directed? Would you decline any thing in your power, that may contribute to preserve and spread the favor of his name and religion? Would you post-

pone a service so fit, improving and useful? It becomes you to fulfil all righteoufness. And if so, can you give a reason for declining this duty for the present? Can you too soon testify your faith and love, by shewing forth his death, with his church?—too soon declare your choice of him for your Saviour?

Again, Does your delay to witness the good confession proceed from a concern and endeavors to be better prepared to come to the table? or is it rather owing to indifference and levity? If you wish the advancement of the kingdom of our Lord, cast in your lot with those who commemorate his bloody passion. Were it a matter of small or no consequence whether this memorial be attended—were the service needless or unreasonable, certainly Christ, the wisdom of God, would not have instituted it. If any of his disciples require other terms of communion than the apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, required, their inventions in Christian worship may cut off from the church worthy members, or prevent such from entering into it. But your lot is not cast among such.

“The righteoufness of faith speaketh on this wise: “Confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe “in thine heart that God hath raised him from the “dead. God hath highly exalted him, that every “tongue may confess him Lord.” Is it your duty to believe with the heart unto righteoufness? It is no less your duty to make a Christian profession. The apostle has connected these two. Is Jesus Christ Lord? Then they who confess him to be so, say well. He hath said, that those who are not with him are against him. Why are they not professedly on the Lord’s side? why are they not ready to give a reason of the hope that is in them? Is it that they love the praise of man more than that of God? Or is it that they fear what man can do unto them? How then do they love the Lord Jesus in sincerity? “He that loveth father or mother,

“son or daughter, more than me is not worthy of me.” According to our Lord’s declaration, not to confess him is equivalent to denying him.

Paul directed Titus to exhort the young *to be sober-minded*. Does not Christian sobriety involve a Christian profession? He mentions some *who were in Christ before him*. It is therefore commendable to be early in Christ—to be so in profession and in heart.

The extension, yea, even the existence, of Christianity depends on the observation of the Lord’s day, the stated assemblies of Christians and celebration of the sacraments. The holy communion, while it upholds the remembrance of Christ, and is a public invitation to observers to come into his church, contributes also to the improvement of communicants. *They take sweet counsel together: They hold fast their profession, and consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.* To decline this profession is to contribute to the extirpation of Christianity. Is Christ Lord and head of the church? Hath he left with it a solemn rite to commemorate his love in giving himself for it? And shall any, who admit his divine mission, refuse to record his dying love? Shall they treat his command to record it as doubtful, unimportant or grievous?

What can more conduce to the mortification of sin, and yielding ourselves to God as alive from the dead, than the exhibition of Christ in the sacred supper?—made a curse for us to destroy sin? This exhibition of our perishing state, and of our ransom by the crucifixion of THE LORD OF GLORY, is calculated to inflame our indignation and our love—our indignation against the cause of his sufferings; and our love to that wonderful person who laid down his life to save our souls. Look to him through the medium of this ordinance, and weep for yourselves, for your sins. But for his cross, these had sunk you in remediless perdition.—Look to him through this memorial of infinite obligation, and arm yourselves with the same mind; take

up your crosses, and follow him—die to sin—be crucified to the world—present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead.

Do not treat with careless indifference the invitation to the communion. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will let him come, and take the waters of life freely.” Come to the table of the Lord, ye who in your infancy were baptized into Christ. Come and recognize the vows then made in your behalf. Do not practically renounce them, by declining to take them on yourselves, now that you are capable of such a transaction. As children of pious vows, dedicate yourselves, deliberately and unfeignedly, to the Father, Son and Spirit. Shew that you know the value of the blessings of the new covenant—that you feel the constraints of the love of Christ, and your obligations to walk in his commandments and ordinances. Confess the just claim, which the former of your bodies and Father of your spirits hath to your soul and body, by avouching him to be your God. He brought you from nothing into being. To his mercy you are indebted that you are not sunk into a state worse than non-existence. Confess the just claim of the Lord who bought you; and, with Thomas, worship him, *My Lord, and my God*. Be not ashamed to appear among the friends of the cross. “Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.” But this is the commendation of the love of God and our Saviour, that Christ died for the ungodly. Fix your minds on this love: It shews the value of the soul. The world would be loss in exchange for it. By this love we beseech you to consecrate to God and the Redeemer your precious souls—to make this consecration in the presence of his saints. Let them see, and let the world see, that Christ is exceeding precious in your

esteem—that you account all things loss for him—that you feel, in a measure, the affection which the apostle expressed thus : “ I am crucified with Christ : Nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; “ and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by “ the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and “ gave himself for me.”

My young brethren, you cannot but observe, that the number, who, in middle life, or in its decline, make the Christian profession, is small. Often have they been invited, and refused the invitation. Tho’ the invitation is continued to them, as well as to younger life, I have yet chosen more particularly to address the latter to-day. I would take occasion to remind you, that the chief hope we have of attention to the gospel invitation is from the rising generation.—Nor can these imagine, that if they delay an explicit profession from one communion to another, and from one year to another, that they shall be more inclined and prepared to make it, than many others, whom they observe to be unconcerned about it, though they have reached, and some of them passed the meridian of life. Would to God that such had set an example worthy of the imitation of the young. Over the last, custom, fashion, have great influence. Custom and fashion declare against the self-dedication to which we would persuade the youth.

Do we then encourage and recommend hypocrisy and affectation ? This indeed we should do, provided there is no faith and sincerity on earth, and never will be. But if they may be found, shall we not exhort the youth to be emulous of them ? If we may not hope for these qualities from them, where may they be expected ? Real faith and sincerity may be *professed* as well as *possessed*. Good things may be brought forth from the good treasure of an heart warmed with the love of Christ.

The rod of God has again been on this place in prevailing sickness. The malignity and mortality have

not now been so great as in some late years. But the deaths have already been double to what is usual in one year, though but three quarters of this year have elapsed. Such visitations, as we experienced some years ago, and again experience, have been sent to accomplish a reformation, a revival of the work of God. I refer it to my hearers, whether such has been their effect—whether an increasing neglect of the sabbath and public worship and ordinances, increasing dissipation and immorality, are not apparent. With accessions to our population, commerce and wealth, and other improvements, have we not declined, rather than improved, in vital piety and good morals? If so, there is more abundant occasion to advise, exhort and warn the generation who are coming forward—to call upon them to dedicate themselves to God and their Redeemer, with a willing mind, not by constraint; deliberately, as those who have *set down and counted the cost*; unfeignedly, as mindful of the command, *My son, give me thine heart*. Make this dedication in the presence of all God's people. Renew from day to day your resolutions to live to him. Beseech him to confirm and strengthen in you such pious purposes and engagements. By reminding yourselves, from day to day, of the debt of gratitude which you owe for redemption, by the daily devotion of the closet, you may, through divine influence, feel your hearts warmed with such religious impressions and affections as may influence to a circumspect walk, a faithful improvement of your time and advantages, a profitable attendance on the worship and ordinances of the sanctuary.

Though religion is often professed from very unworthy views, let it not be thought that it cannot be, and never is, professed from upright views. Because many deny the power of godliness, who yet keep up the form, let it not be supposed that there is no such thing as vital piety. Neither let it be said, that the

spirit of religion can be maintained and advanced without any external profession, rites or ordinances. While we dwell in flesh, we need external symbols, and external worship. The perfected spirits of the just have no occasion for ordinances. Present with the Lord, purified from sense and sin, they stand in no need of a memorial of him.

Lord, revive thy work. The ways of Zion mourn, because few come to her solemn feasts. Pour out thy Spirit upon the youth of this society; that one and another may set their faces toward Zion, and subscribe with their hand to the Lord. It will be a pleasing reflection, in years to come, should they be able to make the solemn appeal, *O Lord God, thou art my hope, my trust from my youth.* The privilege of those youths who yield themselves to God as alive from the dead, may be estimated from the words of our apostle, *Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Whether they live, they live unto the Lord; and whether they die, they die unto the Lord: Whether they live therefore, or die, they are the Lord's.*

S E R M O N IX.

P R A Y E R.

EPHESIANS, vi. 18.

PRAYING ALWAYS WITH ALL PRAYER—



THE context and other scriptures represent the Christian life as a warfare. The foes are enumerated at the 12th. verse, and the arms in the verses succeeding. These arms, or weapons, are called *the armour of God*, of which *prayer* is a part. *Praying always with all prayer*. Every part of the Christian armour is essential.

The exhortation of the text doubtless comprehends social worship as well as personal—family and public prayer as well as secret devotion. But I would call your present attention to *personal prayer*. This is of two kinds; viz. that of the *closet*, and *mental* or *ejaculatory* prayer. We will give each of these a distinct consideration. It may be proper to introduce the discussion with a few observations on the general subject.

Prayer is an acknowledgment of the infinite perfections of God, of our own insufficiency and absolute dependence. Were we self-sufficient, prayer would be unnecessary. Were not God all-sufficient and immutable, it would be useless. To maintain prayer is to confess that we are dependent and unworthy; to profess our faith in God as wise, powerful, good and merciful. To neglect prayer is practically to say, that man is independent; or that God doth not know our wants, or is unable or unwilling to do for us.

Were there really no object, to whom we might repair, or whom we might make our confidence, we should unavoidably frame one to ourselves. Mankind, prompted by nature or necessity, manifest, in various ways, a feeling of their own indigence—some by impatience, or by recourse to external objects—some by the invocation of idols—some by addressing *the bearer of prayer*. All nations have consented in the acknowledgment of a God. Idolatry is a proof of this. Observe the zeal of the pagans for their superstition. “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no “gods!” Christianity hath revealed *the only living and true God*, that we might be *kept from idols*. Christ hath *abolished death, and brought immortality to light*. Through him, as the only Mediator, “we have access, “by one Spirit, unto the Father.” We may “come “boldly, that we may obtain mercy, and grace to “help.” Are we, notwithstanding, at a loss whether this is a reasonable service—a privilege? whether it is incumbent on us to express before God a sense of our dependence, our unworthiness? whether the gifts of nature and providence, and the superior gifts of grace, call for our explicit thanks? We feel our own poverty and misery. Is it yet a question, whether it behoves us to apply to HIM “who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think?” who, in his superabounding grace, hath made full provision for all the necessities of our fallen nature? Barbarous nations, in acknowledging a superior power, condemn many in polished nations, who practically declare, that there is no God who governeth the world, and weigheth the actions of men.

We proceed to apply these general remarks, first, to the devotion of the *closet*.

The public offices of religion are not more necessary to the public weal—family devotion is not more important to these smaller societies, than secret prayer is to individuals. The last is founded in the same general

reasons as each of the former. Individuals have concerns appropriate to their own state and character, proper to be mentioned only before HIM who knoweth the secret groanings of the soul. It is fit that they should pour out their hearts before him. The breath in your nostrils is his. Acknowledge him at all times, in all things, as long as his breath is in you. Observe regular seasons of retirement for converse with him, for self-communion. Your secret sins are in the light of his countenance. Confess them before him in whose sight they have been committed—with whom you have to do. Your wants, outward and spiritual—your temptations, dangers and distresses, are various and constant. Seek supplies and succour from him who knows them all, and hath all fulness. Let a man worship with the greatest apparent devotion in his family and in public, if he yet neglects secret devotion, there is reason to suspect, that his family and public worship proceed not from a pious principle. Secret prayer may indeed be attended merely from the compulsion of conscience. A formal discharge of it should satisfy no one. It should proceed from the abundance of an heart impressed with a sense of its condition, and of the perfections and mercies of God.

The scriptures supply matter adapted to every occasion, to persons of every description and character, and to all circumstances. The spirit of prayer is the principal thing in the view of God who is a Spirit, and requireth that we worship him in spirit.

Such as find their devout affections most excited, and in the best exercise, by means of a stated form, would do well to use it. But the best form may be varied from to advantage, on some occasions and emergencies. A present sense of our own necessities will dictate seasonable, pertinent expressions—more expressive language, perhaps, than any studied form—especially if the language of scripture has become familiar by frequent reading and meditation.

The stated devotion of the closet conduces to make God habitually present to the mind. Pious affections are cherished by this means, so that you will endure as seeing him who is invisible. May it not prove a preservative from sin, and stimulus to duty? May you not hence acquire the government of your passions? the government of your thoughts? May you not be hence led to pay much attention to your inward principles and affections? No prospect of concealment from the world may then prevail over you to sin against God. Every enticement may be immediately and firmly withstood. The first motions of lust and passion may be stifled. Aware of your own weakness, you may, by daily, fervent prayer to him who seeth in secret, call in Almighty grace to your aid; and in your own experience find that scripture verified; "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with every temptation, make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Calling to mind and acknowledging in his presence, from day to day, his manifold mercies to your body and soul, may you not be impressed with gratitude, which will constrain to returns of obedience? May you not feel your obligations for the means, influences and restraints of grace? for the long-suffering of God? for preservation from, or succour in, dangerous snares? If, through remissness and carelessness, you have been overcome by some great temptation, may not the early recollection and confession of it in your retirement, be accompanied with like bitter compunction as that of Peter after his fall, when smitten by the piercing eye of his Lord? If a care of this duty of secret prayer may conduce to preserve or recover from sin—may excite to an unreserved and persevering obedience, is it not highly important that you make conscience of the duty? Can you, in the omission of it, keep a conscience void of offence toward God? Is not a good conscience toward God

the principal source of a conscience void of offence toward men? Prayer is a restraint from sin. By sinning you cast off fear, and will restrain prayer.

Further, prayer conduces to beget, improve and fix the good dispositions prayed for—to assimilate you to the supreme object to whom it is addressed. Herein a devout soul has communion with the Father, Son and Spirit. Prayer, offered in faith, ascends as pure incense, through the Intercessor and Advocate for sinners. God hath made special manifestations of himself, at the seasons consecrated to devotion. When Job prayed, he could say, “Now mine eye seeth thee.” When Daniel prayed, “the angel Gabriel touched him, and said, O man greatly beloved?” Cornelius was praying, when an angel assured him, that his prayer was heard.

Do you object, “I know not *how* to pray?” Have you ever attempted? The vilest sinner, who seldom mentions the name of God, except profanely, can pray earnestly when in extreme distress or danger. The meanest beggar, soliciting alms, is eloquent in his expressions. A readiness and delight in prayer proceeds from a due sense of our necessities. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.* He encourageth *all flesh to come to him.*

Do you object want of *time*? When you have the most business on hand, you allow time for the refreshment of animal nature. Why not allow time to pray and give thanks for it? You will “not be heard for much speaking. Let your words be few; for God “is in heaven, and you upon earth.” If regular seasons for prayer were fixed, there would be no occasion to plead the want of time. No pressure of worldly business would be pleaded. Was laudable business ever impeded, by man’s committing himself and his work to God? In this way he pursues the business of his common calling deliberately and discretely, does every business in season, and inscribes on all, HOLINESS

TO THE LORD. Should you neglect to acknowledge your dependence on, and obligations to, a distinguished human benefactor, it would argue a base temper. But the obligations and dependence in this case may not be compared with what you owe to God, in whom you live and move, and from whom cometh every good and perfect gift. Yet this Benefactor you forget. You find time every day, perhaps, for amusements foreign to the business of your particular calling. Have you yet no time to call upon God? Do you not so much as enquire, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?

The humble heart is his temple, wheresoever the sacrifice is offered. If, in any situation or circumstances, no place of retirement can be found, the devout aspirations of the heart, its ardent wishes, will ascend to the throne of that God, who is witness to the *groanings which cannot be uttered*. It is to be observed, that they who are intent on sin, find no difficulty in regard to some *retired place* for the purpose. Were they alike intent on praying in secret, they might generally with as much ease find a proper place.

Prayer cannot alter God; but it altereth the creature, proving that he is sensible of his wants, and from whom the supply of them must come. It is a needful evidence of that temper, which is the requisite qualification for the descent of God's blessings upon us. He will be enquired of. On what easier terms than asking can we desire the things we need? It is a good reason for maintaining the devotion of the closet, that he *who seeth in secret, will reward openly*.

The other branch of personal devotion, to which I would call your attention, is *mental* or *ejaculatory* prayer.

This is an effusion of the heart in petition, penitence, praise, thanksgiving, supplication or intercession, according to the circumstances or exigencies of the moment. It is a fervent address to God, in some

concise acknowledgment of his wisdom and holiness, power, goodness and faithfulness.

This kind of prayer may, or may not, be expressed in words, as the occasion may be. It is fairly comprehended in various general precepts, and comes recommended by various examples, in the sacred oracles. We are instructed to *set the Lord always before us*, and *pour out our hearts before him at all times—to pray always with all prayer—in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make known our requests unto God—to bless him at all times*. Possessing the spirit of prayer, we shall not neglect the regularly returning seasons of worship in the sanctuary, the family or closet. Shall we not also *continue instant in prayer* out of season as well as in season? Just and needful occasions for it frequently occur in our own state and character, and in the state and character of our connections.—Our eyes and our hearts should be often lifted up, amidst the business and vicissitudes of life, to that Being who filleth immensity, who worketh all in all, who is the sovereign dispenser of good and evil.—Those petitions, which are dictated by a present feeling of our necessities or obligations, express lively faith in the perfections and government of God—a deep sense of dependence—real and earnest desires to engage his direction and aid, as our exigencies may require; to obtain his light, help and comfort.

Have your hearts never glowed with gratitude on the first reception of some distinguished mercy? recovery from threatening sickness, for instance, or some surprising escape from the jaws of death? Have you not felt a peculiar tenderness in the moment of some signal misfortune, or in the day of grief, or of impending danger? Have you not felt inward shame and contrition in the time of sin, or alarming apprehensions under the pressure of temptation? And have you not, in such a situation, poured out your soul unto God? either in praise and thanks, or in humble confession,

and fervent prayer for pardon, or in request for grace, or to be extricated from calamity.

Affliction may indeed for the present soften and humble a bad man. Or some great deliverance may, at first, kindle in him sparks of gratitude. But is there not reason to doubt whether you have the spirit of devotion, if you do not immediately address God in mental prayer, as special occurrences may call for it?

This duty is recommended by examples in scripture. Nehemiah, called on a pressing emergency to exert his abilities and influence for his nation, committed the cause to God in a short ejaculation. *So I prayed unto the God of heaven.* What the prayer was is not mentioned. But it must have been of the kind we speak of. For he was then in the presence of a prince who had it in his power to restore the Jews to their former privileges; and being asked, For what dost thou make request? he tells us, that between the question and answer he prayed—to this effect probably; “Lord, teach me what answer to give: Incline “the king to hear my request.” Our Lord, *looking up into heaven* previously to the cure of the dumb and deaf man, was an instance of the same kind of prayer. So was his *groaning in spirit* on the death of Lazarus; first at the house of mourning, and again at the grave. (John, xi. 33; 38; 41.) Therefore we read, that “he “lift up his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee, that “thou hast heard me.” If his groaning in spirit were not a prayer, why did he give thanks for being heard? There are no other expressions which intimate his making a request to his Father on that occasion. Every part and circumstance of his life afford an example of his pouring out his soul in short, fervent effusions of devotion. Sometimes nothing was expressed in words. At other times words were used in these effusions. “Father, save me from this hour. Father, glorify thy “Son. Father, forgive them. Into thy hands I com- “mend my spirit.”

The circumstances which call for this kind of prayer are too many and various to be enumerated—our personal circumstances, those of our connections and friends, of our people, of the church and world. Daily occurrences afford occasion through the day to look up to heaven. We know not what a day, an hour or moment may bring forth. Our circumstances, or those of others, may be greatly changed in an instant. Will you wait for the return of the hour of prayer, before you stir up any devout emotions suited to such change of circumstances? Rather lift up your souls to God, in prayer or praise, according to the occasion. If there is time or opportunity only for the shortest ejaculation; or if even this cannot be expressed in words, yet the sentiments and desires of the soul may ascend to God.

There are circumstances in which the special interposition of God can alone extricate—circumstances which leave us no human resource. While we are wholly at ease, and think that no evil or danger is nigh, we may, in an instant, be exercised with torturing pain: Or a signal misfortune may befall us: Or an esteemed friend or relative may be removed instantly. We may be pressed by some strong temptation; or may be in a situation, wherein the measures we immediately adopt may be followed with important and lasting effects. These are circumstances which cannot be foreseen or provided for. We are in a manner impelled to fly to God for direction, support and relief. Has excruciating bodily pain suddenly attacked us, while we were wholly at ease? Are we fallen, in a moment, from easy circumstances to indigence? Does our enemy triumph in our wrong? Is our heart, from a full tide of joy, overwhelmed with sorrow? Is our way hedged up, so that we see not what course to steer? Or are we in imminent danger? It is a privilege, in situations like to the above mentioned, that the heart may be poured out to him who is *a very present help in trouble.*

Societies, families, individuals, may, at an unthought of hour, be involved in the deepest distress. In such case, a just concern for personal safety, or the safety of our dependents or people, will be expressed by our prayer, without delay, to the Disposer of events. Israel, on leaving Egypt, were pursued by the strength of that kingdom. Destruction stared them in the face, what way soever they looked. No other than the immediate hand of God could deliver. Moses, full of faith, said, "Fear not. Stand still, and ye shall see "salvation of the Lord this day." Then God arose, divided the sea for his people to pass through, and brought it back upon their pursuers.

They who jeopard their lives on the high places of the field, may, in the time of action, address the God of armies to shield them. A soldier may be devout as well as brave. Piety is the surest basis of valour. The mariner in a tempest may pray to him whom winds and seas obey, as Peter beginning to sink, "Lord, save us, we perish." He has much occasion for pious ejaculation, while "mounting up to the heavens, and going down to the depths, and at his wits end." The pestilence walketh in darkness, unknown in its rise and progress. Does this rage? Are the slain of the Lord multiplied? Do all faces gather paleness? And shall not all give themselves to prayer?

Are you at any time on the borders of sin, from the enticement of vicious companions, or the lust of your own heart, or the sudden assault of a great temptation? Pray immediately for a way to escape.

Do such embarrassments attend you, that you are perplexed to determine on the course of prudence and duty? A mind tossed with doubts and solicitude may pour out tears unto God. Looking to him it is lightened.

Are you in a situation to do essential service to your friends or people? At the same time, must your exertions, in the present situation of their affairs, subject

you to great self-denial and hazard? No course can be so proper as prayer, that God would give you wisdom, strength and fortitude to fulfil the good offices which they need from you.

Beside special mercies or afflictions, which call for the duty we speak of, events of common and daily occurrence call for it. The good man attends to the universal course of providence. Pious thoughts and wishes possess his mind in the house and by the way, in whatever business he is employed, whether he is in company or alone. His treasure, conversation and heart are in heaven. In every thing he makes known his requests unto God.

Even those who object to external worship, yet admit, in a sense, the duty of ejaculatory prayer. They admit that dependent creatures should cherish the spirit of devotion. It is incumbent upon us then to cultivate inward sensations of piety. If we do so, we worship God in the spirit. Shall we not then do his will? Internal devotion is kept alive by explicit acts of worship. The latter will degenerate into empty form, if the heart does not often ascend in pious ejaculations. On the maintenance of this kind of prayer, the improvement, if not the existence, of the Christian life may much depend.

A practical belief of the moral perfections and superintendency of God, and of the truth of the Christian religion, is of the highest moment. His unlimited and unintermitting government in the natural and moral world claims the attention, reverence and joy of heaven and earth. "A sparrow does not fall to the ground without" him. "There is no wisdom, understanding or counsel against" him. He hath the hearts of all in his hand. His "eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, that he may shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is upright." To them there ariseth light in the darkness. Joy springs up from sorrow. The things which may seem

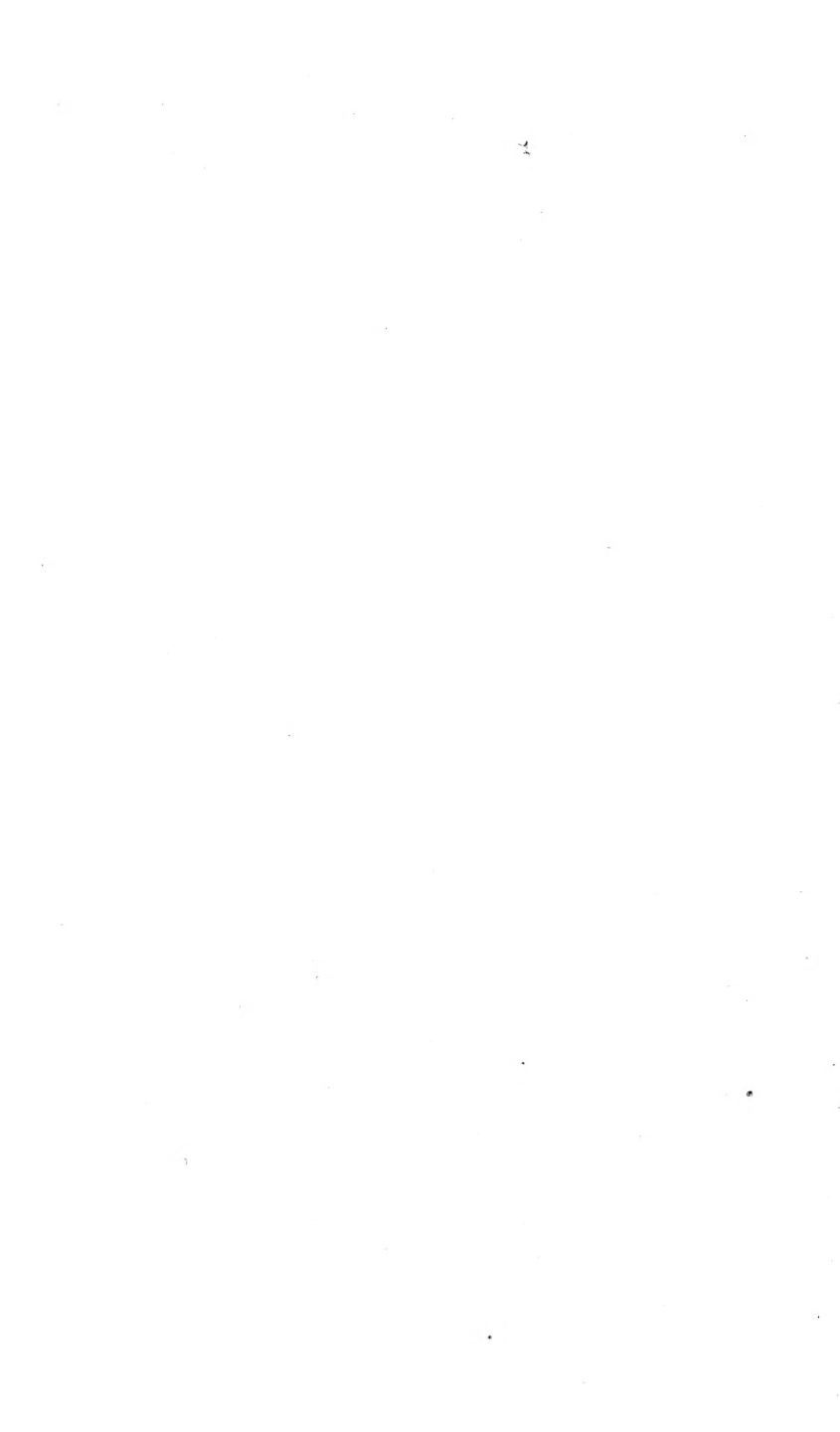
to be against them are all meant for good. God is their refuge in affliction. "His ears are open to their prayer. He will hide them in his pavilion. They abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He will give grace and glory : No good thing will he withhold from them." Such a view of God and providence, and the affections which these sentiments are adapted to excite, are awakened and strengthened by pious ejaculations, as events in our state, in that of others, or of our nation, or of the church, or of mankind may suggest. A serious sense of God and religion will languish, unless frequent occasion is taken, in the way we recommend, to supply fuel to it.

If there is such occasion for prayer as we have remarked, let every opportunity for it be improved. Visible objects unite with native depravity and the devices of Satan to call off the mind from spiritual, eternal concerns. Prayer is part of the armour with which we are to "withstand the wiles of the devil," our inward corruption, and the corruptions of the world. A sense of our insufficiency of ourselves to think, to will or to do, should lead us, in every thing, to apply to him of whom is all our sufficiency.

It is a mighty encouragement to pray always, that "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for the sin of the whole world."

We may hope, by attention to the duty of prayer, that any special circumstances in our lives, every common event in them, every common business and action, may bring glory to God, and turn to our own best account. The acknowledgment of God in all our ways, while it is a principal mean of improvement in vital piety, will greatly contribute to the true enjoyment of life. His blessing with the comforts of life enhances their value. Thus we enjoy God and ourselves—the consolations, supports and hopes of religion, and our portion in this world, be it more or less.

Our young people will suffer the exhortation to begin life and spend it by addressing humble prayer to the God of their life and mercies from day to day—In the morning give yourselves up to his direction and influence through the business and temptations of the day. At evening commit yourselves to HIS keeping who never slumbers, who alone maketh you to dwell in safety. Wait on him all the day. Let all your expectations be from him. Ever eye his footsteps, and follow where he leads. Be thankful for mercies, and submissive under frowns. In affliction pray to him who giveth songs in the night, who seeth your tears, and will hear your prayer—if not in the things for which you make request, yet in better. Give thanks to him for all things; and he will command his loving kindness on your prosperous days. Prepare for future events; not by a solicitude to know what shall befall you in the world—whether you shall be rich or poor; or shall take an higher or lower room—or shall be healthy or sick. Refer these things to the Arbiter of events. Prepare then for future events, by committing your pursuits, your souls, your all to God. Be in his fear all your life long. “For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory “for ever and ever.” AMEN.



SERMON X.

THE OBSERVATION OF THE LORD'S DAY.

REVELATION OF ST. JOHN, CHAP. i. 10.

I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S DAY.—————



FROM the beginning of the Christian institution, the first day of the week has been distinguished by this appellation, THE LORD'S DAY. On this day the disciples *came together to break bread, and Paul preached to them.** On this day they made collections for the poor.† On this day they were assembled, and Jesus was *in the midst of them.*

By his resurrection on this day, he was made both Lord and Christ. Having accomplished our redemption, he on this day rested from his own work, and entered into his rest; as God, having finished the work of creation, rested on the seventh day.‡ “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.|| God hath highly exalted him, that every tongue might confess him Lord.”

Among other prerogatives of the ascended Saviour this is one. *The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath;* which is therefore called the Lord's day. We celebrate his triumphant resurrection and ascension, and the eternal redemption he hath obtained for us.—“Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

* John xx. 19; 26. Acts xx. 7. † 1 Cor. xvi. 2. ‡ Heb. iv. 10.
|| Psalm ii. 7. cxviii. 21—24. Acts, iv. 10, 11.

You see for what purpose the first day of the week is separated and distinguished. Had no Redeemer been provided, it had been good for the race of man, if they had never been born. Yea, on this supposition, for aught we know, our progenitors would have had no descendants to inherit their sin and shame. By the return of the day sacred to EMMANUEL, we are put in mind of the foundation of our hope. This day is equally a memorial of our apostacy, and of the friendship and power of our Lord Jesus Christ, the “Lamb without blemish and without spot ; who verily
 “ was fore-ordained before the foundation of the
 “ world ; but was manifest in these last times for you,
 “ who by him do believe in God, who raised him from
 “ the dead, and gave him glory ; that your faith and
 “ hope might be in God.”

The exalted Saviour, according to his promise before he returned to heaven, sent the Holy Ghost upon the first disciples, as on this day. Their steady practice, after his ascension, is our warrant for the observation of this day as appropriately his. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven was the last confirmation of his mission—an irresistible evidence of his dominion and authority. He is the head of the body, the church—and hath in all things the pre-eminence. The time advanceth, when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord. He was greater than the Jewish temple. His presence filled the latter house with far superior glory to that of the former, and of quite a different kind. As Lord of the Sabbath, he abolished the ritual law respecting it. He made such regulations as to the day of sacred rest, and inculcated such an observation of it, as are suited to mankind of all nations, and may best subserve their benefit and improvement.

We will, first, enquire what frame of mind may be intended by being *in the Spirit* ? or how the Lord's day should be observed ?

Secondly, Evince the wisdom and importance of the religious observation of it.

FIRST, What frame of mind may be intended by being *in the Spirit*.

It more immediately denotes a prophetic vision. "I was in the Spirit—and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." He relates what the voice spake and commanded—"When I turned to see the voice that spake, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and one like the Son of man in the midst of them,—of whom a distinct description is given in some following verses. The same expression, I was in the Spirit, introduces his vision of the door opened in heaven—of the throne of God, and the twenty-four elders around it. It occurs again as introductory to the vision of the great anti-christian apostacy and the persecuted church. And it introduceth his vision of the new Jerusalem. Thus was St. Peter in the Spirit, when he had the vision which he relates, Acts x. 10,—16. And Paul, when he was caught up into paradise, II. Cor. xii. 1—4.

But the expression may be accommodated to the temper with which we should observe the Lord's day—which indeed we should always desire and endeavor to possess, when we bow before the Lord. "God is a Spirit. The true worshippers worship him in Spirit and in truth." Christians "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," who hath consecrated a new and living way of access to God. They offer not animal victims upon his altar; but consecrate their souls to him. In the language of St. Paul, they present their bodies *a living and holy sacrifice*. "We are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." To the dispensation of the gospel, which abolished the Jewish, that prophecy refers; "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among

“ the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering.” To this prophecy correspond those words in the vision of St. John, “ And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer ; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” There is an allusion to the altar of incense in the Jewish tabernacle and temple, overlaid with gold, placed before the mercy-seat, which was over the ark of the testimony, on which the high priest annually offered pure incense, to make atonement for Israel—(Exod. xxx. 1—10.) a type of the intercession of our High Priest in heaven. Having such an Advocate, “ let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.”

Keeping these things in mind, we shall be directed to such an observation of the Lord’s day as will correspond to the expression of being in the Spirit ; not in the primary, but in the general and qualified sense, in which the words may be applied to all who worship with the heart. In this view being in the Spirit may involve the following particulars : An abstraction from secular cares, business and conversation—contemplations on God and Christ, and our immortal interests—self-recollection, communion and devotion—family instruction and worship—and a devout attendance on the public institutions of religion.

First, an abstraction from secular cares, business and conversation.

If we do not discontinue our earthly pursuits on the Lord’s day, the design of its separation from other days must be defeated. This design is equally defeated, if the day is spent in unnecessary travelling, which indeed is no other than the prosecution of our common concerns. It is defeated when the day is devoted to amusements. To *find our own pleasure* upon it is expressly mentioned as dishonouring God. We

honour him, when we call the Lord's day a delight, and the place appropriated to his worship honourable—when we find not our own ways, nor our own pleasure, nor speak our own words.

The opinion, that the time of public worship is the only holy time under the gospel, excludes all distinction between the Lord's day and any other time which may be observed in social worship: It does not well comport with being in the Spirit: It intermingles earthly things with heavenly: It has not a good aspect on the previous preparation and after meditation which become our stated religious assemblies, and conduce to their greatest advantage.

Our Father in heaven never intermits of his care over his great family. The author of our religion healed the sick on the Sabbath, and blamed not his disciples for attending to their own necessities on that day. He reproved those who postponed mercy to sacrifice, who consecrated the spoils of nature and humanity. We may not neglect the care of our dependents, or any object in distress, under pretence of piety. Positive institutions were ordained to subserve justice, mercy and faith. On the love of God and our neighbour hang all the law and the prophets. If any, neglecting the duties of the second table from a professed reverence for those of the first, think they are spiritual, they deceive themselves.

We should every day observe the power, wisdom and goodness of God displayed in the works of nature and providence; and especially his loving-kindness to the children of men. We should shew forth his loving-kindness every morning, and his faithfulness every night—should acknowledge him in all our ways, and commit every undertaking to him. He numbereth the hairs of our heads, and disposeth the most contingent and casual events. He cannot be far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.

But the daily cares of life, the necessary business of our particular callings, admit not of that contemplation and abstraction, which are highly useful for us as probationers for a world which flesh and blood cannot inherit; and where the powers of the soul will not be impeded by sensitive objects. The inhabitants of that world, always on the wing of contemplation, rest not day and night from the pure and perfect worship of God and the Lamb. It is then a token of divine wisdom and goodness, that a fixed and frequently returning day is appointed for the suspension of earthly cares and employments. But why suspend them? The answer is,

Secondly, To appropriate the time to contemplations on God and Christ, and our immortal interests.

We are in the Spirit, if, laying aside other thoughts and cares, we are free to contemplate the soul's dignity; man's apostacy; the diseases of the heart; the value of the ransom provided by God; the fuller manifestation of his glory in redemption than in his other works; the duties of such an appropriate day as this, and the good tendency of observing them.—Recollection is necessary, that our worship may be *without distraction*. While the thoughts wander on every foreign concern, how are we in the Spirit? Shall our thoughts be dissipated on that day when the things of the kingdom should swallow up every other thought? Shall we even then think intensely on the things of this life? Or shall the day of sacred rest be wasted on the bed of sloth? Was it appointed for bodily indolence? Is it sufficient to refrain from secular business or recreations? Does not being in the Spirit imply a collected, thoughtful frame? Can it consist in consuming the hours in sluggishness, or in visits, or in trifling conversation, or in vain speculations? Is this to regard the day as the Lord's—a day set apart for

special attention to the one thing needful ; the good part which can never be taken away ?

Thirdly, To be in the Spirit includes self-recollection and devotion. In other words, communing with our own heart, enquiring into our spiritual state, entering into our closet, praying to him who seeth in secret, dedicating our souls to him, reading the scriptures, and other pious and useful books for our instruction. The things of heaven thus become familiar and delightful. Notwithstanding the weekly recurrence of the Lord's day, good men find that secular thoughts and cares are apt to overcharge their hearts. How then should we be swallowed up with such thoughts and cares, were it not for the return of the day appropriated to special self-converse and religious homage, the cultivation of good principles and affections ?

Fourthly, To be in the Spirit may well include family instruction and devotion.

Heads of families, having the spirit of religion, will especially improve the opportunity, which the day of the Lord affords, to impart religious counsel to the members of their household. Shall it be thought a task, to employ a part of this day in imbuing the minds of children and youth with moral and Christian truths, taking them by the hand, and *leading them in the way everlasting* ? This most reasonable and profitable employment, should be a delightful one : It cannot be omitted without great guilt. It behoves us to talk on spiritual concerns before our families—and especially on that day which we are expressly commanded to *remember and keep holy*.

Those who argue that early religious instruction encourages implicit faith, appear to take it for granted that scepticism is preferable to parental instruction in religion. If so, why should they blame parents for withholding instruction in things of this life ? For

the knowledge of the things of eternal life cannot be of less moment. Let heads of families teach their household what they believe to be the way of the Lord, and let their example enforce what they inculcate.

Fifthly, A steady and devout attendance on the public institutions of religion is included in the frame of spirit with which the Lord's day should be observed.

It belongs to God to say what means of grace are needful for us—what proportion of time we must devote to public prayer, praise and instruction—what ordinances we must observe—what means he will bless. The Lord's day and the duties of it conduce to excite and improve divine and social love, and prepare for the company and worship in heaven. By these means light, strength, animation and comfort are communicated. When the desire of the soul is to God and the Redeemer, to the exercises in which glorified saints and angels are employed, then are we in the Spirit. Are we about to approach an earthly superior? we consider how we shall order our speech and behavior so as to find acceptance. We must bow before the great God with preparation of heart—with exalted thoughts of him, and the lowest thought of ourselves. Were it not that he delighteth in mercy, how could we come before him? We can open our lips with no other plea than the publican's, *God be merciful to me a sinner*. When David engaged in the solemn worship of God, his heart was *fixed*. Our heart must be so. Are we present in body before the Lord, but absent in spirit? We pay him no homage. The same holds true, if we worship for a pretence. God is not mocked. He dwelleth with the contrite and humble. To what purpose is the Lord's day observed, if we have no communion with the Lord of the sabbath? To what purpose do we assemble for Christian worship, if the head

of the church doth not vouchsafe his presence? To enjoy this blessing, our souls must thirst for the waters of life—must aspire to the employments and bliss of that world of eternal rest and joy, of which the Lord's day is an emblem. The religion of the closet and family prepare for the solemnities of the sanctuary. Minds thus prepared go up with joy to the temple, to pay their homage where God recordeth his name, and meeteth with and blesteth his people. “My soul thirst-
 “eth for God, for the living God, to see his beauty,
 “power and glory in the sanctuary. I have thought
 “of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thine
 “holy temple. Blessed are they who dwell in thy
 “house. They go from strength to strength: Every
 “one of them in Zion appeareth before God. We
 “have boldness to enter into the Holiest,” through the Mediator between God and men. At the right hand of the Majesty on high, he pleads our cause. All our offerings must be presented, and whatsoever we do must be done, in his name. We have access to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. “Whatsoever
 “ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Fa-
 “ther may be glorified in the Son.” This is to be remembered at all times—and especially on the Lord's day, when the universal church on earth join with the church in heaven, ascribing “blessing, and honour and
 “glory and power unto him who sitteth on the throne,
 “and unto the Lamb.”

SECONDLY, The religious observation of the Lord's day is of the greatest *utility and importance*.

Separate from divine institution, one day has no preference to another. Reason might dictate some intermission to the labours and cares of life, and the appropriation of some part of time for special attention to our immortal concerns. But without a divine interposition, no universal or general agreement could ever have taken place on these points. Without such agreement, all attempts of the kind would be constantly de-

feated by diversity of opinions and practice. In a matter of so much moment to the order of society, good morals and the cause of piety, the wisdom and authority of God have so enjoined, that all mankind may, with united heart and voice, pay him their homage at the same time, without interruption from one another. We have to acknowledge with gratitude, that God hath decided the question respecting the day to be observed as sacred, the determination of which was clearly called for, both by the outward and spiritual exigencies of man.

The observation of this day supports family and civil order, by impressing a solemn sense of God, morality and future retributions. The state of people who disregard this day, who keep up no public worship, is a state of brutal ignorance of God and very general violation of moral duties. Slavish fear, the most base and insecure of all principles, may, to a certain degree, compel submission to family or civil government. But the true, and only effectual principle of all just respect to earthly superiours is, the fear of God. Now where would this fear be, were his day and religious solemnities abolished? These are of great use, in forming young minds to the knowledge and remembrance of their Creator and Redeemer, and a becoming respect to human authority. Heads of families, while they honour God and his institutions, may assuredly hope that he will incline the members of their household to give them reverence, observe their own place, and fulfil their part in every thing pertaining to the order, cares, comfort and reputation of the family. Such a demeanour, in these nurseries of the church and state, has the happiest aspect on both. See peace within their walls, and prosperity within their palaces. Such order and union are *as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion. There the Lord commanded the blessing.* But what is the state of society, where *the house of God lies waste?* or none is to be seen? where the Lord's

day is profaned by festivity and amusements? Behold the forgetfulness, the denial of God. Behold strife, confusion, and every evil work. We appeal to any observer of the state of society in different places, which has the advantage with respect to virtue and social happiness—that where the Lord's day and worship are observed; or that where the day is spent in dissipation.

If the observation of the Lord's day consists in recollection and contemplation, in imparting and receiving religious instruction, in reading and hearing the things of the kingdom, in meditation and prayer, and attendance on ordinances—then all these are means of divine appointment, intimately connected, and mutual aids to each other. Is not a religious observer of the Sabbath more excellent than his neighbour who profanes it?—better in the conjugal relation? a better parent and master, child and servant? a better neighbour and friend? a better ruler and citizen?

Let us bless the Proprietor of our time for separating one day in seven from other days, for his glory and our chief good. We are highly privileged above those who *wander from place to place, to seek the word of the Lord, but cannot find it*. Valuing this day as we ought, it is an earnest of that world, where the worship hath no intermission nor langour. “He who sitteth on the throne dwelleth among them.” They are all arrayed in white robes—robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. He “feedeth them, and leadeth them unto living fountains of water. They hunger and thirst no more.” Are those prepared for the worship of the church above, who are seldom seen in the assembly of Christian worshippers on earth? who *account the Sabbath a weariness*, and *wish it gone*? who practically declare that the Lord of our time, talents and enjoyments has not a claim to the day which he hath set apart for himself?

We may not *call that day common*, which, by the practice of the Christian church, under the immediate

guidance of the Holy Ghost,* was separated from other days, as a solemn, public memorial of the risen and glorified Redeemer—which he honoured as the day of bestowing the gifts of the Spirit—on which three thousand converts were made by one sermon; and which, in all succeeding ages, he hath delighted to honor, by sending his ambassadors to beseech men, in his stead, to be reconciled to God. In virtue of his promise to be with them *to the end of the world*, his word in their mouth hath *prospered in the thing to which he sent it*. Let us not call that day common, which is an appointed mean of training us up for the rest that remaineth to the people of God. If *the house of God is the gate of heaven*, let it not be *despised*. “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her; and the Highest himself shall establish her. I will abundantly bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.”

It is the character of an hypocrite to place confidence in the external observation of the Lord's day and ordinances of divine service: But to have no occasion for external rites of worship is the exclusive privilege of angels and just men made perfect. An habitual heavenly walk through the week will fit us for the religious observation of the Lord's day: It will help to fix our attention, and elevate our thoughts and our hearts in the assembly of the saints. The good impressions made by the religious exercises of this day continuing through the week, we shall renew our strength, with our faces toward heaven. Our houses and our bodies will be the temple of the living God. All employments and events will minister to the great purpose of a meetness for that state, where we shall rest from the labours, sorrows and temptations, the

short and languid worship, of earth, and mingle in the worship and joy of an eternal Sabbath.

The observation of the Lord's day, from the ascension of the Saviour till now, is a distinguishing proof of the truth of his religion. The first Christians, educated in Judaism, had a strong attachment to the Jewish sabbath, the memorial of the redemption of their ancestors from Egyptian slavery. What could persuade them to drop a memorial which had been kept up from the commencement of their theocracy? Had the first day of the week been set apart by human wisdom, it could not have universally obtained, and been perpetuated in the church. Would the Christians have kept up their assemblies on this day at every hazard, had they not been universally convinced, that such was the command of their common Lord? Would they have been thus convinced, had not the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven thus assured them? There is surely something more than human in the designation and stated observance of this day for religious solemnities. Had the Author of our religion been an impostor, let any man shew that, in the circumstances of the gospel and its first disciples, such a memorial of him could have been set up and upheld in the world. The foes and persecutors of the Christians bear witness to their zeal and constancy in observing this day—that all endeavours to suppress and prevent their assembling upon it were vain. If not suffered to meet openly, they would secretly. If they might not assemble by day, they did by night. Their foes and persecutors further testify, that they manifested no wish to disturb civil government; but were of peaceable and exemplary deportment—distinguished for love and good works—that their profession was the only ground of complaint against them—They believed that Jesus, who was crucified, rose from the dead, and was ascended to heaven; and met to celebrate their triumphant Saviour, to pray, and sing, and hear, and to attend his ordinances. Their foes and

persecutors go yet further, and testify to the wonders and mighty deeds performed by them in his name. Had this counsel been of men, it must have been overthrown. We therefore assuredly infer, from the observation of the Christian Sabbath and the solemnities of it, that Christianity is from heaven.

We infer further, that this day and its solemnities are principal means of the preservation and promulgation of the Christian religion. In the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, v. 23,—26 ; 29, the religious assemblies of Christians are enforced as powerful incentives to the virtues of the Christian profession, and to steadfastness in it. “ Let us hold fast our “ profession, and consider one another to provoke un- “ to love and good works.” These are included in holding fast our profession. Christians are known by their love to one another and the fruits of it. They are “ one body in Christ, and members one of ano- “ ther. Faith worketh by love. Believers are care- “ ful to maintain good works, and stir up one another “ to” them. They “ shine as lights in the world,” while they “ stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, “ striving together for the faith of the gospel. By “ their good works which men behold, they put to “ silence the ignorance of” the foes of Christianity.

Now in the passage just referred to, in the epistle to the Hebrews, the writer exhorts to the upholding of Christian assemblies as indispensibly requisite to firmness in the faith—an indispensable part of Christian love, essential to the good fruits of their profession. Yea, he mentions the forsaking of these assemblies as amounting to the denial of the faith, and the destruction of charity. He calls it *sinning wilfully*; that is, falling off from Christianity. The awful consequence of apostacy is then stated. “ He who despised Moses’ “ law died without mercy. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy “ who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and “ hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith

“ he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done “ despite to the Spirit of grace.” Thus the neglect of the Lord’s day, and of public Christian worship, is nothing less than to *trample under foot the Son of God*, *contemn the blood of the everlasting covenant*, reject the only *sacrifice for sin*, and *do despite to the holy Spirit*. It is falling away from Christianity. How could Christianity be preserved in the world without public worship and ordinances? How could it be remembered that Jesus died and rose again? How could the flame of love be cherished? With the loss of public worship, the loss of the Lord’s day must follow; or be observed for no religious or useful purpose; but merely in recreations and every excess. Thus important is the Lord’s day, and the devout remembrance of it. This day and its institutions are the principal means of keeping alive the spirit of religion and the knowledge of redemption. To neglect them is the sure way to the loss of Christianity, both name and thing. See then the great sin and danger of forgetting this day; of forgetting the design of it—of casting contempt on the public ordinances of it—of dishonouring the day by unnecessary worldly labour, journeying, or conversation on secular affairs, or by vain and trivial amusements. How deplorable is the state of that people, who have no sanctuary dedicated to God and his Son—who have lost the remembrance of the Lord who bought us?

If Christianity be true, it is of the highest importance. Among the gifts bestowed on the church, when the head of it “ ascended up above all heavens, that “ he might fill all things,” were “ apostles, prophets, “ evangelists, pastors and teachers”—extraordinary and ordinary ministers. The following words shew for what purpose they were given—“ For the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the “ unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the “ Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure “ of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Providing

for a succession in the ministry of reconciliation, he promised them his presence while they keep to his instructions. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and "he that despiseth you, despiseth me." The *gospel* is *preached for a witness, whether men will hear it or not*. If they receive it, they improve the means God hath ordained for their instruction in righteousness and growth in grace: If they reject it, they refuse the means of religion, and have no cloak for their sin and folly.

In the light of the Christian revelation, the separation of the Lord's day from other days, and the institutions of the Christian sanctuary, we are *lift up to heaven*. God forbid that these privileges should be abused or neglected. Happy for us, if we really know their value. The present age appears to be in no danger of a superstitious regard to the Lord's day. Liberties are taken and permitted which consist not with the sanctification of it. Heads of families would render an essential service to their house, and to society, by a care that this day may be religiously observed by all under their inspection and government. A reformation in this matter must begin with them. And for their laudable endeavors in this thing, their children and household will remember them in time to come, and call them blessed.

May our young people consider seriously of what moment it will be to them, in all time to come, to remember the Lord's day in their youth—to honour the memory of their Redeemer, and reverence the house of God, and the ordinances of it.

O that there were this heart in them! God would think upon them for good. The generation to come would be a generation of his praise. The hearts of all pious men would rejoice. Aged saints, with such a prospect that religion would adorn those who are to come after them, might exult, "Let thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

SERMON XI.

THE EXCELLENCE OF RELIGION.

PROVERBS xii, 16.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN IS MORE EXCELLENT THAN HIS NEIGHBOUR ; BUT
THE WAY OF THE WICKED SEDUCETH THEM.



THE neighbour, with whom the righteous man is compared, is the wicked man. We will, first, point out the characteristic difference between the righteous man and his vicious neighbour. Secondly, Exhibit the excellence of religion in various particular illustrations of the subject.

We propose, **FIRST**, to point out the characteristic difference between the righteous man and his vicious neighbour.

When it is said, *The way of the wicked seduceth them*, it is implied that the way which the righteous choose is plain, safe and happy. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more. The way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble." They cherish vain and imaginary hopes of happiness. The choice they make, the course they pursue, deceives them to their own destruction. The pious man bewares of the error of the wicked. "Every one who doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Because these are evil, he prefers darkness to light. "But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that it may be made manifest that his deeds are wrought in God."

The difference between the righteous man and his neighbour consists not in any distinction of birth, rank or external circumstances; of natural abilities or human acquirements. The former may be of mean parentage, and the latter a prince by birth. The former may be placed in the lowest room, and the latter called up to the highest. The former may be poor, and the latter rich. The former may have but one talent, and the latter five. The former may be despised, reviled and persecuted; and the latter esteemed, applauded and highly favoured. These things notwithstanding, the righteous man is more excellent than his neighbour.

Let us attend to the standard of excellence, as applied to intelligent creatures. No distinctions, which nature or providence has made, no adventitious qualities, or merely human acquisitions, constitute this excellence. It is a renovation of the soul after the image of God; the imitation of his moral perfections; acquiescence and joy in his government; firm confidence in his promises; a view of him as our reconciled God through the Mediator; together with the highest satisfaction and hope springing from the persuasion of his special love. If the perfections of God are infinitely amiable, the just object of the supreme veneration and delight of all his intelligent offspring, then a conformity to him in righteousness and true holiness constitutes an excellence with which no other may compare. We feel agreeable sensations in contemplating the beauties of nature and art. Natural beauty and harmony are pleasing. Benignity of temper and suavity of manners are attractive. Much more should those dispositions of the heart be engaging, which conform the offspring of God to their divine Parent, who only is holy—essentially, perfectly and immutably so—the source of all good; the original of all excellence.

We propose the following distinct illustrations of our subject. Religion is excellent as it implies a thoughtful, candid mind, attentive to the nature and consequences

of its volitions and actions, and impressed with a sense of accountableness—As it involves supreme love of the greatest and best of Beings, and universal charity—As it also involves the various virtues of self-government. Its excellence further appears upon a comparison with the opposite character.

First, Religion is excellent ; for it implies a thoughtful, candid mind, attentive to the nature and consequences of its volitions and actions, and impressed with a sense of accountableness.

A rational creature, on probation for eternity, and yet living without reflection, is like the beasts that perish. Or if he reflects with no other view than to accomplish the end of his appetites, this is but to make reason subservient to the passions. The inspiration of the Almighty hath given us understanding, that we might contemplate him in his works ; consider our relation to him as his creatures, entirely dependent and infinitely indebted ; the end for which we were made ; and the account, which, as moral agents, we must render to him. Candid enquiry, on all important subjects, and especially on the most important, denotes impartial search after truth ; a faithful use of means for the discovery of it ; attention to evidence exhibited, in opposition to sinister views or prejudices, which pervert the judgment. The only object in view is, to know the truth, the good and right way. The spirit of religion always desires to know and do the will of God. It seeks his direction, and follows where he leadeth. Not exercising itself in things too high for the human intellect, it receives his testimony, without demanding, *How can these things be ?* Why hath God thus determined ? We receive the witness of man, who may deceive or be deceived. Shall we hesitate whether to admit the witness of the God of truth ? He guideth the meek and humble in his righteous paths. Such shall understand ; but the wicked, leaning to their own understanding, shall not. Humble enquiry,

a well informed mind, is an excellence in any character : It is especially amiable in the young. A youth of this description will probably grow “in wisdom, “and in favour with God and men.” When a Jewish scribe answered our Lord *discretely*, he was thus addressed, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” Informed on the essential and weighty matters of religion, he was prepared for further instruction.

Superadded to just doctrinal sentiments in religion, the pious man has a correspondent love to it. The love of the truth conduces naturally, and by the express encouragement of the Father of lights, to all necessary and useful information. The lover of truth shall not be left to any fatal error. Religion then is amiable, as it involves probity of mind ; a desire of knowledge with a view to practice, and not merely or chiefly with a view to amusement.

Secondly, The excellence of the character of the righteous appears from hence, that it involves supreme love to the greatest and best of Beings, and universal charity.

“The first and great commandment is, Thou shalt “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, “and strength, and mind. And the second, Thou shalt “love thy neighbour as thyself.” The two commandments are connected. To the one or the other may be referred all the law and the prophets ; and the whole of Christianity, the end of which “is charity, “out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of “faith unfeigned.” The acclamation of the heavenly hosts gives us an idea of the gospel ; “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.” In the Author of our faith, we have the highest possible instance of friendship to all mankind, guilty before God, and under condemnation. *If, for a good man, some might even dare to die, this bears no resemblance to the voluntary death of the just for the unjust.*

Behold the love of God, in appointing his only begotten and well beloved Son to the most excruciating and ignominious death for the sake of apostates, that he might magnify his mercy, his holiness, and his law—that the malignity of sin might appear, and righteousness and peace embrace each other. If he delivered his own Son for our offences, the great evil of sin and the greatness of the mercy which pardons it are equally manifest. We add, the wonderful friendship of him who “gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling favor. “I delight to do thy will, O my God! yea, thy law “is within my heart.” This will was, that he should offer his body a sacrifice for our sins. He therefore “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, “even the death of the cross.” Can we compute the sum at which the ransom of our souls was valued? Can we comprehend *the height and depth, the length and breadth of the love of our Redeemer*, who “though “he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we “through his poverty might be rich? The cup which “my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it? Father, “glorify thy name. For the joy set before him, he “endured the cross”—the joy of magnifying the law, accomplishing the prophecies, seeing his seed, and bringing to glory all who should embrace his offers. He “went about doing good; was holy, harmless, “and separate from sinners—when reviled, he reviled “not again; and when he suffered, he threatened “not; but committed himself to him who judgeth “righteously.” He “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for “many.” He closed the scene with a prayer for his murderers, and commended his spirit into the hands of his Father.

The gospel of Christ has its source in the original love of God. He first loved us, or no Saviour would have been provided. Redemption, therefore is the

effect, not the *cause*, of the love of God. He was self-moved in finding a ransom. *God is love*—essentially and immutably good. He appears most amiable and glorious as he is revealed by Jesus Christ, *reconciling the world to himself*—A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR. To be his children, we must “love our enemies, bless them who curse us, do good to them who hate us, and pray for them who despitefully use and persecute us.” We must forgive, to seventy times seven, those who trespass against us. Their trespasses, which we are commanded to forgive, are but as an hundred pence to ten thousand talents, at which our trespasses against God must be set. This immense debt he freely cancelleth, upon the condition of our forgiving our debtors. Look to the Saviour on the cross, fervently praying for them who crucified him, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Can you but learn to “put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and malice?” Can you but learn to be kind, tender-hearted, and to forgive one another? The Saviour hath made this the characteristic by which his disciples may be known, that they *love one another*. This they learn of him. This they are taught of God. His religion teaches to do good to all as we have opportunity. His parable of the man who fell among thieves, and of the good Samaritan who had mercy on him, best explains who is our neighbour, and is an admirable comment on the precept, “Love thy neighbour as thyself.” Charity, as St. Paul has said, is superior to gifts, faith and zeal. It “suffereth long, and is kind; envieth not; vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and never faileth.”

Such is charity, or true love to God and men. Is not this an *excellent way*. Must not he who possesseth this spirit be pronounced more excellent than his neighbour of another spirit? He can scarce fail to conciliate the esteem of men. However he may possibly be treated by them, they can but approve and venerate his character, place superior confidence in him, and wish to die his death.

Those, who have this spirit of love, rejoice in the gifts, virtue, usefulness, health and happiness of others; and contribute thereto as God giveth ability and opportunity. They wish to others more good than they can do them. They “rejoice with them who do “rejoice, and weep with them who weep. If it be “possible, they live peaceably with all men. If an enemy hunger, they feed him; and if he thirst, give “him drink, thus heaping coals of fire upon his head.”

Such is the spirit of the gospel. Is it not an excellent spirit? Can those who walk according to this rule be otherwise than amiable? This view of the Christian religion may well recommend it to the choice of the young. Would you approve the things that are excellent, then cast in your lot with the friends of piety.

Kind affections to kindred and friends, gratitude to benefactors, a peculiar attachment to those of our own country or communion, may be more or less common to good and bad men. For *sinners love those who love them, and do good to those who do good to them, and lend to those of whom they hope to receive.* Christian benevolence embraces strangers and foreigners as well as our fellow-citizens—the evil and unthankful as well as those who have laid us under special obligations. It gives, not expecting to receive, unless from HIM who liberally rewardeth charitable deeds. It embraces in Christian fellowship good men of all denominations, not confining true religion to any one church; but “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in “the bond of peace.” Instead of widening the breach

between contending parties, it endeavours to unite them. There is in the Christian spirit nothing morose. It “is peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits.” It would be to the reputation, edification and comfort of professors, and to the honour of the gospel, did they think more on these essentials, instead of maintaining endless and senseless controversy on the circumstantialia of religion. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

3. We observe further, in illustration of the amiableness and excellence of religion, that it involves the various virtues of *self-government*: For instance, purity, sobriety, mortification, self-denial, contentment, meekness, humility, resignation, patience, and fortitude. These virtues are all comprehended in *keeping under the body, striving for the mastery, and living soberly*—in *crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts*—learning of Christ, who was *meek and lowly*; who came not to do his own will; but, in all he did, and in all he suffered, had in view the glory of God, the finishing his work while it was day. He left his disciples a perfect example of active and passive obedience. Their hope in him is an incentive to *purify themselves as he is pure, hold fast their profession, and never be weary in well doing*.

The Christian character is the same in all circumstances, stations and relations—uniform and fixed: It implies principles, maxims and prospects taken from another and better world than this—an heart purified by *faith which overcomes the world*.

Are the saints the excellent of the earth? Do glorified saints and angels excel yet more? Is there an excellency in HIM who is *higher than the angels*, and whom they all worship? Is the blessed God, who is glorious in holiness, to be *praised for his excellent greatness and*

transcendent moral perfections? The righteous man is conformed to all these.

If the love of the truth, and candid enquiries after it, especially the most important—if the assemblage of virtues comprehended in the love of God and our neighbour, and in the government of our appetites—if a conformity to all the best of beings, finite or infinite, is amiable and excellent in any character, then religion is so: For it involves all these. It comprehends “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, “lovely, and of good report”—every virtue, every thing praise-worthy. Religion therefore gives a decided preference to a character; and the more so, the earlier it is embraced: It is amiable at any period, in any station: It gives an ornament of grace and a lustre to all who embrace it, whether they be young or old, high or low.

What reason then can be given for postponing that which is so excellent, which gives such pre-eminence? a pre-eminence which seems to be acknowledged even by the irreligious? For men who are governed by no principle, may yet discern and *approve the things that are excellent*. This is evident from the testimony of an accusing conscience; and from the confidence which they place in men of principle; but withhold from persons of a character like their own. The hypocrite, who seems to be religious, who takes great pains to appear righteous, acknowledges, by his dissimulation, the excellence of religion. This being admitted on all hands, no reason can be given for any delay in the choice and profession of it, but what amounts to a declaration, that turpitude and deformity are to be preferred to moral beauty.

The understanding may be darkened, and the heart depraved, to that degree as to *call evil good, and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*. Great indeed is this darkness and depravity. As the consequence of

having pleasure in unrighteousness, men know not the truth : The light is painful to them : They are given over to delusions, and believe a lye. The effectual guard against such a state of mind as this, is an early attention to the evidence and excellence of religion—the superior character of the righteous man to that of his impious neighbour. In every exterior view his neighbour may be superior : But the good disposition of the heart, the amiable qualities of the mind, give a superiority and weight to the character above every thing else—an excellence which is of great price in the judgment according to truth.

To sit at the feet of Emmanuel, and learn of him the words of eternal life—to have the same mind as was in him—to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in him, as the supreme object of pursuit, the main business of life, this is an excellent spirit. Whatever excellence other qualities, unconnected with the spirit of the gospel, may be thought to have, this *excelleth them all* : It is an unchangeable, *eternal excellence*. It is the temper of heaven. You may be studious to excel in other things, which may recommend you to human esteem and favour ; but unless you have approved yourselves to God, and are of that number whom he *delighteth to honour*, what can it avail that you may be highly esteemed with men ? When we speak of excellence in moral agents, as such, it is a proper question to ask, Excellence in whose judgment ? The answer must be, In the judgment of the wise and good—and especially in the judgment of God, with whom we have to do—who is privy to the thoughts and intents of the heart, and therefore weigheth actions in their principles—who will render to all free intelligent agents according to their character.

Compare characters of known piety with the thoughtless, the unstable, and double-minded, persons in whom is no faith—with such as are the prey of every vanity, passion and excess—Compare those youths,

into whose hearts true wisdom hath entered, even the the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom ; with those who despise wisdom and instruction ; are open to the counsel of the ungodly ; choose their own way, and are filled with their own devices. You will confess the truth in the text—that religion is the brightest ornament, and irreligion the most deformed, uncomely thing in the world. *Wisdom is justified of her children.* Her doctrine descends on their minds as the rain and dew on the tender grass : Its salutary influence, on their temper and life, recommends it to observers as *altogether lovely.*

We have three classes of young persons mentioned in scripture : First, Such as really “ fear the Lord “ from their youth.” Secondly, Those who have been trained to habits of visible regularity and sobriety ; as the young man who proposed to our Lord the question about eternal life. Thirdly, Such as say, “ Let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth.” The first will be *wise in their latter end* : They will not depart from the virtuous paths to which they are early inured. There is safety in those paths. The second, if they continue to love any object more than God, their Saviour and their souls, will never *enter into life*, whatever their enquiries are about it, or however righteous and estimable they may be in the view of men. The last know not that *God will bring them into judgment.* I leave it to your own reflections, with which of these classes you must cast in your lot, as you would merit an amiable, an excellent character.

IMPROVEMENT.

IF what has been observed on this subject be attended to, the friend of religion will not be thought to be such an *object* creature as his enemies would represent him. What is there in the doctrine, precepts, motives and hopes of Christianity, or in the life of its Author,

that can be spoken against? what that does not bear the marks of an excellence superior to that which was ever taught, or commanded, or manifested in the life of the wisest and best of men, in any age or nation? Why then should it ever have been suggested, that the character of an intelligent creature may be impaired and sunk by professing this religion and living according to it? If any thing improves and exalts the human character, this does. If any thing can degrade the character of man, it is a vain imagination, that he is not dependent on, or indebted or accountable to, the great God—Thus he cherishes the pride and ambition of apostate spirits.

What must we say of those, who are the sport of passion, the slaves of lust, devout worshippers of mammon, or sunk in sensuality? If the soul of man constitutes his superiority, then those things are excellent, which give to the rational and immortal principle the direction and control of the appetites and passions, and assimilate him to superior intelligences in the world above. This religion doth: It is *perfect, converting the soul; sure, making wise the simple; right, rejoicing the heart; pure, enlightening the eyes. All the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.* Irreligion blinds and degrades the noble faculties of the soul—estranges it from all that is good, or that is worthy of its contemplation, and love, and confidence—turns its thoughts and alienates its affection from God, from the way of truth and holiness, from whatever can dignify and adorn the nature of man—from whatever might fill up the part assigned him in the world. It is a source of vain hopes.

If irreligion is thought to be a mark of superior discernment, of a great and independent mind, it is a superiority and independence learned from hell, and in which the prince of darkness excels. The men of religion take heed that they be not deluded by him—be not led away with the false glare and outside of

things. They fix on objects of real, substantial and lasting excellence, not on superficial and transient, or merely fictitious, objects—not on things which drown men in perdition.

If the imperfect view we have taken of the nature and spirit of religion, and of the excellent character of the righteous or religious man, be just, why should those in youth cherish objections to religion, or ask to be excused from the early choice of it? Ingenuous minds will hear her cause fairly argued. Such minds will embrace her, if indeed she shall appear to be excellent, *the perfection of beauty*. She addresseth herself to the understanding, and to the heart, and asks for no other respect than will do equal honour to both. Do you wish to be reputed youths of an ingenious mind? capable of distinguishing things which differ? able to give a reason of your choice? wishing to justify it to your own minds upon the coolest reflection? We recommend religion to you as having in all things the pre-eminence. Look to those who were, and to those who are, its brightest ornaments. Look to the *cloud of witnesses*, whose names are written in heaven, and are transmitted in the sacred oracles to excite your emulation of their faith, patience and charity—who stood fast in the Lord in many and great temptations—whose love to religion many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown. Look to those pious dead whom you once knew, and could not but venerate; who being dead yet speak to you. If they were the excellent of the earth, then follow them. Cultivate the like spirit of faith and love. Have they transmitted a favour of religion? Was their *death precious in the sight of the Lord*? Is their *memory blessed*? Shew that you are thankful for their good example, that you hold their memory dear, by becoming cordial, firm friends of religion, which cast the lustre on their character, and made them blessings in their day. Did they shine as lights in the world? Be it your care

that you may also. “Be ye followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved you, and gave himself for you.” *Great is his goodness, and great is his beauty. Yea, he is altogether lovely.* Shall HE who is *the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person*, who was full of grace and truth, be thought to have *no beauty that you should desire him?* Will you unite with those who despise, reject and abhor him? God forbid. May he open your eyes and your hearts to see the King in his glory and beauty; and shed of his beauty on each of your souls. *So shall he greatly desire thy beauty.* Souls, adorned with the Redeemer’s image and loveliness, are “beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners.” He who hath thus renewed them in righteousness, will make them an eternal excellency. *For righteousness is immortal.*

If heaven excels earth, the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour. Believe it, I beseech you, that there is an excellency in wisdom more than in folly; that the former excelleth the latter as far as light excelleth darkness. It giveth life to them who have it. Therefore *approve the things that are excellent; be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ.*—This is the excellent way which we shew unto you. God grant that your ears may hear the voice proclaiming, *This is the way, walk ye in it.*—AMEN.

SERMON XII.

THE HAPPINESS OF LIFE.

PSALM xxxiv. 8.

○ TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD: BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT
TRUSTETH IN HIM.

AN opinion has long prevailed, that a religious life is joyless. The young and inexperienced are especially liable to imbibe this opinion. If it be a just one, how shall we persuade them to be religious? At their entrance on life, and at the stage for the enjoyment of it, must they be called upon to forego pleasure? We suppose not: The present discourse shall be devoted to the removal of this groundless prejudice. There are indeed *the pleasures of sin*. These must be shunned. But are there no other pleasures? or none that are superior or equal to these?

Our view of religion is not taken from the cruel and frightful superstitions of the heathen; nor from the monasteries of the middle ages. In our view it requires not the sacrifice of humanity or of reason: It interferes with no rational enjoyment: It allows us to enjoy our portion and our friends. Yea, under its regulations, the pleasures of society and friendship; and the just pleasures of the animal life, are best enjoyed. *O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

In what does the enjoyment of life, or true pleasure consist? Where, from what object, is it to be sought? *The sea saith, It is not in me; and the depth*

saith, It is not with me. Neither earth nor skies can give it. The enjoyment of life consists not in riches, or honour, or fame, or sensual delights, or health, or friends. With any or all of these, man may have his happiness to seek, and still enquire, “Who will shew “us any good?” He is the subject of moral government. He feels the pains or pleasures of an accusing or excusing conscience. This principle within him is, to his conduct as a moral agent, what the organ of vision is to his natural actions: It is placed in his breast as a regulating power to his thoughts and affections, to his whole conduct towards God, or man, or himself.

The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. The man who chooses and acts in opposition to the dictate of this rational spirit, or attempts by any means to extinguish or darken this candle of the Lord, is, in a moral view, guilty of like folly and madness, as it would be, in a natural view, to throw himself from a precipice with his eyes open; or wilfully to shut them, that he may not see the danger on which he rusheth. As *this* is contrary to the powerful principle of self-preservation, common to mankind and the animal creation; so *that* is contrary to the rational and divine principle, which requires him to take care of his better part—to save his soul alive.

Shall creatures, to whom God hath given understanding, and made next in rank to the angels, *call evil good, and good evil? put darkness for light, and light for darkness?* If the dignity of man consisted in mere intellect, Lucifer far excels any of the human race. The dignity of an intelligent creature consists in the knowledge and worship, the resemblance and enjoyment of his Creator. All ranks of moral agents, men of all diversity of genius and opportunities, are therefore under indispensable obligations to use their means and advantages for improvement in the knowledge of God, and their duty to him, to one another, and their own souls.

Added to the light of nature, we have the much clearer light of revelation, to assure us what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. Revelation only *guides our feet into the way of peace*. It exhibits Jesus Christ as the only source of rest to the soul. No other *hath the words of eternal life*. The fall of man rendered it necessary that a new foundation of religion should be laid, in a divine proclamation of pardon and grace to rebels. This proclamation is *as life from the dead* to a condemned sinner, sensible of his condition : It offers reconciliation to enemies, a ransom for the guilty, and brings life and immortality to light.

The soul of man is of such capacity and duration, that it aspires after other delights than earth can give, and which endure and improve forever. Compared with these, every other interest is of no value. It lessens the value of any present good, if we know that it is shortlived. It heightens a present enjoyment, if we are persuaded that it is lasting. Nor can any enjoyment be of much intrinsic worth, unless it be permanent. The human soul, and the exercises and enjoyments suited to it, being the only durable part of our frame and of our bliss, what is man's highest wisdom and happiness?—the happiness adapted to his dignified rank among the works of God, and in the possession of which he will be satisfied? When he is viewed in a state of apostacy—when it is considered that the crown is fallen from his head, that he is obnoxious to the judgment of God, and enquires, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? what shall I give for the sin of my soul?* it must afford the strongest consolation to be assured from the God of truth, the Father of mercies, *I have found a ransom*. This ransom, while it *shows man his transgression, delivereth from going down to the pit*. Redemption, which in one view proclaims man's sin and shame, in another view proclaims his dignity—the great worth of his soul, which, when sunk in sin and shame, was *bought with a price* above

silver and gold ; even the precious blood of EMMANUEL, God with us. O taste and see that the Lord is good ! We cannot express or conceive the greatness of his condescension and friendship, or the value of this gift of God—or the value of the soul thus redeemed. All that a man hath will he give for the ransom of his temporal life. But the owner of a world cannot give a ransom for the soul, any more than the beggar : It called for a ransom more precious—a ransom of a far different kind.

Learn from the boundless grace of God and the Redeemer how to prize your souls. Angels minister for their salvation. The God of all grace expostulates, *Why will ye die ?* Sinners, who have *forsaken the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns*, can *save their souls alive only by coming and taking freely of the waters of life.* A fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness. Christ giveth *living water* to them who ask him—the *well of water which springeth up to everlasting life*—emblem of the *pure river of water of life*, which issueth from *the throne of God and the Lamb.*

With the view of illustrating and establishing the truth before us, that religion is the most pleasant and happy life, it may be useful to contemplate it in various lights.

First, *In the act of doing and suffering* what it enjoins, religion yields superior satisfaction to any which those who neglect and despise it can enjoy.

It is a source of substantial pleasure, as the contemplation of natural beauty is delightful to the judges of it. It requireth labour, circumspection, engagedness and self-denial. But men do not expect the accomplishment of their worldly hopes without taking pains, without encountering difficulties. They rise up early and sit up late for the supplies, and conveniences, and ornaments of life. The dearest connections, and the source of their greatest comfort, subject them to great care and solicitude. Religion requires no other la-

bour, and no other restraint, than is requisite to the true enjoyment, use and end of life—no other than a *light burden*. It requires that we *deny ourselves, and take up our cross—that we keep under the body, and bring it into subjection*. But it does not require us to deny our reason—unless it should be thought a denial of reason, that *faith stands in the power of God, not in the wisdom of men*. Such a thought we repel by observing, that the testimony of God is greater than that of man, and claims greater regard. *Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar*. Reason never taught man to deny what he cannot comprehend: It never taught him to reject the testimony of God, which is as clearly given to the book of revelation as to that of nature. Reason requires us to accept and to ask wisdom from the Father of lights: Its province is to regulate and control our bodily appetites; and to suppress vain *imagination, which exalt against the knowledge of God*. Religion enjoins that we *crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts—cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*. On other terms men must be slaves, in a worse sense by far than any external state can make them so—self-made slaves, the slaves of their own lusts, slaves of Satan, *taken captive by him at his will*. To wish for exemption from the restraints of reason and conscience—to sacrifice our peace and our souls to sensual appetites, to the pride of life, or to mammon, is folly and madness. *Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*. If any service is reasonable and conducive to happiness, this is. *Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof*. Their course is hard, who *fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind—who walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*. The ambitious and the avaricious *disquiet themselves in vain, and travail with pain all their days*. *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow, if not the epicure?*

He who hath no rule over his own spirit, is as a city broken down and without walls. The religious man is a stranger to the turbulence of passion, the sad effects of intemperance, the restlessness of ambition and avarice. Outward misfortunes, disappointments, distresses and injuries do not destroy or impair his inward peace. His joy is not interrupted or allayed, as that of men of the world. It is the joy of a good conscience, of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, of trust and confidence in God through Christ. Whatever his outward state, his *mind, stayed upon God, is kept in perfect peace.* This peace, which passeth understanding—this joy of faith, is the seal of the Spirit, the earnest of the heavenly inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession. This is union with the great source of being, perfection and blessedness—the result of conformity to him—the privilege of those who are followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as the disciples of Jesus. It is their privilege to rejoice evermore—to give thanks in every thing—to be careful for nothing. *As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.* The gospel proclaims peace with God and our own consciences—peace on earth. Any other joy than that of religion is superficial and fleeting. The wicked, because they have no changes, because they live without reflection, may seem to be tranquil and happy. But there is no true peace to them. The peace of Jesus is peace which the world cannot give, nor take away—peace amidst the troubles of life. Bereaved of substance or dearest connections, religion faith, *The Lord gave, and hath taken away: Blessed be his name.* In prison and chains, the servants of Christ pray and praise. They are refined in the furnace. A cloud of witnesses, in all trials and temptations, have exhibited the power of religion, the blessedness of those who make God their trust—who have tasted that he is gracious. He manifesteth himself to them, and not unto the world. The stranger intermeddleth not with their joy.

Would you know what the pleasures of religion are, you must cordially embrace it : It ensures contentment in every condition, and the blessing of God on every enjoyment. Better is a little with godliness and contentment, than large possessions without either. The fashion of the world passeth away. Has the godly man tribulation in the world ? He can glory in it, because he is justified by faith, and has peace with God through Christ, who hath overcome the world. Also because “ tribulation worketh patience, and patience “ experience ; and experience, hope. All things work “ together for good to them who love God.” The loss of goods or friends cannot bereave them of their chief joy, their everlasting Friend. Pain or sickness cannot deprive them of the rest in Christ. In the case of persecution for his sake, his peace is a balance to whatever they lose or suffer for righteousness’ sake. O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Every common mercy is heightened, when viewed as coming from him whom we have chosen for our God and Father, in whom our supreme delight is placed ; who, with the unspeakable gift of his own Son, will freely give us all things. Confidence in God will not permit us to cherish any desires inconsistent with peace of mind : It elevates the thoughts and affections to spiritual and eternal objects, greater than “ eye “ hath seen, or ear heard, or have entered into the “ heart of man. My soul wait thou upon God ; all “ my expectation is from him. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. In God is my salvation and glory.” Blessed are they who walk in the light of thy countenance, who rejoice in thy name all the day, and are exalted in thy righteousness. “ The “ Lord God is a sun and shield ; the Lord will give “ grace and glory ; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. They dwell “ in the secret place of the MOST HIGH, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” Events not joy-

ous, but grievous, conduce to the greater mortification of sin, growth in grace, clearer evidence of their sincerity, greater joy and peace in believing, and a more lively hope of eternal glory. Wherefore,

SECONDLY, A life of religion is then most pleasant and happy, when pursued with the *greatest engagedness*, and the greatest proficiency is made in it.

In many secular undertakings, the first attempts are difficult and discouraging; but assiduous application is rewarded with skill, facility and desired success.—Difficulties and discouragements may peculiarly attend the first entrance on a religious life. Those, who have early wandered from pious paths, have to expect peculiar obstacles in returning to them. That they should learn to do well, after having been accustomed to do evil, is resembled to a natural impossibility—Not that it is absolutely so; for with God all things are possible. *He breatheth upon dry bones, and they live.* Those who are but newly reclaimed from a vicious course, not having the strength and firmness of confirmed virtue, are peculiarly exposed to be foiled by the assault of temptation. This is a weighty reason for the early choice of religion, which prevents the difficulties and dangers just mentioned, lays a foundation for greater proficiency and pleasure, in proportion to the diligence given to make sure our calling and election.

Other pleasures are often pursued to excess. The votaries thus miss their own end. The pleasures of piety are more certain and rise higher, the more constantly and ardently they are pursued. Such is the sure way to find, in our own experience, the truth of those words of Christ, *My joy shall be in you, and your joy shall be full.* But the ardent pursuit of some earthly good lays a sure foundation for disappointment. That good may not be obtained: If obtained, it cannot afford the expected satisfaction: It may soon be taken away. All this dissatisfaction and fruitless inquietude are prevented by religion, or trust in God.

They who have given him their heart, wish not for indulgence in any sin. Esteeming all his precepts to be right, hating every false way, they go on their way rejoicing. Waiting on him they renew their strength; run, and are not weary; walk, and do not faint. Strait indeed is the gate, and narrow the way of life. The spirit and flesh lust against each other. Many are the snares and allurements of the world. Great are the depths of Satan. Temptations, powerful temptations, from within and without, are inseparable from the religious life, in all stages and circumstances of it. These are owing to imperfect views and imperfect grace. They call for constant self-denial and watchfulness, light and power from on high. Labour and faint not. For with every temptation God maketh a way to escape. Fight the fight of faith, taking the whole armour of God. Endure hardness as good soldiers. Strive for the mastery. Lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth easily beset you. Refuse no labour or self-denial to which the Christian warfare may call you. If the service of the Captain of our salvation be not the way to affluence or worldly promotion—if it be no security from a variety of afflictions—yea, if, in some exempt instances, those who fight under his banners are, in a worldly view, the most miserable of all men, let not these things move you. For they receive, even in the present time, an hundred fold more than the world can give or take away. They are more than conquerors in all things through him who loved them, and gave himself for them. His power resting on them, when they are weak, then are they strong.

Look to the men whose wealth is their confidence. In the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits. Those in power, if supercilious and oppressive, incur the just hatred of mankind: Or, if faithful to their high trust—if public benefactors, they are subject to inquietudes from which other ranks are exempt;

and compelled to appeal to their *record on high* against human ingratitude, envy and calumny.—The momentary gratifications of pleasure bring lasting pain. But religion is a perpetual spring of inward comfort, whether a man's external state be affluent or indigent, exalted or abased, healthful or diseased, joyous or grievous. The godly and the sinner are liable to the evils of life. These evils cannot touch the supreme good of the godly. The sinner, ignorant of the joy of a good conscience, may yet know, from the reproaches of an evil conscience, that the pious man's choice must be a source of true and lasting pleasure. If sinners cannot enjoy their outward comforts, they may infer that the godly have a sure refuge and strong consolation in all events. What avail health, friends, affluence, fame, elevation, if the mind is restless as the troubled sea? Cares, company, amusements, may, for a time, divert reflection; but it will return. Frequently neither business nor festivity can banish it. Heaviness and sorrow are the end of their joy, and mingled with it. What then must be the heaviness and sorrow, when their *bones are filled with the sins of their youth*? Beside perturbations of conscience, unlawful pleasure is a fruitful source of bodily pains and diseases—of infamy, poverty wretchedness; and not seldom of premature death. They who are given to pleasures, are always open to snares and dangers. Finding nothing at home to gratify them—self-reflection being shunned as the foe of their peace, they go abroad for their daily happiness, as the beggar from door to door for his daily bread. Not knowing how to endure their own company, they cannot be presumed to contribute much to the happiness of others. To expect a pleasant and happy life, by a departure from the path of rectitude, is as absurd as to prefer the devouring flames of the bramble to the sweetness and generous fruit of the fig-tree, the

olive and the vine. Wisdoms “ways are the ways of
“pleasantry, and all her paths are peace.*

THIRDLY, a religious life is joyful in the *review*.

“The work of righteousness is peace; and the effect
“of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.
“This is our rejoicing, the testimony of conscience,
“that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with flesh-
“ly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had
“our conversation in the world.” When the irreligious reflect on the past, their hearts reproach them. Any peace they have is owing to want of reflection—pains taken to corrupt and bribe the moral judgment. Sometimes, notwithstanding all their attempts, the force of conscience is so powerful, that neither company, nor lust, nor festivity can stifle it: Its upbraidings arrest them amidst their carnal mirth—and sometimes will not suffer them to sleep.

A pious man, on the contrary, far from wishing to fly from his own reflections, looks back with comfort. *I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith. I know*

* “You say, Religion demands of us a succession of services, from which you are exempted. But, O ye votaries of the world, let us examine your claims. and see wherein your pre-eminence appears. Have you then no services to render? Think of your privations, and sacrifices and submissions; think of the numerous and arbitrary laws you have to obey; the laws of opinion, the laws of custom, the laws of extravagance, the laws of folly. Yes; I sometimes think, if religion were to require of me such duties as the world imposes upon its enslaved followers; if it required me to turn day into night, and deprived me of seasonable repose; if it required me to embrace indecent and injurious fashions, and to expose at once my modesty and my health; if it required me to adopt expensive modes of life, which devoured my substance, and involved me in pecuniary disgrace; if it required me to spend my evenings from home, and to resign domestic enjoyments to rove from one insipid amusement to another; if it required me to give up all that is easy, and simple, and natural, for ceremonies, visits and crowds, where all is artificial, studied and forced; if it required me to convert my dwelling into the confusion and disorder of a rout; to stoop to the absurdities of a masquerade; to hazard my own life and the life of a fellow creature, because I had received an offence, perhaps unintentionally given. and allowed me not the choice of a refusal; then I should conceive a disgust; then I should long to emancipate myself from such capricious despotism; I should sigh for liberty; for what liberty could I enjoy, while compelled to submit to what is unreasonable and foolish, to what is dishonourable and shameful, to what is injurious and ruinous? But remember, ye followers of the vain world, these are the commands you obey; these are the services you render.”

Jay's Sermons, p. 448, 449.

whom I have believed. What he hath done and suffered in life, has been in obedience to the will of God—in imitation of the Saviour's pattern, and through Christ strengthening him. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is in him a reconciled God—the great Redeemer is his friend. Is peace with God, through an atoning and interceding Mediator, and peace in our own breasts, to be exchanged for sublunary, transient joys? for silver and gold? for the kingdoms and glory of this world? The Christian has a treasure in *all things*. *The world, and life, and death, things present and to come are his.* O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Fourthly, A religious life lays a foundation for a *joyful death*.

The wisdom or folly of any course or pursuit may be estimated by a contemplation of the issue. What is the issue of a life of pleasure? Endless pain. We no sooner read of the death of a sensualist, than we find that *he lifted up his eyes in torments*. He had received all his good things in this life; and a great gulf is fixed between an impenitent in hell and the joys of heaven. What is the issue of the miser's life? He *carries nothing away with him*. He has laid up no treasure, he has no portion, in a better world. Cankered silver and gold cannot *profit in the day of wrath*. "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be which thou hast hoarded? So is he who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." What is the issue of worldly ambition, the pride of life? Shame and everlasting contempt. *Man who is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish*. Remark, on the other hand, the issue of the life of the perfect and upright man. *The end of that man is peace*. "To them who, by patience in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life—a crown of glory which fadeth not away—treasures where no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth; durable riches—rivers

“of” unmingled, unfailing “pleasures.” Are any sufferings of the present life worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed?

When we speak of an happy death, it proceeds upon the supposition of having lived and died to the Lord. Shall it be said that such a life is not an happy one? What is happiness, if *peace always, and by all means*, is not? if contentment, in whatever state we are, is not? if joy unspeakable and hope sure and steadfast is not? Are such peace, contentment, joy and hope to be found without religion? If no instance of the kind can be produced, you must acknowledge that religion has the only claim to these blessed fruits. Yea, sinners themselves being judges, a religious life is the most happy, if we take the end of it into consideration. For it is the universal prayer of sinners, *Let me die the death of the righteous.*

“Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart.” He will guide you by his counsel through life—resolve your doubts—lead you in a safe and plain path—guard you against the error of the wicked, whose way is as darkness—and cause your path to shine more and more. It is an high privilege to have HIM for our counsellor, who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. By his light we may walk through darkness. In whatever mystery his providence may be involved, his children look forward to the period when this mystery *shall be finished*—when *in his light they shall see light.* In the multitude of thoughts which they have for themselves, for their country, for the church, for the cause of truth, his *comforts delight their souls.* They rest assured of the final triumph of truth and righteousness. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” Blessed are they, to whose morning of life can be applied, *Thou art the guide of my youth.*

Man is born to trouble. The friends of God and his Son bear the troubles of life with a composure to

which the wicked are strangers. God is the supporter and comforter of his saints, their *present help in trouble*, their *refuge and strength*—their defence against the foes of their souls—beyond comparison the most dangerous foes. “This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith. If God be for us, who can be against us?” Christians can “count it all joy, when they fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of their faith worketh patience;” and that God hath promised to them who love him, and endure temptation as a proof of their love, that they shall receive the crown of life. It is an honour, a privilege, to suffer as a Christian, supported by the peace of Jesus, by conscious integrity, and the assurance of a *great recompence of reward*. It being his heavenly Father’s good pleasure to give him the kingdom, nothing needful or best will be withheld. The God of his hope is the best judge what is needful or best. God is at his right hand in all difficulties and perplexities, dangers and fears, changes and sorrows; so that he shall never be moved. “I have set the Lord always before me. My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

Religion sets before us the way of life, and the way of death. She is justified of her children. If it is not wisdom to choose life, *produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons* to justify your refusal of the good part which shall never be taken away—your unwillingness to come to Christ, that you might have life; your objections to *his* terms, who is the way, the truth, and the life—your excuses and delays—your halting between two opinions—your preference of vanity and vexation to substantial and lasting happiness—your preference of death to life.

The foe, who takes from us our outward enjoyments and our peace, and who proceeds to torture and even kill the body, is not so bitter a foe as those are to themselves, who hate the light of truth, and destroy their own souls—despise the peace of God, the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. “Peace of mind” was the great thing, to which all the philosophy and wisdom of the world ever fought to bring men. No man in his wits would submit to perpetual sickness and pain for the sake of gaining a great fortune; and yet no disease in the world is, for the sharpness of it, comparable to the sting of a guilty mind;” as “no pleasure is comparable to that of a good conscience.” *The good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

Who ever repented their choice of true religion? or that they chose it in their youth? My young hearers, would you be wise for yourselves? then make early choice of God and Christ. Would you be wise for soul and body, for time and eternity? then begin life in the fear of the Lord. Be in his fear all your life long. Thus you will *spend your years in pleasure*. It will be well with you here and for ever. You “desire life that you may see good.” For the attainment of this end, the true course is that recommended in some following verses of the context. “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile; depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.” By postponing religion, you abridge yourselves of the pleasures of contemplation and love—the pleasures of an approving heart—the pleasures of hope, which springs immortal in the soul, and enables the subject of it to *finish his course with joy*. Neglecting religion in the morning of your days, what heart will you have to it in the evening of them? Many have mourned at the last, that they hated instruction, and despised reproof in their youth: What a review, at the end of life, have those

who waste and abuse its golden period? But what pleasure to reflect, when the days arrive, in which earthly delights, or the relish to them, depart, that a religious course was early embraced? O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

Does it not appear, that a religious life is very far from being joyless? Who but the men of piety *rejoice and are glad all their days*? In proportion as they press toward the mark for the prize of their high calling, they *go on their way rejoicing*. *The ungodly are not so*. In league with death, at agreement with hell, they are wearied in the multitude of their counsels. The way that seemeth right to them, is no other than the way to hell.

Beware lest you imbibe early prejudices against the best course of life—the paths of righteousness and peace. The wisdom from above is an invitation to perfect purity and freedom, peace and joy—to *perfect love*, which *casteth out fear*: It guards against innumerable evils, and supports under such as are unavoidable: It turns sorrow into an occasion of joy: It is light in darkness: It takes away the sting of death. Would to God that all were persuaded cordially to embrace this heavenly wisdom—the *wisdom of the just*. The earlier it is embraced the better—greater peace—more sure hope.

The friend, with whom we have taken sweet counsel, to whom our obligations are the greatest, is often in our thoughts. Would you prove unmindful of *that* friend, who is “not far from every one of us? in “whom we live, and move, and have our being? who “giveth us all things richly to enjoy?” Instead of thinking of him with awe and reverence, gratitude and complacency, would you banish him from your minds? From him all your delights come, even every good and perfect gift. And is he yet unamiable? Is there no pleasure in a sense of his special love? in *the joy of his salvation*? Would you say to him, and his friends,

the excellent of the earth, *Depart from us?* We hope better things of you. *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: Hereby good shall come unto thee.* Religion is the employment of our noblest powers, and the source of the highest pleasures of which we are capable—pleasures durable and ever improving. It is *a well of water springing up to everlasting life.*

SERMON XIII.

THE STANDARD OF HONOUR.

PROVERBS, iii. 25.

THE WISE SHALL INHERIT GLORY.



MY present design is to discuss and improve this observation, *That religion is the highest honour.*—Other standards have been set up and resorted to. I will attempt to shew you that they are false standards—that you will *then* honour yourselves, and then *only*, when you shew respect to religion, by preferring to all praise the honour that cometh from God. To discern and pursue this as the true dignity and glory of man, will peculiarly commend those who are in the morning of life, and to whom we look to support the cause of religion in time to come. In a course of sermons to them, it is proper that religion be shewn to be honourable in itself, and the way to honour and glory.

Shall it be taken for granted, that religion debases man?—that it is suited only to a few ignoble, groveling spirits; such as cannot rise above vulgar prejudices—bigots of a narrow education? Have persons of genius, of enlarged minds and improved education, discovered and proved that it merits contempt rather than reverence? Do such as are in reputation for wisdom and honour, think lightly of it? and would mankind be better without it? We hope to shew you that such sentiments are wholly unfounded—that the despisers of religion are infamous, and those who hon-

our it are honourable, whatever their age, talents, or rank in life. “Exalt her, and she shall promote thee : “She shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace ; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. *The wise shall inherit glory.*”

Glory and wisdom are connected, as shame and folly are in the other clause of the verse. *Shame shall be the promotion of fools.*

In the eighth chapter of this book, wisdom is represented as a person of distinguished excellence and dignity, “set up from everlasting, brought up with” the Creator of the world, “daily his delight, rejoicing always before him—rejoicing also in the habitable part of his earth, and whose delights were with the sons of men.” This description hath been generally applied to Christ, “the wisdom of God—the Word who was in the beginning with God ; who was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth—in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ;” and who declared, *If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.* These words of the Saviour are similar in import to those of the text, *The wise shall inherit glory.* The servants of Christ are *wise to salvation* : They are the children of wisdom, however scorned by the men of the world, whose wisdom is foolishness with God, as his is foolishness with them.

A capacity for religion and its rewards is the glory of intelligent beings—Dependent creatures, (as all created intelligences are) owe submission, gratitude and supreme homage to the Lord of all. Giving him this glory due to his name, they act up to their rank in the creation. Their noble faculties are exercised, are delighted, in the survey of his works, which proclaim his wisdom, power and Godhead, and declare his glory. Thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, superior beings of every order in heaven, cast

their crowns before the throne of the eternal King, and, with veiled faces, worship him in whose sight the stars are not clean. They need no stimulus to this service. They rest not from it day or night. In ever blessing they are ever blest. "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, who do his will," not only in heaven but in earth; ye "eyes of the Lord, that run to and fro, and encamp round them who fear him." This honour have the blessed angels: They know no other. They have not a wish nor a thought but in subserviency to his pleasure. The alacrity with which they execute it, shews that they place their glory and happiness in an entire conformity and submission to him.

The glory of man's innocent state consisted in the same thing. God created him in his image, next in rank to the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour. Distinguished from the lower animals in the excellence of his soul, what could constitute his true dignity? what could be the part of wisdom for him, but to continue obedient to God, who had put such a distinction upon him? Among the great and marvellous works of God, which we behold, the most marvellous is the union of an immortal mind with an animal body. The crown fell from man, when the superiority of his mind yielded to the indulgence of appetite—when he was seduced, by the vilest being in the universe, to break the covenant of his God. Then was his glory turned into shame. Then was he troubled, as well he might be, at the presence of his Maker. Confusion succeeded to confidence. He meditated nothing but terror. He had believed the deceiver: he had coveted forbidden knowledge. Behold the consequence. He attempted to fly from HIM who filleth immensity. Fig-leaves were thought

a covering for nakedness. By his offence he lost paradise; the ground was cursed for his sake. He was doomed to get his bread in the sweat of his face; and the sorrow of his partner, who was first in the transgression, was greatly multiplied; and both were doomed to return to dust.

You see the sad fruit of the first desire of forbidden knowledge. Forbidden fruit, it was imagined, might make man wise: It appeared pleasant to the eyes. Whence had it this appearance? Satan had first blinded the eyes of our progenitors. He suggested, and his suggestion was admitted, *You shall be as gods*. Here is the source of our shame. Hence the origin of evil. If the progenitors, who brought sin, sorrow and death into the world, who have entailed such miseries on their race, that man who is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble—if they were wise, and pursued the path of glory, then was their *tempter* wise. Then did he also aspire to just glory, when he headed a rebellion in heaven. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!—For thou hast said in thy heart, I will exalt my throne above the throne of God—I will be like the MOST HIGH. The angels, who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.”

Endowed with a soul capable of endless improvement in the knowledge and resemblance of God, man's glory must consist in the honour which comes from him. His judgment is according to truth. Compared with this it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment. With him we have to do. To him every one of us must give account.

If you speak of honour, it is proper to ask, In whose opinion? You answer, In the opinion of good judges. Who then is so good a judge as the only wise God? the blessed and supreme Potentate? To be approved

of him—to be of that number whom he will honour, you must be truly religious. This is the only true wisdom. And our subject speaks of a glory which the *wise* shall inherit.

It is dishonourable to be a *slave*. To whom then shall this appellation be applied? Not to those who are in bondage for life—in the most cruel bondage to such as trade in the *souls of men*, as in herds of cattle. This outward bondage, whatever its tendency, does not necessarily bind the powers of the soul. The soul may, notwithstanding, enjoy the noblest freedom, *the glorious liberty of the sons of God*. The same may be said of the captive and prisoner in chains. And if so, they have a glory superior to what those can boast, who bring them into bondage, and detain them in servitude. If the dominion over their bodies has no other effect upon the soul than to display to better advantage their fortitude, and other virtues which wrongful sufferings call forth, they display a greatness, which all must admire; but which the authors of their sufferings would by no means display upon a change of circumstances.

They are another set of men whom we pronounce to be vile and contemptible slaves—destitute of the principle of true honour, and deserving of the greatest reproach. We mean the men who make *themselves* slaves. Neither men nor devils can make such slaves as these. They are made by their own choice. The slave of passion, appetite, lust, fashion, opinion, is a self-made slave. “He that has no rule over his own spirit is as a city broken down, and without walls,” exposed to every foe that would divide the spoil. The epicure, a stranger to every enjoyment but sensual, is sunk to a level with the beasts that perish. He glories in his shame. The miseries and dishonour of the slave of lust need not be mentioned: He subverts all social order and happiness. The dishonour is not confined to himself: It involves the ruin of those

with whom his illicit intercourse is kept up, and the disgrace of their connections. The licentious may boast of liberty. But liberty, unrestrained by law, is the liberty of a thief, and a robber. It is said indeed that there is honour among such—honour which but very few will envy. When the fruits of industry and talents are claimed as common property—when the idle, the ignorant and clamorous obtain the honours and emoluments purchased by diligence, knowledge and modest worth, civilization is exchanged for barbarism, and every incentive to useful and honourable pursuits extinguished. Merit is degraded. Folly and demerit are elevated. When such is the state of society, *the post of honour is a private station.*

The slave of amusement is a slave to frivolity and insignificance, a consumer of time, an incumbrance and nuisance to the community; and, with an ardent passion for pleasure, seeks rest, but finds none. This is not honourable, but opprobrious, to any character.

If true glory has any solid foundation, fashion and general opinion cannot be the standard of it; for nothing is more changeable than these.

Granting then that there is no glory in the dominion of passion, appetite, lust, amusement, fashion and prevailing opinion, take a view of their opposites, and see if they lead in the path of glory.

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” All mankind will agree in this sentiment, those only excepted who are the sport of passion.

Nor can there be any other difference of sentiment in regard to the government of appetite. He who is sober and temperate in all things, keeping under his body and bringing it into subjection, enjoys himself, and is held in reputation—at least so far—Very different from him, in whom the law in the members controls the law in the mind, bringing him into captivity.

The same holds true with respect to the restraint of lust. He who "possesseth his vessel in sanctification and honour"—whose care it is to "crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts"—who "keeps himself unspotted from the world," acts as becomes a rational creature, who is under law to God. Sin does not reign in his mortal body: He does not obey it in the lusts thereof. No fruit but shame results from the indulgence of them.

If there is no dignity in the prevailing love of pleasures, in dwelling carelessly, in following reigning custom or opinion, however mutable, there may be dignity in attention to useful and improving pursuits; in not being conformed to the world, whereintoever it would ensnare the soul, and seduce us from what we owe to ourselves as intelligent creatures, who have life and immortality set before us—who have other and superior concerns to mind than a present convenience, advantage or interest.

Further; what glory is there in hoarding up *riches*, and setting the heart upon them?—in presuming that our houses shall continue for ever? that neither we nor our treasures shall see corruption? "Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased. For riches take wing and flee away." When they change their owners, the many friends, who had gathered round their former possessors, desert them, and go over to the new holders. When the rich man "dieth, he shall carry nothing away: His glory shall not descend after him." Nor doth he know whether a wise man or a fool shall be his heir. "He disquieteth himself in vain. He heapeth up riches" with great care and pains, *and knoweth not who shall gather them.* This is his folly. *Like sheep are they laid in the grave.* It is more wise and honourable to lay up treasures in heaven. These treasures are durable and satisfying, subject to no decay or disaster. The "rich in faith are heirs to a kingdom," however

poor in this world. The “rich in good works lay up
 “in store for themselves a good foundation against the
 “time to come.” God honoureth them, by regarding
 them as his almoners. “He who hath pity upon the
 “poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he
 “hath given, will he pay him again.” The Redeemer
 and the Judge of the world will, at the great day, re-
 ward charitable deeds, shewn to the proper objects,
 and from worthy motives, as done to himself. “Come,
 “ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom pre-
 “pared for you. When thou doest thine alms, do
 “not sound a trumpet before thee—that thou mayest
 “have glory of men—But when thou doest alms, let
 “not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth :
 “That thine alms may be in secret : And thy Father
 “who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee
 “openly.”

Again, will you call the *pride of life* true glory? We will take a short view of the pride of exterior magnificence—the pride of conquest—the pride of suicide and duelling—the pride of genius and talents, connected with the desire of fame.

First, the pride of *exterior magnificence*. If exterior splendour be accompanied with no greatness of mind, it can but render the possessor more conspicuously ridiculous. Instances of this kind will at once occur to every observer. Outward circumstances confer no dignity, where there was none before. Persons residing in superb edifices, clothed in purple, faring sumptuously, having numerous servants in their train, are wont to be gazed at by the unthinking. They are flattered from secular views, and because they are fit subjects. They may yet be the meanest of men. Their flatterers hold them in contempt. You may find, in the most private walks of life, numbers who would dignify a conspicuous station—who would know the best use of an affluence—who would disperse and give to the poor, from no motives of vanity. *The poor man's wisdom is apt to be despised.*

Solomon, in all his glory, never appeared so dignified, as when he fell on his knees, and poured out this prayer before the Fountain of wisdom, the giver of every good and perfect gift: "O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out, or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people—Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad." A greater than Solomon came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and gave his life a ransom for many. He appeared with no marks of exterior greatness: He had not where to lay his head: He was despised and rejected of men. Yet he was such a friend and benefactor as the world never saw before, nor ever will again, until he shall come in his glory, with all the holy angels for his attendants. He taught his disciples, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

Secondly, *Of the pride of conquest.* Here you see those, who should be God's ministers of good to mankind, laying waste the earth, filling it with violence and blood. They who place their glory in the extension of their dominions, are scrupulous of no means to accomplish their object. Actuated by the same spirit, from Nimrod the mighty hunter of men down to the present Gallican chief, they have been *as roaring lions and ranging bears*. They have made the wide dominions of the earth *mountains of prey*. Observe the self-complacency and arrogancy of *one*, as a just specimen of the temper and character of *all* aspirers to glory of this sort: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" For this he was sent a grazing with the beasts of the field. From his degradation take your opinion of such glory, acquired by such means. For thus it is that *pride goeth*

before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.
 “ Knowest thou not this of old ; that the triumphing
 “ of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite
 “ is but for a moment ? Though his excellency mount
 “ up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the
 “ clouds ; yet he shall perish for ever, like his own
 “ dung ; they who have seen him shall say, Where is
 “ he ? ” Let us comfort ourselves with these words :
He who is higher than the highest regardeth.

Thirdly, There is the pride of the *duellist* and *suicide*. The duellist has set up this standard of bravery and glory, that he will be his own judge of any personal affront, whether real or presumed ; and that the slightest shall not be atoned for, but by putting at hazard his own life, as well as the life of the person offering the supposed indignity. That is, he will commit deliberate murder, and compel the other to do it. For in the eye of heaven, the challenger, and he who accepts a challenge, are both murderers. If either falls in the encounter, the survivor, doubtless, ought to be put to death by *the powers that be*. What of glory then is there in deliberate murder ? that is, in a liability to the just sentence of being suspended on a *gibbet* ? Duelling is the death of friendship, and subversive of all government : It is recurring to an absolute state of nature. Is this opprobrium of humanity more honourable than a state of society and order ? What proof of valour is there in duelling ? Many a coward has been engaged in this way.

As to *suicide*, the only honour this can claim is that of the dastardly soldier, who deserts the post of danger assigned him by his general.

We mentioned, fourthly, the *pride of genius and talents*, connected with the desire of *fame*. By this we mean seeking glory of men, regardless of HIS approbation and glory who giveth us our talents, and affords us all our advantages. In this we include the indulgence of vain imaginations, and high things

which exalt against the knowledge of God, in opposition to the design of “the weapons of our warfare,” which “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” This kind of pride is peculiarly to *fall into the condemnation of the devil*. Can there be greater disgrace, than to be led *captive by him at his will*? to give *him* the direction and use of the talents received from God? The spirits of darkness were once angels of light—among *the morning stars*, who *sang together and shouted for joy* round the throne of glory. Their present degradation and infamy most forcibly evince, that the creature’s honour consists not in the mere splendour of talents; but in the right use of them—in honouring and humbly serving the Father of spirits. No man’s talents can be sunk, because he has a supreme reverence of the great God, and of his only begotten Son: This must aid and elevate his talents: It will call them forth on every occasion, in all places and circumstances, in every relation he may sustain. His abilities and acquirements will otherwise be perverted to the basest purposes. Talents without virtue, far from having a claim to respect, are to be detested as *the depths of Satan*. The wisdom and purity, benevolence, humility and fervour of Gabriel are a worthy pattern for us to praise and extol the MOST HIGH. The daring pride and rebellion, deformity and malignity of the prince of darkness, *seeking whom he may devour*, are viewed with supreme abhorrence, by all whom the infinite God *delighteth to honour*. If the standard of honour is to be taken from hell, the illuminism and philosophy, which at this day prostrate all order, dissolve every duty of man, and would subvert the throne of the eternal King, have the first claim to honour. But, taking the standard of honour from *heaven*, look to the worship and fervent zeal of the powers above, falling down before him who sitteth on the throne of the universe. Look to him whom all those powers worship; before whose

example of humility, love and zeal every other fades. *Therefore God also hath highly exalted him. Before honour is humility.* “The high and lofty One, who dwelleth in unapproachable glory, looketh to that man who is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

The gospel of life and immortality is our guide to glory. We shew unto you this excellent way—the way that leads to real, distinguished and eternal glory. Is the gospel, which has the clearest signatures of wisdom and grace, to be despised? Is HE to be despised, who was proved by his doctrine and mighty works, to be the wisdom of God, and the power of God? The line that separates deism from atheism is not easy to be perceived.

Man has the lowest thoughts of himself, when he has exalted thoughts of God. With such thoughts he will give up a favourite hypothesis, when the authority of the sacred oracles requires it. *Be not wise in thine own eyes. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart.* Paul was a great genius and proficient in science. But when it pleased God to enlighten his soul with the knowledge of the divine glory in Jesus Christ, he determined to know nothing else comparatively. He demanded, “Where is the wise? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

Do you covet fame? Religion shews you how you may gain an everlasting name. *The just shall be in everlasting remembrance.* Why should any envy kings and emperors their sceptres? Religion ensures a crown of righteousness, a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Is glory and praise from men sought with great pains? Much more should the honour that comes from God be sought. The King of kings, and Lord of lords, will give to all, who consent that he should reign over them, to sit on his throne, when the great and mighty, the infidel and scoffer shall cry to the rocks to fall on them, and to the mountains to hide them from his presence.

If the author of our religion was an impostor, it would not be honourable, but in the highest degree opprobrious, to follow him. But, admitting his divine mission, no honour may compare with reverencing him as the Son of the Blessed. Those are the wisest and most honourable of the human race, to whom *he is an honour*. He sought not his own glory, but his Father's, whose ministering servant he was; in doing, suffering, and finishing whose will and work he had meat to eat, of which the world were ignorant. Distinguished for the greatest self-denial, humility and philanthropy, he *went about doing good*. He had compassion on all who laboured under any disease, or were fainting under spiritual wants. *No guile was in his mouth*. He *was reviled*, but *reviled not again*. He *committed himself to him who judgeth righteously*. He laid down his life for enemies. He *knew no sin*, but *died for the ungodly*. His design in coming down from heaven, where he had a glory from eternity, was universal peace and benevolence. Of him we learn humility and charity. The more is done and suffered in the cause of truth, the more honour. The primitive disciples could say, "To us it is given," as *a privilege*, "to suffer shame for his name. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth on you—on your part he is glorified. By patience in well doing seek for glory, honour and immortality."

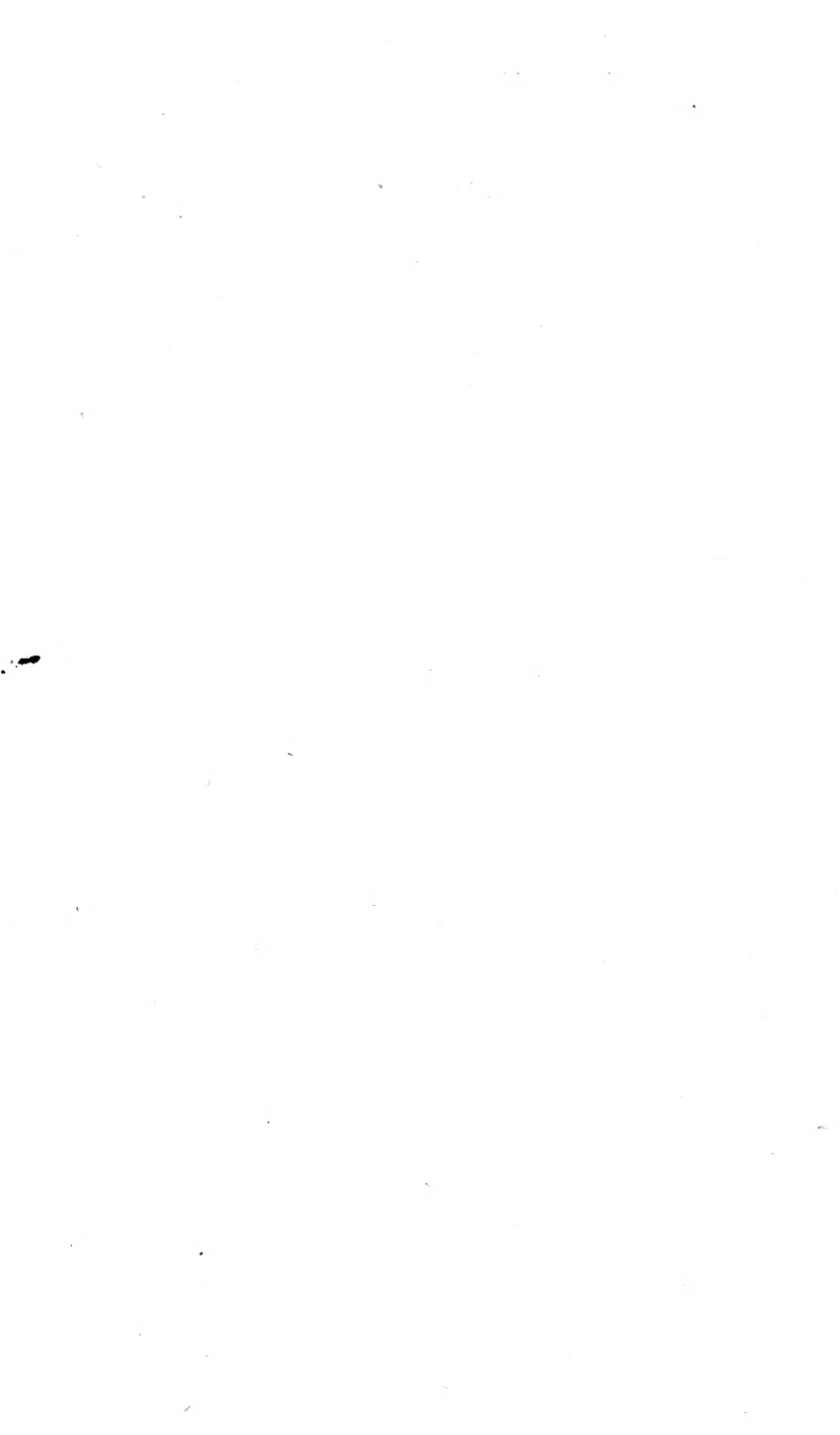
Religion is the restoration of man's fallen nature to the highest perfection and glory of which it is capable: Its friends are the friends of universal holiness, peace and happiness. All, who are not entirely lost to a sense of moral excellence, esteem and honour them. The *yoke of religion is easy*, and its *burden light*. It supplies an inward spring of comfort, independent on outward sources. Is it not honourable? If Christ was *the light of the world*, to hear him is to honour our understanding, to shew ourselves wise.

He indeed doth *not give as the world giveth*. But, compared with his peace, even the joy of faith and assurance of hope, riches, and honour, and the delights of the sons of men are contemptible. With all these, the wicked are as the troubled sea. Christians, *let not your hearts be troubled*. Your joy is the testimony of a good conscience; and neither earth nor hell can take it from you.

Reflect further, that all human glory is consigned to dust. The grave abolishes all the distinctions among men. There is no order there. The *future* recompence of religion is ultimately intended by the declaration, *The wise shall inherit glory*. They look for the *blessed hope, and glorious appearing of Jesus Christ*, when they also *shall appear with him in glory*. They *shall be like him*. Their bodies being changed, and fashioned like unto his glorious body, he will present them without spot to his Father. He will *be admired and glorified in them*. The glory they shall inherit, eye hath not seen, nor can the human heart imagine what it is. But the unerring approbation of the Judge—bearing his image in the glories of immortality—immediate communications from the fountain of life—the assurance of the everlasting love of God in Christ—a crown of glory that will never fade, but grow brighter and brighter; this honour, this glory shall the wise inherit. They *shall not be ashamed before him at his coming*. “Those who afflicted them shall see it, and be troubled and amazed. Repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, they shall say within themselves, “These are they whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted their life madness; and their end to be without honour.” Behold, how they are now more than conquerors, through the Captain of their salvation. Behold them “before the throne, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands!”

Infidels and men of bad morals would, if possible, subvert our faith and our souls. Shall we, in compliance with their wishes, disregard him, who is higher than the angels? Where is their honour, while they treat EMMANUEL with scorn, and would seduce us? Or what sense of honour have those, who, through shame, sacrifice their own principles, their peace, and their immortal hopes? Thinkest thou, who art ashamed of the Saviour, that he will not be had in honour by others? Or dost thou think of that day, when he will consign thee to everlasting contempt?

Infidelity must be referred to the source pointed out in our Lord's address to the Pharisees: "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God?" The unbeliever loves darkness rather than light, whether his unbelief proceeds from a vain imagination of the sufficiency of human reason, or from an immoral life. The simplicity of the gospel offends men who offer incense to their own presumed luminous talents, and expect that others should overrate them as much as they do themselves. They do not point out a way of pardon for offenders. They do not shew how the soul may be renewed, and the dominion of sin removed. They do not discover a resurrection and immortality. They do not remove the darkness, impotency and death under which we labour. Why, in the name of reason and gratitude, do they reject a religion which accomplishes all these ends? I conclude with the Saviour's words; *Blessed is he whofoever shall not be offended in me.*



SERMON XIV.

GOOD COMPANY RECOMMENDED.

PSALM cxix. 63.

I AM A COMPANION OF ALL THEM THAT FEAR THEE, AND OF THEM THAT KEEP THY PRECEPTS.



THE fear of God and keeping of his commandments are connected parts of the same character, and comprehend the whole duty of man. The author of the words before us delighted in the law of the Lord : It was his meditation all the day. He beheld the transgressors, and was grieved. Yea, saith he, "Horreur hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked who forsake thy law. Do not I hate them, O Lord, who hate thee? and am not I grieved with those who rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies. I have not sat with vain persons; neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil men; and will not sit with the wicked." To all of this description he said, "Depart from me; for I will keep the commandments of my God." In the text he mentions the *fearers of God* as his *companions*. These were the characters which he esteemed *excellent*, and in whom was all his delight. These hath the Lord set apart for himself. For these the holy angels minister. They shall not be tempted above that they are able. If cast into the furnace, they come forth as refined gold. Their death is precious in the sight of the Lord. They shall be found to honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Such are the fearers of God. What I now have in view is to recommend their company to young people.

The *character* which persons obtain in life, depends much on their *early associates*.

Upon this ground parents are commanded to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This they cannot be presumed to do, unless they recommend to them virtuous companions, and enforce the recommendation by a pious example before them. Trained up with the fearers of God, habits may be formed and fixed, which may secure them against the snares and allurements in the path of life. Careful observers trace the discrete, virtuous, useful, and even eminent part, which some act in life, to their early choice of a few associates, esteemed for thoughtfulness, prudence, and an emulation to excel in wisdom and virtue. Among the instances of gross departure from honourable and useful paths, the greater part, perhaps, must be ascribed to an early acquaintance with some one or more of an unprincipled character—But we need not enlarge in a case so plain. The world abounds with bad examples: Good ones have been generally rare—not certainly less rare in our times than heretofore. If more frequent, and of a more dangerous description, greater vigilance and firmness will be required to withstand them: Greater magnanimity will be displayed in resolving to keep company with the virtuous few. Let the lasting and important consequences, which may depend upon an early and fixed resolution in this point, be kept in mind. For the earlier this resolve is made, the more praise-worthy, the more secure your virtue.

Secondly, The fearers of God are *of one heart*. This is a further recommendation of their company.

They are agreed in the great doctrines and duties, and in the spirit, of religion. They have *one Lord, one faith, one hope*. On points not essential, on forms and modes, on the ways and means which may be best

adapted to promote religion, there will be a diversity of sentiment : But the fearers of God, so far as they know one another, are united in esteem and affection : They agree in love to Zion—in striving for the faith delivered to the saints—in endeavours for the best interests of their country, and of mankind—in fervent prayers and exertions for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem, the *enlargement of her cords, and strength of her stakes*. They mutually rejoice, when things go well in church and state. They are afflicted in the afflictions of their people : They mourn the declensions and deadness of professors : They unite against the common foes of Christianity, are deeply affected with any advantages gained against the cause of truth, and the reproaches cast upon it : They agree in endeavours that their *light may shine before men*—that their *good may not be evil spoken of*. Except they are thus far agreed, they *seek their own things, not the things of Christ*. Christian charity *seeketh not her own*. From imperfect knowledge of religion and of each other, good men separate. When clothed with humility and charity, they are sensible of their own liableness to err, think no evil of their brethren, without full proof from their fruits ; and *esteem others better than themselves*.

Vicious men and infidels, though they agree in their opposition to truth, holiness and peace ; yet do not pursue the *same*, but *separate*, sinister interests, according to their different passions. But the fearers of God, so far as they act up to this character, have no end separate from his glory ; no happiness separate from his favour. *So far as they have attained, they walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing*. What distinguisheth them is not a perfect accordance in opinion, but the spirit of Christ, the same mind as was in him. This unites and endears them to each other, though of different opinions on speculative and circumstantial matters, more and far otherwise than any agreement in such matters without the spirit of the gospel. This

spirit, apparent in any, is a peculiar recommendation of their society. Especially would we recommend such society to those who are just coming forward in life. For,

First, They are the best *counsellors*. They receive the truth in love, and have no attachment to error. They come to the light. Perceiving how much they need wisdom from above, they ask it of him who giveth liberally: They ask in faith, nothing wavering. They therefore shall know the doctrine of religion in all important points. "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." God teacheth his way to the meek and humble, who wish to know and do his will. Their "path is as the shining light, which shineth more and more. But the way of the wicked is as darkness." Their deeds being evil, they love darkness rather than light. The Father of lights guideth the former by his unerring wisdom; the latter, trusting to their own wisdom, know not at what they stumble. They who walk uprightly walk surely; because God is their sun and shield, to enlighten and guard them.

These are the best advisers, if it be true that *he who walketh with wise men shall be wise*. Both their integrity and judgment, in the things of your peace, may be confided in. For "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they who do his commandments."

What more desirable, at the entrance on life, than a guide, an acquaintance, in whom you can confide?—whose society is improving? a guide, an acquaintance who hath *acquainted himself with God, and is at peace with him*—a friend of universal virtue—in whose eye a *vile person is condemned*—who *honoureth such as fear the Lord*. The thoughtful and serious seek the company of persons with whom they may take *sweet counsel*; and shun the thoughtless and frivolous, vain and impious. He who has not the fullest confidence in his own opin-

ions, but is conscious of his liability to err, desires the opinion of others in matters of moment. With whom then shall he take counsel? Certainly with those who have no wish to deceive him—who treat the most important subjects as being what they are—who rejoice not in iniquity, but in the truth—whose supreme wish is, that *this* may have free course.

Secondly, Such companions will not only give you salutary counsel, but will constantly *incite* you to “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.” With a view to mutual improvement in such things, the *fearers of God speak often one to another*, stirring up the gifts of God in one another, as good stewards of his grace. Without such mutual incitement, the love of religion will grow cold, and its cause be wounded in the house of its friends. These therefore exhort one another, as they have opportunity; “confess their faults one to another, and “pray one for another, that they may be healed.” You need every incentive to virtue in early life, every preservative against vice. Associate yourselves therefore with the friends of virtue: Set before you her brightest ornaments. Emulate what you must acknowledge to be praise-worthy in them.

It follows, thirdly, that in such company you will best pursue *the end for which life was given*.

You were sent into the world to do good in *this* life, and to lay a good foundation for *that* to come—to believe in and follow your Redeemer, who eminently glorified God on the earth, and finished his work while it was day. In this work he had meat to eat, of which the world is ignorant. Would you do the main business of life in some such manner? would you, as he was, be animated by the joy set before you? Then keep company with them who live to the Lord. These only are the persons who consider the true use and end of life—who *rejoice both God and man*—who reflect that they are not their own, were not made for

themselves, are stewards of another's goods, and must give account of their stewardship. Would you give a good account of your own, then keep company with such—not with the idle and murmuring, who hide their talent; nor with the steward who wastes his Lord's goods.

Fourthly, Pious companions will best guard your virtue *in perilous circumstances, and in perilous times.*

The foes of piety are always numerous. Some are of an insidious character; others are impudent and shameless scoffers. Such characters walk on every side at the present day. To withstand the craft of Satan and his agents will call for all your vigilance. To resist the torrent of vice and the derision of mockers will require great fortitude. “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” Amidst an evil and adulterous generation, the temptations to be ashamed of religion are many and powerful. Those in youth are peculiarly liable to false shame, the dread of singularity in the cause of truth. They naturally follow the multitude and the fashion, in the paths of error and destruction, rather than the few, in the paths of truth and life. It is hoped that our young people will receive the exhortation to be companions of them who fear God. Such will be constant guards to their principles and morals—constant monitors of the delusions and danger that surround them. With such they may escape temptations, which have proved fatal to those who have not had the counsel and warning of some able and faithful friend, when their faith and virtue have been assailed. Such a friend may persuade you never to make shipwreck of faith and conscience, be the temptations what they may—to *hold fast integrity till you die.* Such an associate, speaking the language of his own experience and of the purest friendship, may convince you, that conscious integrity and the hope of heaven are too dear to be sacrificed to any fear of the adversary—any apprehension of outward shame and sufferings.

Such a friend may prevail with you to stand fast in the Lord, trusting his promise, "I will keep thee in time of temptation—will make a way to escape." Such a friend will remind you, when you most need to be put in mind, of the power, and grace, and pattern of Christ, "who was in all points tempted as we are; yet without sin—who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself—endured the cross," overcame, and is crowned; and through whose strength his disciples are *more than conquerors*. Have you great temptations from within or without? Does your mind waver between truth and error, duty and sin? Are you even ready to resolve on the side of irreligion? ready to be led captive by the devil? In such a perilous situation, a wise and virtuous friend, observing that you lie open to temptation, may, by seasonably interposing, snatch you from the tempter, and keep you from presumptuous sins. See then the importance of being a companion of them who fear God, and keep his commandments.

Fifthly, Be a companion of them; for they are *the best comforters in affliction*.

If you do not lay your account for various afflictions, and prepare to meet them, they must fall the heavier. You are liable to frowns on your laudable industry and enterprise. You may be cast on the bed of pain and languishment. You may be injured in your good name. You may be bereaved of kindred and friends, on whom you have much temporal dependence, the objects of your earthly hopes. You are liable to mental darkness. Such circumstances peculiarly call for the succours of religion. In such circumstances, what miserable comforters are vicious companions? They can only add affliction to the afflicted. Or if they are capable of mere *human* sympathy, *adversity* calls for *divine* consolations; and the suitable persons to administer them are those who *have tasted that the Lord is gracious*. Such are friends at all times; and espe-

cially when a friend is most needed ; and in the thing most needed, the *one thing needful*. The fearers of God smooth for each other the rugged paths of life ; *lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees*. They have learned contentment in whatever state they are. Whatever the gloom in their outward condition, or that of their connections, or people, or of Zion, they *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation*. They have a perpetual spring of inward support in the principles and spirit of religion. If the world rejoice, while they are sorrowful, their sorrow shall be turned into joy. Their sufferings are working out for them a far more exceeding weight of eternal glory. Like the good Samaritan, who shewed mercy to the wounded traveller, the fearers of God will pour an healing balm into your wounded breast. Their conversation, in a day of trouble, will do good like a medicine.

Sixthly, Be a companion of the fearers of God ; for with them you will best enjoy *prosperity*—the various blessings of life. Are you in health ? They will put you in mind that a sound heart is to be preferred to a sound constitution ; and will instruct you to improve the vigour of your powers to the most valuable purpose. Are you rich and prosperous ? They will excite you to be rich in good works ; to trust in him who giveth you all things richly to enjoy. They will help to inflame your gratitude for health, peace, plenty, friends, and other delights. They will guard you against a denial and contempt of God, the insolent and oppressive treatment of man, which not seldom attend on a fulness. They may prevent *your table from becoming a snare*—your affluence from proving an occasion of *leannefs being sent into your souls*. They will help to sanctify your prosperity, as Job sent and sanctified his children on their days of festivity. They will teach you, indeed, to *eat your bread with joy, and to drink your wine with a merry heart*—to rejoice with your families

and friends *for the abundance of all things*. For every gift of God is good, and nothing to be refused. They will teach you, at the same time, such use of the world as does not abuse it—even *moderation and temperance in all things—joy with trembling—a remembrance of the days of darkness*. They will caution you against a presumption that you *shall never be moved*, because that now, through God's favour, your *mountain stands strong*. *The blessing of the Lord maketh rich ; and he addeth no sorrow with it*. For riches, obtained and enjoyed by his *blessing*, are neither ill gotten, nor ill used. The gifts are not confided in, but the Giver. If you are a companion of them who fear God, while they rejoice for all his goodness to you, they will help you to realize the mutability and emptiness of external goods ; and will point you to the superior gladness of God's reconciled face. Their joy is not the extravagant mirth of fools ; but calm, manly, social joy, which centres in joy in God. Their conversation is not frivolous and light ; much less is it profane and filthy ; it is *always with grace*, chaste, savoury, entertaining and serious.—Are your children and friends round you ? Is no rod of God upon you ? Do you know no sorrow ? If you are a companion of them who fear God, they may guard you against setting your affection, your hope, on any of the endearments of life—against presuming on their continuance—against expecting too much from them—against placing them in God's stead. Let them instruct you to rejoice as though you rejoiced not ; and to weep as though you wept not—to fulfil your duty to the friend or relative who may be dear to you as your own soul, reflecting how frail you respectively are. Your present joy may be turned into heaviness at any hour. With the fearers of God for your company, joy in your dearest comforts will be tempered with this serious impression, that *God destroyeth the hope of man—that he giveth and taketh away*.

Lastly, be a companion of them who fear God, for with them you will wish to be united at death. No one in the hour of death, will say, *Gather my soul with sinners*. Those who have been companions in sin thro' life, fervently wish and pray, that they may have other company in the future world, however unqualified and indisposed for it. What is earth and time to heaven and eternity? That society to which you would choose to be united for ever, and which will be eternally delightful, is doubtless the best for this life. Behold the company in heaven, glorified saints, among whom may be numbered some whom you knew, and who were highly esteemed on earth; yea, some of your kindred—behold angels of every order, *thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, who minister for the heirs of salvation*—behold Jesus who was crucified, but is now crowned with glory, whom all the angels worship, who is able to save to the uttermost, and hath declared, that every one who overcometh shall sit with him on his throne, and reign for ever and ever—In that high and holy place dwelleth the King eternal and immortal, with whom is the spring of life, and whose presence is the fulness of unmingled, eternal joy. To be united to such society is to be blessed beyond all that eye hath seen, or ear heard, or hath entered into the heart of man. For such society you can be made meet only by an union with those on earth, who have the temper, and live the life, of heaven. If you have no love to such company now, if you do not prefer them, what lot or portion can you have with them hereafter? There is neither an hypocrite, nor a profligate, nor an atheist, who, on the supposition of an after state, does not wish to attain the happiness, and shun the misery of it. Companions in holiness and bliss mutually enjoy and improve each other. But what joy have the vicious and profane in each other? What enjoyment is there among infernals? Instead of alleviating each other's misery, such company can but

aggravate it. If you cannot be willing to suffer with the wicked in hell, if you wish to be happy with the fearers of God in heaven, then choose *these*, not *those*, for your acquaintance on earth.

What has been observed, it is hoped, may incite our young people to form an early acquaintance with those who appear to have the fear of God before their eyes. Connections with such, in business, in friendship, and in the nearest earthly alliance, are recommended to them. The nearer and more important the partnership in either of these, the greater attention should be given to the temper and character of the parties. Genius, rank, wealth, without virtuous qualities, can never ensure the ends proposed; but may interfere with and defeat every valuable purpose of the connection. There must be some foundation for a solid affection, esteem and confidence. But what foundation for either among those who have no commanding sense of moral obligation, no fear of God? Persons of contrary dispositions and pursuits, cannot trust or enjoy each other: Their society must be disagreeable. The vicious form connections with the virtuous, to make advantage of them, to pervert them, to rob them of their worldly goods or of their religion, or with some other unworthy view. Men naturally separate, as far as they can, from the company of those, whose confirmed taste, inclination and pursuits are dissimilar to their own—for whose character they have no esteem. A virtuous friend, a virtuous partnership in business, and especially a virtuous partner in the conjugal relation, is to be much valued. Their cares, interests, enjoyments, burdens and hearts are one.

Connections in business, in friendship, in the nearest ties of life, should then be formed with much deliberation and circumspection. The comfort, usefulness, improvement and advantages of life are very intimately concerned herein. It is desirable to be connected with those whom you can trust—with whom you can

have an unreserved intercourse, a cordial and warm friendship—who can and will faithfully advise and aid you in the things of life and godliness—who in all the vicissitudes of the world, will be your comforters. A friend, to whom you may safely and profitably open your heart, must be of great worth. Take care then to choose one who will not knowingly deceive you—to whom you can communicate all your state. Can this be any other than a fearer of God?

We plainly infer, from the foregoing discourse, that those who are inattentive or indifferent to their company, do not fear God. The personal virtue, of the young especially, depends so much on the company they keep, that scarce any thing more demands their own attention, and the attention of their parents and teachers. The truth and importance of this thing, are so very manifest, that many parents, who have no fear of God themselves, would prefer virtuous associates for their children, and take pains to give them a virtuous education. If parents who are evil may give such good things to their children, much more will pious parents attend to this subject. Let the young, therefore, as they would be numbered among the fearers of God, honour all of this character, and ever choose them for your intimate acquaintance. The honour of God, your own reputation, peace and security require this. Set before you the best patterns. Imitate the example in the words before us. Resolve, in the morning of life, to be companions of them who fear God, and whose ways are directed to keep his precepts. With youths of this character for your companions, you will be in the fear of the Lord all the day; yea all your life long. You will be preserved from the awful condition of such as learn to sin without fear or shame. *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. Stand in awe, and sin not.* Be the friends of Christ, and of his friends. Have no intimacy with his foes, that they may be ashamed. If

you allow yourselves to frequent their company, you will be in imminent danger of proceeding to all their excesses. In your greatest extremity, they will have no pity on you ; but desert you, as you have deserted the ways of virtue. “ The opportunities for sin,” which an intimacy with them affords, “ are great temptations. They will furnish you with the skill and knowledge of sinning. They will always be ready to second your temptations. They will watch your weakest hours, that they may triumph in your fall, and have the malicious pleasure of seeing you like one of them. Men are not always alike upon their guard : Their virtue is not at all times equally strong—you have inclinations to evil, which you are not always sure of controlling : Whenever they attack you, reason, thought and prayer are your best refuge. Why then will you enter the societies of wicked men ? You know that they will never suffer you to enjoy the advantages” of reflection and devotion. “ They will leave you no time to think, but will drive you on” to destruction.

“ There are many difficulties in the practice of religion, even when we call in all the assistances, and take all the advantages that may be had—Whoever considers this, must needs think it extreme folly in any one, who shall refuse the helps he may have to make the work easy ; or expose himself to greater difficulties in it. This every person does, who lays himself open to the deadly insinuations of evil men, who are industrious in the bad cause they serve.” Therefore my young hearers, have no fellowship, lot or portion with them. Contract friendship with the fearers of God. *The ungodly are as the chaff which the wind driveth away. They shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous ; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

SERMON XV.

CAUTION AGAINST BAD COMPANY.

PSALM, i. 1.

BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT WALKETH NOT IN THE COUNSEL OF THE UN-GODLY, NOR STANDETH IN THE WAY OF SINNERS, NOR SITTETH IN THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL.



THE design of this discourse is to offer a seasonable caution against profane and immoral company. Our young people, who are most exposed to have their principles and morals corrupted, are desired to consider themselves as peculiarly interested in what may be offered.

The several appellations, *ungodly*, *sinners*, *scornful*, may be used to express the general character of the foes of piety—the opposite to that of the godly, who, as it follows in the next verse, *delight in the law of the Lord, and meditate in it day and night*. Or if these terms were meant to describe different sorts of irreligious men, we may understand by the first, those of a *speculative* cast—by the second, the openly *immoral*—and by the last, *scoffers*. The first may be men of visible morality, though their talents are employed to subvert the foundation of piety. The second, if not speculative, are practical unbelievers. In this number are the intemperate, the lewd, such as live by extortion, and the lovers of pleasure. The last, without fear or shame, give the reins to their lusts, and openly revile the most solemn truths of religion. They alike blaspheme God, and violate decorum and good man-

ners in their treatment of mankind. *Blessed is he who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.* Blessed is the man who is guarded against the counsel of infidels—who shuns the company, avoids the crimes, and escapes the doom of the dissolute and the scoffer.

First, Beware of the counsel and society of those who admit not the principles of religion, revealed or natural.

The human mind has naturally an impression of a Deity and moral Governour, of accountableness and future retributions. All nations and ages have concurred in these general sentiments: They are the basis of all laws; the support of all authority, and of all confidence among men. Without the admission of them, human society could not exist. What then could ever have induced any mortal to doubt, to deny this original, universal sense of morality and religion? Not want of evidence; but either a wish that it may be untrue; or the vanity of being thought wiser than the rest of mankind? Through this vanity, some, to whom God hath given a superiour genius, have bent their whole attention to find arguments against religion. Through the pride of talents, puffed up with vain imaginations, they will not seek after God. They seek deep to exclude his providence from the government of the world, and to explode his existence. Many a speculative man has been caught in his own subtlety: Exercising himself in things too high for him, he has pursued a groundless theory much further than he contemplated at first; and at length fixed in total scepticism. No other result could be expected from the sacrifice of practical principles to vain speculations. Confiding in his own wisdom, man disowns human liberty and agency, and resolves every thing into fatality or chance. Every avenue being closed, at which useful truth might enter the mind,

he co-operates with the grand deceiver and apostate in the work of delusion. Men most resemble Lucifer, when they take deliberate counsel against the Almighty, and would bring him to their feet.

Are the disbelievers of revelation advocates for natural religion? *This* certainly obligeth them to call upon God, to set him before them, and study to approve themselves unto him. But they *cast off fear, and restrain prayer*: They despise God and his government; and say, by their neglect of his worship, *Depart from us*. Christianity has been confirmed by proofs as clear as the works of nature which proclaim the glory of God. Works of a like kind shew that Jesus was sent of God. His resurrection supports the Christian fabric: It was proved to the conviction and confusion of his foes, who wanted not means or ability, and spared not endeavours, to prevent or detect fraud in a matter of such moment. It was a fact which might compare with the creation of the world—a fact as fully ascertained as any event attested by experience. The immediate witnesses of it could not have been deceived; nor could they have testified it, had they not believed it. Their declaration of the fact is not, however, the whole proof upon which our faith rests: It was corroborated by the miraculous gifts with which they were endowed; to which gifts the promise, which Jesus addressed to them, refers: *The works which I do, shall ye do; and greater*. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, immediately imparting to unlearned men the knowledge of all languages, was a display of divinity, which the world had never before witnessed: On the day of its first exhibition, before a great assembly of the foes of Christianity, collected from all parts, it made three thousand of them converts to a crucified Saviour; even the Saviour whom they themselves had crucified not two months before their conversion.

If Christ rose from the dead, why should a general resurrection be thought incredible? The infidel denies

both—because some circumstances are not explained, which no reflecting man, unperverted by system, would expect to have explained. He demands in particular, *How are the dead raised? and with what body do they come?* If the manner in which this great event shall take place, if the *form* and *properties* of the resurrection body, are not made known, he will not believe. Yet uniform experience, upon which much reliance is placed, exhibits what is equally inexplicable—the reviviscence of seed, grafs and plants—the renovation of the face of the earth, after the deadness of winter. Why is not this disputed? It is as inexplicable as the restitution of the human body from the dust.

The counsel of the ungodly against religion is open or secret. It is *open*, when, in their conversation or writings, they directly attack the principles of religion—when they *produce* their *cause*, and *bring forth* their *strong reasons* against it—confident that they are the men, and that wisdom shall die with them. They find it easier to pull down than to build up. If they can destroy our faith, they are not concerned to substitute any thing in its room; but content to set the human mind free from all principle. Instead of a fair and candid examination of the external and internal evidence for religion, they apply their whole mental strength to the statement of subtil and specious objections. Did they take comparable pains to consider the arguments for religion, as they do to argue ingeniously against it, they would believe. But they must offer incense to their own talents, at the expence of faith and a good conscience. If such philosophers as Newton and Locke, men who investigated every subject of their contemplation with profound attention and discernment, were the friends and ornaments of Christianity, and wrote elaborately in its defence, no man need account it a dishonour to his understanding to believe and profess the gospel. To be sure we may

not take it for granted, that infidelity is a mark of superior understanding—that the counsel of the infidel is wise and safe.

But his counsel against religion is often *secret*, and given under the guise of friendship. Instead of directly assailing its authority, he aims to undermine and sap the foundation, by corrupting and perverting its doctrine: Its friends may be on their guard against the open foe; but not against the artful and insidious, who profess an esteem of the gospel with no other view than to gain advantage against it. A great part of the writers on infidelity are *wolves in sheep's clothing*. The false teachers in the apostolic age did more to obstruct the gospel than its open foes. They made divisions in the church, and perverted its members. They imitated their master in the *deceivableness of unrighteousness*. *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.* “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. Try the spirits whether they be of God. Walk not in the counsel of the ungodly,” whether their counsel be an open or secret attack upon the principles of piety, the doctrine according to godliness. Boldly withstand the open foe, and watch against the lurking one.

In the next place, Shun the *openly immoral*. *Stand not in the way of sinners.* These, if not *speculative*, are *practical* unbelievers. Though they may profess the gospel, they in works deny it. If it be true, they must either reform, or be miserable: “For therein is the wrath of God revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” The plea, GRACE, GRACE, cannot be admitted to save from wrath any who continue in sin. Eternal life is a reward promised only to those who *have their fruit unto holiness*. The grace which brings salvation, teaches to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live a sober, righteous and godly life, looking for the blessed hope. The way of

finners is the broad way to destruction, however they may flatter themselves in their own eyes. They may indulge a false hope. They may build upon the sand. Comparing their own character and the terms of the gospel, they have nought to expect but indignation and wrath, unless repentance intervene. If then they will not be persuaded to forsake their sins, they must with the gospel to be false; and from wishing, they may be led to believe it false. Resolved to pursue the way which seemeth right in their own eyes, how can they know or believe the truth? Having pleasure in unrighteousness, the light within becomes darkness. They call evil good, and good evil. They are given over to delusions. Sensual affections naturally lead to infidelity; or, to what is equivalent, opinions destructive of faith and sound doctrine. Fools say in their hearts, No God, no future punishment. The reason is, "They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity." Bad morals corrupt men's principles, and bad principles their morals. Through want of faith, they depart from the living God. And while they are far from him, and are wandering further, they preclude themselves from the means of faith. Those soon lose their morals, who become indifferent to, or give up religious principles.

Were the morals of our Saviour and his example followed, happy would it be for the world. Those who deny his mission, and cast opprobrium upon his character, do what they can to take away the restraints on the lusts and passions of men; encourage forgetfulness of God, of providence and a future life; and to sanction the Epicurean system, *Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.*

Sinners, resolved to walk in the way of their heart, will either be unmindful of, or indifferent to, or inclined to doubt, such moral principles as check their favourite pursuit. The profane, intemperate and unclean, the avaricious and unjust, did they verily admit

and reflect upon the plainest duties of morality, and the certain issue of the course they are pursuing, (not to mention the present effects of it) would not dare to go on in their trespasses.

Thirdly, Avoid those who *sit in the seat of the scorner*. They make a mock at sin, affront the good sense of all mankind, and defy the Almighty. They are lost to fear and shame. The most solemn truths, and the most solemn of all scenes, a judgment day, are selected for ridicule. "Where is the promise of his coming? Pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. They speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth. They say, How doth God know?" The most successful propagators of infidelity have been the greatest corrupters of the morals of mankind, and men of abandoned morals themselves. For proof of this, we need not recur to former times, nor bring examples from old and long corrupted kingdoms. But our own times and nation supply examples in abundance. In very many circles, religion and morals are introduced with no other view than to be ridiculed. Daring and unfounded assertions, accompanied with every species of indelicacy and mockery, are employed to prove revelation an imposture, and sound morals an abridgment of the rights of man.

To withstand all this arrogance and derision, requires great firmness—greater than young persons especially can command, unless they have learnt to love the truth; have some principles well fixed; and, by exemplary morals, are able to put to silence the ignorance and folly of such scoffers. They must bear to be reproached for hypocrisy and affected gravity, by the many scorners of the present day. If a contemptuous sneer, the finger of scorn, a sally of wit, an impudent falsehood, can put them to shame, or make them waver in religion, their souls will be perverted, nor is

there any pollution in which they may not be overwhelmed. They are coming forward on the stage at a period when every artifice will be used to delude and demoralize them—a period in which scepticism and degeneracy are fashionable and prevalent beyond what has been heretofore known in this country. In every place there are to be found despisers of God, of his superintendency, of man's accountability, of the duties of morality—despisers of the Redeemer and his friends; of the Lord's day, its worship and ordinances. In every place there may be found those who *rejoice in iniquity* instead of *the truth*; who sow discord, and triumph in the divisions, blemishes and declensions of professors—in any advantages which these things may furnish them—in any means of embarrassing and oppressing them. I certainly do not wish to exaggerate. I submit to persons of observation and reflection, whether any past period has endangered the faith and morals of youth comparably with the present. Happy those who may escape the snares and allurements before them.

Among various dissuatives against *walking in the counsel of the ungodly, standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scorner*, we observe, *first*, an intimacy with such characters must express your *approbation* of them. You implicitly wish success to impiety and profligacy: You cast in your lot with them, that infidelity and pollution may have free course—that truth and virtue may be depressed and vilified. I hope better things of our young people, or should think it fruitless to address them. The object of my address on this subject is to prevent their being ensnared, by associating with persons of this description. Be not deceived. There is much danger of being deluded by their sophistry, and polluted by their example. You cannot be in an house or city infected with the plague, without danger to your life or health.—Nor can you keep company with such characters, and

not endanger your principles or morals. The friends of truth and virtue walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful; because (as it immediately follows) their "delight is in the law of the Lord." They abhor the principles and the way of life, which the ungodly, sinners and scornors maintain and pursue. They behold such, and are grieved; and have therefore no disposition to embolden and strengthen them by any familiarity. "Two cannot walk together, except they are agreed. Righteousness hath no fellowship with unrighteousness; nor he that believeth, any part with an infidel. Come out from among them, saith the Lord; touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." A lover of truth and virtue can no more be delighted with the company of the profane, the immoral and scornors, than Lot with the Sodomites, or Michael with the devil. The world very justly form an opinion of men's characters from their chosen companions. Human laws involve associates in the crimes and punishment of the principals. A companion of fools deservedly brings on himself their infamy and misery. In the eyes of every fearer of God, a vile, unprincipled person is contemned; and if contemned, surely not cherished as an associate. Abstain from all appearance of evil. Keep not company with any, through whom the way of truth is evil spoken of. They wish to pervert your souls—to make you think and speak lightly of the way of truth and holiness.

Suppose your principles are at present uncontaminated, they cannot continue so, if you keep company with the immoral and unprincipled. Therefore enter not into their path; go not in their way; unite not to their counsel. Do you imagine that your virtue is impregnable? would you call temptation to yourselves? Then be seated with scornors. The effect will soon shew your temerity. Perhaps the mischief may

be irretrievable. When the pious David resolved to *keep the commandments of God*, he said to *evil doers*, *Depart from me*—implying that he could not keep God's commandments, unless he avoided such company. If you resolve to serve God, such company will leave you, as Satan, when all his temptations were withstood, left our Saviour. Resist them as you should him. Be not within hearing of their counsel, their profane, filthy conversation. For *evil communications corrupt good manners*.

The vicious seek the company of the virtuous, with no other view than to involve them in their own dishonour, to obtain supporters in vice, and triumph in the spoil of those whom they have deluded. "They sleep not, except they have caused some to fall. They eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. Their way is as darkness. They lurk privily for the innocent. My son, walk not thou in the way with them: Refrain thy foot from their path. Can one take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt?"

From these things it appears to be highly important that you endeavour, among other marks of integrity, to have this: "Lord, I have not sat with vain persons, nor gone in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers: and will not sit with the wicked. They turn the night into day: The harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; But they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." They raise not their thoughts so high. They neither review the past, nor attend to the future; but pursue the impulse of their appetites, wasting life in a mad career of vanity and dissipation. *The thief cometh not but to steal, to kill, and to destroy.*—This character well applies to the ungodly, the immoral and the scorner. They come to steal your good name, your treasure, your peace—to destroy

your immortal interests, to *kill the soul*. They envy the virtuous their esteem and confidence, influence and improvement among men; feeling that they themselves are distrusted, avoided and abhorred. Their wish is to wipe off the infamy from vice and profaneness—to make piety and virtue ridiculous—to encourage fraud, speculation, gambling, seduction and scepticism. Many, who, but for their example and instigation, would have grown up in virtuous and useful courses, have been ensnared by them—*forsoaken the guide of their youth*, (parents and teachers) *and broken the covenant of their God*. What destructive, irretrievable consequences have followed? Such characters as the text mentions are as Achan in the host of Israel.

You ask, May we have no company with such characters? I answer, As little as possible—and certainly no intercourse which would imply that you cast in your lot with them—none which must put at hazard your integrity, your fear of God.

But would you *absolutely* have no intercourse with such characters, you *must needs go out of the world*. Neither the state of society, nor of families, admits of a total separation. You may not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor follow the way of sinners, nor join with scorners. You may *not give that which is holy to the dogs, nor cast pearls before swine*. You may have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. You may yet be placed in a family or neighbourhood, where you cannot avoid an intercourse with the vicious and impious. As much as lieth in you, you are bound to endeavour their conversion. The Author of our religion came to call sinners to repentance. With this view he was a guest with publicans and sinners; tho' he knew no sin. In reproving sin, he kept the prejudices of the reprov'd out of view; so that in the issue they were compelled to condemn themselves. Our treatment of the vicious must be calculated to strip them of their prejudices. Asperity and affectation are

to be avoided. The spirit of religion is meekness and charity. "Be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; having a good conscience," exhibiting a good conversation in Christ, that the enemy may be ashamed.

To hold fast your profession, in the case of any opprobrium or sufferings for his sake and the gospel, will be your highest honour and happiness, and what is indispensibly due to him who *endured the cross, despising the shame*. Whoever would pollute your morals, or turn you aside from the truth as it is in him, whatever their station, or however you may be connected with them, you must obey God rather than man. A disciple of Jesus is not ashamed of him, nor terrified, however the foe may revile or persecute. Happy the youth whom the force of religious principle secures against the contagion of the immoral, the sneer of the scorner, and the subtilty of the infidel. Example has great sway: Bad examples are often the greatest—especially the example of superiours in station, circumstances or talents—of those on whom there may be much temporal dependence; or whom past favours, personal accomplishments, or the ties of nature may endear.

Some wrest the scriptures to serve an hypothesis: The denial of them is but an easy transition: And the next step is to take the seat of the scorner. "When the belief of a future life, and the superintendency of an all-wise and just Ruler of the world, the rewarder of right and the revenger of wrong; and faith in a Redeemer, and the influence of his Spirit, and of his doctrines, are no longer suffered to check the passions, regulate the desires, and restrain the will of such fallen and degenerate creatures as we became by sin, what must man be to man?"

A nation "abrogating all the principles, and disclaiming all the sentiments of Christianity, have convulsed the whole civil, moral and religious world—

“ Their contempt of God, their rejection of the faith
 “ of his Son, their violations of his sabbaths, their neg-
 “ lect of the ordinances of religion, have fatally recoil-
 “ ed upon themselves. They made impiety the fa-
 “ shion, and it was followed. The world has seen to
 “ what these fashions lead.” They prepared the way
 to the military despotism which that devoted nation,
 and many of its neighbours, now “ bitterly experience.
 “ Do not sacrifice your religion, morals, peace with God
 “ and with your own consciences, your well-being in
 “ this life, and your hopes for an hereafter, to the folly
 “ of fools, to the volatility and frivolousness of the idle,
 “ or to the profaneness and impiety of the dissolute and
 “ profligate. Scorn to be the servile followers of any,
 “ however high in rank or station, who shew that they
 “ have set themselves above their God, and that they
 “ despise the service of their Redeemer. Follow not
 “ the example of those who cannot screen you in the
 “ day of God’s dreadful visitations; or protect you
 “ from the evils, which they shall be themselves the
 “ first to suffer.” *

You guard against such as would rob you of your earthly treasure, or of your civil liberties—against those who would destroy your reputation or your health, or would degrade you from your proper rank in life. Beware much more of such as seek to enslave your souls, to strip you of the true riches, to blot out your name from the book of life, and destroy your title to an eternal crown—would bring on you a spiritual disease, the end of which is the second death, everlasting contempt, and the chains of the bottomless pit. Embrace principles, which will enable you to withstand the shock of temptation from every quarter—which will support in adversity, and in passing the shadow of death. Those principles can be of no value, which, like the *house on the sand*, fail a man when *the rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow*. With prin-

* T. L. O’BEIRNE, D. D. Bishop of Meath.

ciples and hopes founded on the oracles of God, you will be as the *house on a rock*, which cannot be shaken. Religious liberty consists not in having no fixed principles; but in embracing and holding fast such as produce all the fruits of righteousness, charity and peace.

“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee—from the way of the evil man, who leaveth the paths of uprightness, to walk in the way of darkness—from the enticements of the strange woman, who hath cast down many wounded. Her end is bitter as wormwood. Her house is the way to hell.” It is easier to keep from destructive paths, than, after having been seduced into them, to turn back, and lay hold on the path of life. Let as many as have not been contaminated, shun all approaches to sin, *all appearance of evil*. “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” Say not, “Rejoice in thy youth; and walk in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know that God will bring thee into judgment.”

The prevalence of principles destructive of sound morals and piety is a characteristic of the present age. The institutions of religion are much neglected and despised. *The way of truth is evil spoken of. Many depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits. The foundations are destroyed.* Publications on infidelity are circulated with great industry, and read with avidity. The sceptic and the scoffer *walk on every side*. In such times, there is great occasion for a caution to young people with respect to their company. “When they find what honour is often done to unbelievers, and how well they are received, whilst religion suffers under the hard names of ignorance and superstition, they grow ashamed of” the gospel; “and, if not really, yet affectedly they put on the fashionable air

“ of disregard to every thing that is serious. By degrees they harden ; till, from being ashamed to own God, they grow bold enough to deny him, encouraged by example and by precept to brave his utmost vengeance.”

Such, my young friends, is the ruinous effect of walking in the counsel of the ungodly, of standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scornful. “ You who have not made shipwreck of reason and conscience—who have not yet renounced your God and Redeemer,” but are “ exposed to the temptations of crafty sinners—give me leave to expostulate this case with all the seriousness the subject requires. It is an unpardonable folly and inexcusable perverseness for men to forsake religion out of vanity and ostentation ; as if irreligion were a mark of honour, and a noble distinction from the rest of mankind. To fear, where there is true cause of fear, where our souls and our eternal happiness are at stake, is not below the dignity of man. To outbrave God and his justice is a sad instance of courage. And men who sin through such a ridiculous vanity, may value themselves for their bravery in despising the fears, and their wisdom in deriding the weakness, of religion ; but perhaps a little time, a very little time, may shew them what learned pains they take to dispute themselves into hell.” They “ must answer for the vanity of taking pains to invent” sophistical “ reasoning, to oppose to the plain evidences which God hath afforded of his being and power, and to undermine the proofs and authorities upon which religion stands.” *

It will be a peculiar advantage and felicity to persons coming forward in life, if they are unconnected with, uninfluenced by, such characters as the text mentions—characters abhorred of God, of good angels, and of all wise and good men—assimilated to Satan in deceit and turpitude—deceivers and deceived. They

* SHERLOCK, Vol. iii. p. 14, 15.

prostrate truth, holiness and peace; and exalt error, impurity and discord. They are distinguished for arrogancy, envy, hatred, confusion and every evil work. *They seek whom they may devour. Heaven shall reveal their iniquity, and earth shall rise up against them.*

Consider their odious, mischievous characters, the destruction and misery which are in their paths: You must acknowledge it to be of the last importance, that you walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. Would you walk surely, take the sacred oracles for counsellors. Choose for your friends the characters there recommended. Then you will never listen to the instigations of the ungodly; nor assist to accomplish their devices by supplying the means, or by any compliances. You will not try to exempt them from deserved opprobrium. Such characters will be contemned in your eyes, as you honour them that fear the Lord. Instead of winking at their folly and profaneness, through fear of their censure or their scorn, your example will be a standing reproof; and, as far as may be proper, will be accompanied with faithful rebuke. You may spare no means and endeavours to convert them from the error of their way; to guard those of your early period, who, from their disposition or situation, may lie open to their counsel or company; to prevent the devious from wandering further, and to reclaim them.

Finally, my young brethren, answer fairly to the demand, and follow the advice of an apostle. *What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Wherefore, come out from them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

SERMON XVI.

CAUTION AGAINST BAD BOOKS.

PROVERBS xix. 27.

CEASE, MY SON, TO HEAR THE INSTRUCTION WHICH CAUSETH TO ERR FROM THE WORDS OF KNOWLEDGE.



“**T**HE fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” To hate knowledge is the same as not to choose the fear of the Lord. “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding—Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding, The knowledge of the Holy is understanding. Buy the truth, and sell it not.”

From these various expressions it appears, that by the words of knowledge true religion is intended. The instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge therefore means instruction opposed to the doctrines and duties of religion—instruction in whatever is subversive of religious faith or practice. The teachers of error are frequently more attended to than the teachers of truth.

The sources of error are bad *company* and bad *books*. In my last discourse, our young people were furnished with cautions against the former. The design of

the present discourse is to guard them against the baneful instruction, contained in books calculated to pervert their understanding, and corrupt their hearts.

The books in my view are of various description. One class would make you infidels in *practice*; another class would make you infidels in *speculation* as well as practice. Their instruction alike causeth to err from the words of knowledge. When the erroneous instruction they contain hath been pointed out, the reasons will be offered which enforce the advice of the text, peculiarly on the rising generation. *Cease, my son, to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge.*

The books which contain this instruction are the light and frivolous—the licentious, coarse and obscene—those which refine upon vice and impurity—those which make ridicule the standard—and those written with much labour and sophistry, in support of universal scepticism and fatality.

First, the *light and frivolous*.

Of these there are a great variety. They have no useful object in view—no certain end, unless to avail the authors of the foible of that large class, who read merely to find something novel and strange. Filled with “trifles light as air,” they exhibit no other than utopian ideas of life, visionary characters, visionary blifs. If they may afford a few moments’ amusement, amidst serious studies and occupations, it is the most that can be said of them. The writers who furnish the materials of this amusement, have little or no claim on the gratitude of mankind, their object not being general *utility*. They cause to err from the words of knowledge, by preventing the acquisition of it, filling the mind with vain imaginations, and consuming the time which should be applied to real improvement. With no other than such reading, you will “die without instruction, and in the greatness of your folly go astray.” But “a wise man will hear, and will increase learning.”

Secondly, Another class of books we call *licentious*, *coarse* and *obscene*.

These, much more than the first mentioned, cause to err from the words of knowledge. Some of them are the grossest vehicles of impurity. The authors, with a brow of brass, and an heart which is a sink of pollution, have set themselves to excite lusts, which otherwise might never have been conceived—passions which never might have been excited—lusts and passions subversive of all order and peace ; which violate all the dearest interests of individuals, families and communities. Such books are more destructive than the wide wasting pestilence. They cannot be read in company, but at the expence of all decency ; nor in the closet, without opening the heart to every foul spirit. They prostrate the foundations of society, and make man like the beasts which perish.

Some may think that publications of this kind should never be suffered to proceed from the press. The only effectual way to restrain them may be not to read them. Let them lie on the shelves of the authors and publishers, and they will cease to be printed. No care of the education of youth will avail, if such books are in their hands, and read with any satisfaction. Immodest language in conversation is an insult to decent company ; and in books, it is an insult to the public : It is appearing abroad in a dress, of which one should be ashamed at home.

But some authors have a talent of *refining* upon vice and impurity. Their indecency is *polished*, and not of the *gross* kind just mentioned. These constitute a third class of bad books.

Can the ornaments of stile change the nature of things ? make darkness light, and light darkness ? make evil good, and good evil ? make bitter sweet, and sweet bitter ? If not, then language thus abused is a prostitution of talents given for a better use. The allurements of stile may ensnare minds, which would

not be corrupted by gross obscenity. Immoral books, written in insinuating language, do more extensive injury to the cause of truth and virtue, than those distinguished for impudent and shameless ribaldry. The latter may be read by the coarse and ill-bred; the former are designed for polished life. Many useful observations on life and manners are intermixed with instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge. Writers of splendid talents, when their object is to *please*, rather than to *improve* the mind or the heart—when their real wish is to give currency to dissimulation, impurity and excess, have influence, above all others, in seducing into the paths of error. CHESTERFIELD ranks first among writers of this description; as STERNE does, in some of his writings, among the grossly obscene.

A fourth class of books make *ridicule* a standard? They aim to bring truth and virtue to this test.

This is a powerful weapon. Those who cannot be reasoned out of their principles, may be laughed out of them. Men who are averse to cool reflection, and have not a talent for sound discussion, may be prompt at a jest and sarcasm—may know how to pick flaws, to seduce the simple and unwary. A great part of the writers against revealed religion have adopted this mode of attack, with a success to be much regretted. If misrepresentation, sneer and contempt, lewd and profane wit, and every species of obloquy, could have borne down and extirpated Christianity, it had been rooted out in the apostolic age: It was *every where spoken against*: Its author was reproached as the son of a carpenter, a Nazarene; and its disciples, as Galileans. They were *accounted as the filth of the world, and off-scouring of all things*. No exertions were spared to expose him and them to popular scorn. Nor are any attempts of this kind wanting in our own times. Every part of Christendom, this country in particular, is filled with publications calculated to make Christianity

appear ridiculous—yea, publications which are a burlesque upon virtue, and renounce all pretensions to it as hypocrisy. This indeed is instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge. Are truth and sincerity—all ideas of moral government and accountability, to be scouted down by impious jests? Books which would teach you to deride the difference between truth and falsehood, right and wrong—to deride all principle of conscience and moral obligation—to deride death and judgment, heaven and hell, can be read only by such as hate the truth, and have pleasure in unrighteousness.

The last class of books, against which I would caution you, is, Those which are written with great *labour* and *sophistry* in defence of infidelity.

They undertake to appeal to your reason and understanding. They would persuade you that nothing rational or solid can be said in behalf of the gospel—that it is founded in imposture; is, in its internal frame, a contradiction to reason and natural religion, altogether unworthy of the wisdom of God; and, in its external proof, without any solid support—that the miracles, said to have been wrought in confirmation of it, never were wrought—that the Spirit of prophecy was merely a conjecture; or, instead of being a *prediction*, is only an *history*. Uniform experience is opposed to both, especially to the miracles. It is urged that philosophers and learned men have in general agreed to reject Christianity; and that it is fit to be embraced only by weak minds, incapable of research.

This description of writers do not descend to the buffoonery of the former: They are cool, deliberate and sophistical defenders of scepticism and universal fatality. They studiously cherish sentiments opposed, not only to Christianity, but to natural religion. *Through the pride of their countenance, they seek not after God—they pay him no acknowledgments. While they take much pains to pull down and destroy, what do*

they give us in the room of that religion which is the anchor of our hopes, and which they labour to take from us? Do they point out the destination of man, the end of his creation, his duty, his interest, a foundation of rest to his soul? If not, what have they in view? What friends to mankind are those who subvert the order of society, and leave no security for private friendship or public faith? By reading such books many are *spoiled thro' philosophy and vain deceit*. These systematical teachers of error have abounded of late years, so that the world can scarce contain their publications. They have been spread with great industry. Our young people are peculiarly exposed by them to err from the words of knowledge.

We have referred to the books which contain instruction in error—the light and frivolous—the licentious coarse and obscene—those written in a polished style, with the view of giving the more ready currency to dissimulation, impurity and excess—books which abound with lewd and profane wit, and would, by ridicule, bear down truth and integrity—and books written with great labour and sophistry, with specious reasoning and argumentation, against revealed religion, moral government, human agency and accountability, in support of universal scepticism and fatality.

We now proceed to assign the reasons, which peculiarly enforce on young people a caution against books of this description. The general reason is, that they contain instruction in error. *Cease, my son, to bear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge*—instruction which leads into dangerous and fatal error, both in principle and practice. True wisdom cannot enter into a soul that is open to such instruction: It separates from God and Christ—It shuts and bars the mind against that knowledge which is life eternal; yea, against the things belonging to our peace, honour and safety in this world.

There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him an understanding capable of everlasting improvement. Shall his soul then cleave to the dust? Shall its noble faculties be debased to the contemplation of frivolous, low and sensual objects? to the service of the bodily appetites? to vain imaginations, which exalt against the knowledge of God? The noble powers of the soul should rather be exercised in contemplations on the Father of spirits, the Father of lights; his perfections and works, his providence and will; on what he requireth of us; the way and means of acceptance with him; how we may serve his will in our generation, and lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come.

If such is the only worthy employment of your intelligent and immortal powers, then it is a perversion of these powers, a waste of time, to be occupied in reading such books as have been mentioned. Their design and tendency is, to turn away your thoughts and alienate your hearts from the just objects of them; to exclude from the heart and mind the things of God and the soul—to fill you with light, and froward, and contemptuous thoughts of those things and objects which are entitled to your most dignified, delightful and sober sentiments and affections.

There are not wanting books, written in the best manner, on every important branch of science, morals and religion—adapted to entertain and improve persons of every age, rank, and diversity of talents—books calculated to enlarge, purify and elevate the mind—books stored with the best information and principles; written with ability, perspicuity and force; leading in a plain and safe path—books composed by authors warmly attached to the outward, spiritual and immortal interests of mankind. These burning and shining lights, if dead, still speak by their excellent writings. Shall the cool and deliberate thoughts, the

mature instruction, of such authors, whether living or dead, be neglected, that you may read authors whose instruction causeth to err from the words of knowledge? who aim not to store your minds with useful sentiments and virtuous principles; but to banish these from the mind, and render it as vacant as possible, by teaching you to live without reflection.

One class of books would amuse you with *frivolous* and *fanciful* notions, with fictitious history instead of real? They would scatter rather than collect your thoughts. You must give account how you employ your thoughts, and spend your time. If God is not in all your thoughts, if your souls are not, what account will you be able to give? Can God or your souls be in your thoughts, if, in the choice of books for your instruction, you prefer fiction to reality, trifles to substance? Volatility pleases the idle; but those who are employed as they ought to be, reflect that they must give account of their idle thoughts as well as words—that it behoves them to *keep the heart with all diligence*. They therefore prefer such books as contain useful and serious instruction. They cannot be entertained with trifles. Your time and advantages were not given to be consumed in vanity, but to be improved to the glory of God, the good of your fellow men, and your own best account. The days of youth are the best to lay a good foundation, both for life and godliness. Be not idle and vain; but wise, and studious to know what the will of the Lord is. In this case your leisure hours will not be spent in reading useless books, but the most instructive: The former cherish the vanity incident to early life; the latter give the mind a right direction at the most important period.

If frivolous books cannot be read without an abuse of time, the danger is much greater from the *loose* and *licentious*, which inflame lust and passion. These are read only by minds already polluted. These impure

fountains pollute the mind yet more, and fix a disgust to every chaste and virtuous sentiment. They denounce reason, fear the conscience, and involve in every temptation and lust ruinous in this life and that to come. They would strip you of all shame, and lead you to boast in the foulest disgrace.

There are writers who insist, that the unrestrained indulgence of the appetites and passions is allowable; that it is to follow the propensities which the Author of nature hath given us, and which he therefore cannot disapprove. Such writers must answer for the agency they have had in ruining the principles and morals of their readers. They are the bane of society, and ought to be hunted from it. There is no social connection which they do not violate. Their contagion is like the pestilence, and their reproach that which cannot be wiped away. They fill the world with their gross obscenity. You may shun the reading of their books; but you cannot read them without being the worse for them; and the more so in proportion as you read these profligate writings. If such is the danger, yea, such the guilt, of reading them, I beseech you, avoid them, as you value a reputation for the things which are true, pure, lovely, and of good report—as you value your own safety, and the wishes of your dearest connections and friends.

Would you imbibe the instruction of those authors, who have bestowed on immorality and impiety every *embellishment* which genius could devise? You have much occasion to guard against their snares and allurements. If their genius is admired, their turpitude is to be abhorred as of the deepest dye—more malignant than even the grossest profligacy, as it is more studied and systematic: It is an effort to change the nature of virtue and vice, of sweet and bitter. By refining upon immorality, and exhibiting it in a pleasing form, it entices many, who could not be seduced while it retained its native deformity. Think not

that it can be the less odious, because fashionable—or because language has embellished it. Be peculiarly cautious of writings, which thus abuse the powers of language, and enlist the gifts of God into the service of Satan. Polite depravity avoids a *clownish* violation of the laws of morality; but teaches to violate them as men of *breeding* and *fashion*. The clown may possibly feel occasional remorse for his immoralities: But the polished gentleman despises what are called remonstrances of conscience. Superior to vulgar prejudice and superstition, initiated in the wiles of Satan, brought up in his school, he refines upon deception, impurity and excess; and experienceth pleasures of sin, which those of a grosser mould do not find. Beware then of the books which contain instruction in the art of sinning.

Beware also of the very many books, which *scoffers* and *blasphemers* have published, and which their disciples spare no pains to circulate. Presume not that you shall withstand their ridicule and profanity. A curiosity to read their writings is dangerous. It implies light thoughts of God and his government, of good morals and of the human soul. Or it implies, that the cause of such writers is entitled to an hearing; that they have something to say in their own justification—that it may be immaterial whether the laws of piety and morality have or have not any real foundation—that the fear of God and regard to man may be things indifferent, if not senseless. They are senseless, if they can be ridiculed with innocence: They are indifferent, if the scoffer has any excuse—if he has any claim to have his writings read. The scoffer writes to subvert social order, and “confound even the names of things.” His blasphemy ascends to heaven. He sports himself with the good sense and feelings of mankind in all ages and nations. What can exceed the depravity which writes a book to ridicule the existence and perfections of a Creator and Governour of the universe, the moral obligations of man, the belief of a fu-

ture life? What must man be to man, when every moral principle, that would check his passions and regulate his desires, is exploded and laughed to scorn? Shall writings, which would turn mankind loose, like beasts of prey, to devour one another, have free circulation? Shall they be read with pleasure and avidity? In this case the education of children and youth can avail nothing. The instructions of parents, and others who are appointed to guide their early steps, must be lost. Any impressions of virtue will wear off. The direction to train up a child in the way he should go was unnecessary. The instruction of such books will efface them all. The amount of it is, to forsake the guide of your youthful and tender years, and forget the covenant which bound you to God—to treat the good doctrine of your father and law of your mother, the fear of the Lord in which you were brought up, as the suggestion of weakness and folly, meriting your contempt, not your regard. Will you listen to such instruction, and number such books among your favourite authors? Useful information and knowledge is the proper end of reading. And the proper end of writing books is to impart needful instruction. But the books which contain such instruction are few compared with those which instruct in error. Books of this kind are multiplied only in proportion to the demand for them. This clearly indicates the extent of a vicious taste, and proclaims the shame of these times.

Beware lest any author spoil you *through philosophy and vain deceit*—Beware of books on infidelity, written with great labour and subtilty. In them error is taught by the rules of art. There are but few comparatively whose talents and situation enable them to read deep speculations on infidelity—to detect their sophistry, and examine all sides. It requires much study, extensive reading, and consequently free access to the various defences of religion, to form a clear and sound judgment of the most studied publications

against it. Religion does not shun, it invites, examination: It appeals to our understanding: It commands us to "be ready always to give a reason of our hope"—to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good"—Let every man be fully persuaded "in his own mind."

The principal vouchers for revelation are prophecy and miracles. This branch of the evidence is an appeal to fact, of which men in common life, and of common understanding, are as good judges as the learned. If the Author of our religion, by speaking the word, gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, restored withered limbs, healed all manner of disease, raised the dead, and made winds and seas obey him, then he was a teacher sent of God. All who have eyes and ears can judge of such facts. If Jesus died and rose again, they could easily determine the fact of his resurrection. This also was an infallible proof of his divine mission. The extraordinary events which preceded, accompanied and followed the destruction of the Jewish temple and capital city, the perpetuity of that desolation, the dispersion and preservation of that people, are facts of which all men are alike competent judges. The foresight that could distinctly predict them must be divine. Here then is another decided proof of revelation, which all men may see. The wild Arabs, the posterity of Ishmael, have existed, for thousands of years, a signal instance of the truth of prophecy; and this is also a case of which all men may judge. I do not insist on the *moral* instructions of the bible, the decalogue, for instance, and the sermon on the mount: For these belong to the *internal* evidence of revelation—their superiority to any system of morality ever taught by the most learned philosophers, is a proof of the divinity of the scriptures, which *he who runs may read*. Such proofs are abundantly sufficient to convince all men of the divinity of our religion.

There are other proofs, of which the learned are the proper judges; and to them it belongs to meet

the sceptic and infidel philosopher on such points. But the arguments of infidels, however studied and specious, can have no weight against the external evidences of religion, which are open to all mankind. With this evidence before you, be assured, that the sophistry of the sceptic and fatalist, though it may bewilder, need not shake your faith. For faith *standeth not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* The testimony of God should not be confronted by the speculations of men. Facts should never give place to conjecture, nor practical principles to theory. If you should read books, written with much ability and art, against religion, justice requires that you also read the ablest defences of it. If you have any wish that religion may be true, you may be sure to find it so, upon the strictest scrutiny. The more you examine, with such a temper, the more you will be satisfied that it contains the words of eternal life. The more reason will you find to join with an apostle in his determination to know nothing compared with JESUS CHRIST, *and him crucified.* For the excellency of this knowledge all other will be accounted loss. Pray that “the God” and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would enlighten the eyes of your understanding; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”

Upon considering what has been said, to guard you against bad books, you are, perhaps, convinced, that all your wisdom and care, and wisdom from above, are necessary to preserve you from the trifles of one class, the indelicacy of another, the fashionable depravity of a third, the ridicule of a fourth, and the sophistry of a fifth. Sacrifice to none of these your judgment, principles and morals, your peace, your honour, and your souls. Be assured, that to follow where they lead, is to wander in pursuit of rest thro’ dry places. But few of the class of books we have referred to can be read with *safety*—and fewer with

improvement. A wise man will hear the instruction that will increase his stock of valuable knowledge, and that will be wisdom in the latter end ; not the instruction that causeth to err from such knowledge—instruction at the expence of character, usefulness, kindred, friends, the true enjoyment of this life, and which must end in infamy and perdition in the next.

No *good* end can be proposed from the use of such books, which would not be more easily and fully attained by books of another description. They can answer *no* purpose long ; because life is short. They may have the *worst* issue in time and through eternity, unless you soon cease from following their instruction. If ceased from at all, must it not be in youth ? Erring from the words of knowledge at this period, the error may grow with your growth, and strengthen with your strength.

The desire of our progenitors to forbidden knowledge has descended to their posterity. Knowing the fatal effects of such desire in them, check it in yourselves. Bad books are read at a similar peril as they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The instruction of such books is forbidden fruit. You desire such wisdom at your peril. If they have been put into your hands, and at all drawn your attention, the sooner you lay them aside, the better. If you have not been conversant with them, why should you wish to be ? The reasons are obvious and weighty for refraining from them : They ensnare and poison the soul : They lead in the way to hell. We recommend, in your choice of books, a determined selection of the solid and chaste, those distinguished for elegant sentiment, seriousness, and for clear and sound reasoning. Would you prefer to these, the trifling, the immodest, the merely fashionable, the ludicrous, and the sophistical ? *What is the chaff to the wheat ?* Let a few books, stored with good sentiments, well arranged, adapted to your genius, talents and situation, and written in a pure style, suffice you.

In a moral and religious discourse, designed as a caveat against dangerous books, it would be an essential omission, did I not particularly exhort you to a careful study of the *book of books*. *Search the scriptures.* “They are able to make you wise to salvation.—” “They are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for “correction and instruction in righteousness;” they can “thoroughly furnish you to every good work.” They contain instruction adapted to persons of every age, rank and condition—instruction in the whole duty and happiness of man. It will be your highest honour and advantage to be well acquainted with them in the morning of life—to make them your delightful study by day, and meditation by night. There you will find a treasure of wisdom and knowledge more precious than gold. They will be your best guard against the snares and allurements of the world, and best support under the various afflictions of life. They will elevate your views and affection from terrestrial and transitory objects to things above, eternal in heaven—things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man. The scriptures, emanating from the Father of lights, guide into all truth, and lead in the way everlasting. There is no light in those who will not be guided by the oracles of infallible wisdom. “The wisdom from above “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be “intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without “partiality, and without hypocrisy.” However well instructed in human science, or in the theory of religion, man knoweth nothing as he ought to know, until he is taught of God by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit. *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.* May this precious word be fulfilled in the youth of this society. *Cease, my young brethren, to hear the counsel that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. AMEN.*

SERMON XVII.

FRUGALITY.

JOHN, vi. 12.

WHEN THEY WERE FILLED, HE SAID UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, GATHER UP THE FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN, THAT NOTHING BE LOST.



OUR Lord, having fed thousands with five loaves and two small fishes, directed his disciples to *gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost*. He who thus multiplied the loaves and fishes, could have no anxious thoughts for himself, and the friends who had forsaken all to follow him. He had taught them, “Fear not, little flock. Take no thought for the morrow : But seek ye first the kingdom of God ;—and “all these things shall be added unto you”—meaning things needful for the body. There is, at the same time, a care for the present life, without which the professors of religion are not warranted to conclude that they seek first the kingdom of heaven ; yea, must be pronounced *worse than infidels*. Nothing is given to be refused, abused, or wasted ; but to be enjoyed with temperance, and applied to useful purposes, that our divine Benefactor may be glorified. The greatest plenty is no excuse for excess, nor for a neglect to *gather up the fragments*.

When it is considered *who* gave the injunction on frugality in the words read, and to *whom* he gave it, a discourse on this subject will not be thought improper. It well claims the particular attention of those who are entering on life.

Some illustrations of the subject are first proposed. Secondly, We will attend to various reasons which enforce it.

First, Some *illustrations* of the subject will be offered.

The injunction to gather up the fragments was not meant to recommend *parsimony*. Avarice is no part of frugality. The gospel severely condemns an eagerness to hold all that comes within our grasp, and to accumulate more. No liberality may compare with his, *who went about doing good*. The following are recorded as the words of our Lord, which it behoves his disciples to remember: *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. His ordering them to gather up the fragments, was, no doubt, with this view, that what remained might be distributed in charity, and also supply their future necessities.

Some, pretending to sublime Christianity, affect an entire neglect of terrestrial concerns. Is he then the best Christian, who is the worst citizen? who is indifferent to his civil duties, and to the duties of the nearest relations? Jesus Christ inculcated and exemplified every relative and social virtue. He came eating and drinking as other men, and freely conversed with all ranks and characters for their good. Early intent on the work given him to do, he yet regarded his earthly connections, was subject in his childhood and youth to his parents, and is supposed to have wrought at the occupation of Joseph, his reputed father. Though he wrought a miracle to feed the multitudes, in a special emergency, he took care to prevent a misconstruction of it, giving no encouragement to a neglect of the ordinary means of obtaining the supplies of life. When these means are denied, man has no other resource than to cast himself immediately on the providence of God, which *feedeth the fowls of the air*, though they neither *sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns*; and *clobeth the lilies, that neither toil nor spin*. But when the means of preserving life, and supplying its wants, are afforded,

it is tempting God, to expect that he will preserve us and supply our daily necessities, without our own care. Christians should reflect, that their families, kindred and friends, their neighbours, the poor, their fellow christians, their country and mankind have demands upon them. While they practically disclaim all these relations—while they neglect, or are remiss in, the business of their stations, let them not imagine that they are *servant in spirit serving the Lord*. They do not *walk as God hath distributed to them, and called them*. They slight our Lord's injunction, to take care *that nothing of the bounties of heaven be lost*.—The words of Christ, *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth*, do not forbid his disciples to provide against misfortune, sickness, or old age. They forbid only such care for earthly things as implies that they are preferred to heavenly. Man has to fulfil his part, in obedience to the will of God, by vigilance and industry in the use of means for the support and comfort of life, acquiescing in the disposal of divine providence. Mismanagement, when owing to incapacity, calls for pity; but when owing to carelessness, men suffer the merited consequences of their own folly and negligence. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; having no guide, overseer, or ruler, she provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.” Inattention to the order of nature and providence is justly followed with embarrassment, indigence and misery.

Further, the words contain a lesson of *moderation* in the use of the bounties of heaven. Excess and negligence are alike opposed to frugality. A disciple of Jesus *keeps under his body, and is temperate in all things*. His *moderation is known* in the provision of his table, in furniture, apparel and diversions. It ill comports with his profession, to be allured with external splendour and worldly greatness. “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even

“ as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” The steward, whose profusion, sloth and pride lavished his lord’s goods, when called to account, proceeded further to injure his lord, by a scandalous compromise with the debtors. Assured of an immediate ejection for his unfaithfulness and profligacy, and determined still to persist in sloth and dissipation, he had recourse to means adapted to his end. “ I cannot dig ; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him,” and cancelled a large part of their acknowledged debt. Such are the tendency, embarrassments and shifts of sloth and dissipation. Every sentiment of justice, gratitude and honour are violated without shame or scruple. Thus bankrupts embezzle the goods of their creditors, and live in profusion upon what they have fraudulently withheld from the just owners.

SECONDLY, We will attend to the *reasons* which enforce the subject of frugality.

First, it is dictated by *gratitude* to God. This requires that we receive and enjoy his gifts as he hath directed. To what end are the supplies and comforts of life given, but that we might cheerfully serve him in the abundance of all things ? A competency is ordinarily procured by industry and circumspection, and accompanied with the most enjoyment.

If, under the head of *food convenient*, we extend our desires to supplies for a life of ease, for vanity, for riot and excess, these are neither convenient nor safe. Affluence is apt to excite confidence in outward possessions. He whose “ ground brought forth plenteously, said to his soul, Take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years.” Instead of being thankful in proportion as God was bountiful, he indulged to security. The man in the parable, who was clothed in

purple, and fared sumptuously, was regardless of God and a future state. Not that there is any necessary connection between an affluence and ingratitude. The opulent, as well as the indigent, may trust in the living God. But in this case they are frugal, though they abound. Profusion is the reverse of gratitude; because it consumes the divine bounty by such *provision for the flesh as fulfils the lust thereof*.

Secondly, Frugality is dictated by a regard to *health and contentment*. We “need but little here.” The temperate enjoy life; the intemperate cannot. The gratifications which depend on other means than nature and providence have prescribed, or exceed the degree prescribed, are followed with an overbalance of pain. Different supplies, in kind or degree, or both, may be requisite for different constitutions, employments or situations. All beyond this gradually impairs the bodily health and powers.

Thirdly, Frugality is enforced by the precepts, *Owe no man any thing. Whatsoever things are just, think on these things*. When Elisha the prophet multiplied the widow's oil, he enjoined upon her to *pay her creditor, and live with her children on the rest*. The declaration of Zaccheus, *The half of my goods I give to the poor*, supposeth that so much at least was honestly acquired. When he further declared, *If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore fourfold*, it appears that he both did justly, and loved mercy. Men may involve themselves deeply through negligence, sloth or profusion. The consequences are injustice to their creditors, snares and embarrassments to themselves, misery to their dependents and families, perplexity and want to their heirs. Sometimes, by engaging in too many branches of business, extending their pursuits beyond their means and talents, they are plunged in inextricable difficulties. Loose and unsettled accounts, a variety of circumstances known only to themselves, lay a foundation, after their decease, for large demands

upon their estate, where little or nothing might be due. They die insolvent by making haste to be rich.

Fourthly, Frugality favours *industry*. He that is a *great waster* and he *that is slothful in his work* are brethren. Observe the effects of profusion and idleness on the person himself, on his connections, and on society. Those who are suffered to grow up without some useful employment, rarely know how to direct their inferiors and dependents. Those who have never learnt to obey, know not how to govern. High and low, rich and poor, if not employed, in different ways, and to different good purposes, fall into temptation and a snare, and into divers lusts, which drown men in ruin. They are ever restless, prepared to resolve on mischievous devices, open to Satan's temptations. Honest industry and enterprize, on the contrary, supply the means of innocent enjoyment, render persons content with their own circumstances, and exempt them from presumptuous courses. They neither plot against the comfort of others, nor envy their enjoyments. Frugality affords every encouragement to industry, by preserving the fruits of it, and applying them to their proper use. Opposed to penuriousness, it allows us to enjoy our portion. Opposed to dissipation and waste, it reserves something for a time of need.

Industry and frugality are *useful*, in a natural, civil and moral view. In the first, by forming to habits of body and mind, which fit men to fill up their proper place with their respective abilities and advantages. In the second, by disposing and enabling them to be just and charitable. In the last, by impressing the obligations of morality, the principle which should regulate our intercourse with our fellow men, even the fear of God, who will call us to account for our conduct towards them, and requires that we make his honour and approbation our supreme end.

We have noticed, that the steward who wasted his Lord's goods, proceeded, as the consequence of his

profusion, and the pride and insolence which it had cherished, to the further and deeper injustice of conniving with his lord's debtors. A disposition to expend more than their means afford is in all cases a violation of justice. It will extend from an abuse of small means to an equal abuse of larger, and the greatest; and be apparent in all circumstances and situations.

It is a further reason for frugality that it supplies the means of *alms-giving*, and distributing to *pious and charitable* uses. A few retrenchments from dress, vanity or pleasure would enable people to perform many charities. Out of the stock belonging to Jesus and the twelve, small as it was, it had been the practice to give something to the poor. (John, xii. 5. xiii. 29.) The primitive Christians laid by, on the first day of the week, "a little pittance for this purpose. These "drops will not be missed from the general reservoir; "and yet, *collectively*, will rain a shower of blessings "on many indigent and distressed. Cordials and "restoratives to the sick may be supplied by Christian "economy." So extreme was the avarice of Judas, that he embezzled part of the little stock he had in trust. He covered his avarice under pretence of pity to the poor. For when Mary, with very costly spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, Judas complained of the waste. *Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Did he care for the poor, who sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver?*

The gospel makes the most honourable mention of charitable deeds, when they proceed from worthy motives. The most forcible motive to them is taken from the example of Christ, and the assurance he hath given that they will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. St. Paul excited the Corinthians to a liberal contribution for the necessitous disciples at Jerusalem, first, by the example of the Macedonian Christians, whose "abundant joy and deep poverty, in a "great trial of affliction, abounded unto the riches of

“their liberality”—In the next place, by commending the forwardness of the Corinthians themselves on a former occasion, and observing to them, “He who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully”—And lastly, by the pattern of Christ. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.” The apostle recommended to this church, the same as he had to the churches of Galatia, a weekly collection for the poor Christians. “Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come.”

It is observable, that the good man *will guide his affairs with discretion*. Hence it is that he is able, according to the largeness of his heart, to *disperse and give to the poor*. “He who hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again. Cast thy bread upon the waters, and it shall return again after many days. There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” *The merciful shall find mercy at the great day. They shall be received into everlasting habitations*. Beside this good foundation for eternal life, which they lay up in store for themselves, they also lay a foundation for sympathy and relief in any calamity which may befall them in the world. Friends and benefactors will be found ready to succour them. “Blessed is he that

“ considereth the poor ; the Lord will deliver him in
 “ time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and
 “ keep him alive. The Lord will strengthen him upon
 “ the bed of languishing.” The widow in Israel, who,
 in a time of famine, entertained a prophet of the
 Lord with the last provision she had, found that *the*
barrel of meal did not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail.
 Deeds of charity are not estimated by the abundance
 of the gift, but by the circumstances and promptness
 of the giver, as appears from the honourable memorial
 of the poor widow’s *two mites*.

The first objects of charity are the industrious and
 virtuous poor. The idle, profligate and vicious have
 no reason to complain, if they experience somewhat
 the neglect and extremity of that son, who left
 his father’s house, and wasted his patrimony in excess
 and riot. Charity, which, bestowed on the former,
 brings on the benefactor *the blessing of him who was*
ready to perish, may be worse than lost upon the latter.
 Common vagrants would be better provided for in a
 work-house than otherwise. Those poor who con-
 sume their little earnings in intemperance, should not
 be furnished with the means. But too much atten-
 tion cannot be paid to the necessities of the virtuous,
 reduced to indigence by the act of providence. A
 compassionate man feels more satisfaction in ministering
 to their wants, than in his own necessary food. He will
 straiten himself, that he may be able to give to them.
 How different the character of such as, by various spe-
 cies of luxury, put it out of their power to relieve
 the distressed, as they otherwise might ? How much
 better to make our abundance a supply to the needy,
 than to consume it upon our lusts, or in frivolous
 amusements ? *There is no good in it, but to rejoice and*
do good.

The lower ranks, those in narrow or but moderate
 circumstances, by a fondness to copy, as far as they

can, the fashion of the upper ranks and the wealthy, abridge themselves of necessities of life for the sake of ornament and show. Those whose circumstances are below mediocrity, or who have barely a competency, cannot, without injury to themselves and others, live in a stile which may well become the opulent. The latter have, indeed, no warrant to be wasteful. A care *that nothing be lost*, is incumbent on both. A single family may live in affluence on a large estate ; but when that estate is divided among a number of heirs, shall these begin life with as plentiful a table as their frugal parents, after many years' industry and good management, could furnish ? With like application and forecast, they may, in time, attain to similar circumstances. Otherwise they may waste their patrimony faster than it was acquired. It is with families and societies as with an individual. *His* ease and credit depend upon his care to fulfil his engagements. So do *theirs*. If, through inevitable providence, his means are small, he must not go into various articles of expence, which larger means would admit—articles of luxury or mere ornament. Expensive amusements especially must be avoided.

Seest thou a man diligent in his business, guided by rules which steady experience pronounces to be wise, neither withholding more than is meet, nor lavishing the fruits of industry, he shall, by the ordinary blessing of providence, have a competency, if not an affluence. He will enjoy his portion the better, having acquired and preserved it by proper application and discretion. He will be content with such things as he hath, and useful in his sphere, willing to live honestly, and inclined to relieve indigence and distress according to his ability. When heads of families shew a pattern of industry and discreet behaviour, assigning time and place to every concern, order is then conspicuous. Every member knows his place, and is treated according as he demeans himself. There is no lack through neg-

lect, or waste through capriciousness. This *good householder brings out of his treasure, things new and old.*—Provision is made, so far as human foresight can make it, against contingences, misfortune and the days of darkness. Such an householder is training up his family to be both comfortable and useful. Habits of industry, discretion and sobriety, to which children and servants are early inured, yield fruit, like the generous olive, that *honours God and man.* The example of this householder sheds its salutary influence, not merely on the subordinate members of his family, but also on the neighbourhood, and on others who have opportunity to observe it.

Among other examples, the scriptures make honourable mention of female diligence, prudence and charity. The industrious and charitable *Dorcas* was respected in life *for good works and alms-deeds.* *The coats and garments* she manufactured, and which clothed the poor, were shewn after her death, by the widows who bewailed her. *The fruit of her hands praised her in the gates.* *Lydia* was employed in honest traffic. Having, from this source, supplies for hospitality, she was distinguished for largeness of heart; and her piety and alms are mentioned with honour. Among the qualifications of indigent widows, whom St. Paul commends to the charity of the church, we observe these: “Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.” There is reference to an ancient usage, and to the then dispersed and persecuted state of the church. But the general meaning and application are plain. In opposition to such virtuous and pious matrons are the “idle and wanton, tattlers and busy bodies,” who “wander from house to house,” instead of “guiding” their own. Such are excluded from charity. Some of the temptations and mischiefs

of idleness the apostle mentions in the above words. There is scarce a vice that can be named, to which it is not a temptation. They who mind not their own business, intermeddle with that of others. They lie open to falsehood, dishonesty, intemperance, uncleanness, envy, back-biting. They are a burden to themselves, a dead load on their connections, and the bane of society. In middle age, or the decline of life, they are filled with the follies and extravagancies of their youth—the sloth, indiscretion or profusion of that period of life, in which they should have made provision for misfortune, infirmity, or age.

Apply the subject to *public characters* and *communities*. In civil society, as in the natural body, “those members, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” *Studying to be quiet, and do his own business*, every one is useful to the community.—Be his station ever so obscure, or his talents ever so small, he casts his mite into the public treasury. However inconsiderable his offering, compared with the much which others cast in; yet it helps to fill the treasury. Every man serves his generation, when he walks as God hath distributed to him, and called him. When the tax-gatherers asked Jesus, “What shall we do?” his answer was, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” When the soldiers asked the same question, “Do violence to no man,” said he, “neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages. Let every man abide in the same calling in which he is called.” Those who are in circumstances above dependence, should be examples of application, in various ways beneficial to themselves and to mankind. Their industry and private economy, as well as the riches of their liberality, reflect honour on them, and are of much utility to the world.

Look to the ruler, who labours and watches for the welfare of his people, in imitation of HIM who never slumbereth. Look to the public character, who considers that public frugality is as judicious and needful as private; as salutary to the community as the other is to a man's personal affairs. Such a ruler is a benefactor to his people. A striking contrast to this character is exhibited by most in power. They lavish the public treasure on vain magnificence, luxury, ambition and corruption. The poverty of the body of the people is humiliating and wretched beyond description. To be fond of the splendour and profusion, the great inequality, which have long been the curse of the European nations, must be extreme folly in a young and republican government. A free republic, as that of the United States, instituted at a period of such light and improvement as the present, should have original manners: It should seek no other foreign connection than commerce; and this on terms of reciprocal advantage. Frugality, with a great degree of equality, support the respectability of such a republic.

Let us finally apply the subject as *Christians*. In this character it ill becomes us to be captivated with the pride of life. This is to *savour the things that be of men*: The foe of God and man allures souls by proffers of worldly grandeur. Simplicity and humility mark the disciples of HIM, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"—who said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek." The Christian will not seek great things for himself, will not seek his own things, if he looks to Jesus. He will not be allured by the fashion of the world; for he reflects that it *passeth away*. He forgets his Master's caution, whenever he *seeks the highest room*. Shall any glare of exterior greatness occupy the mind of one, who professes to seek the honour of God and of a crucified Saviour? The real Christian passeth through honour and dishonour as one who ac-

counts it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment. He knows both how to be abased, and how to be exalted, how to abound, and how to suffer need. He reflects, that *he brought nothing into this world, and can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment he is content. Contentment with godliness is great gain.* It being *the good pleasure* of his heavenly Father *to give him the kingdom*, he is not of doubtful mind as to other things. He is not envious that others have a larger share of earthly things than himself. If raised above them in these things, he *condescends to men of low degree*; his heart and treasure are in heaven. To obtain a treasure there should swallow up all other cares.

In ways of well doing we may cast all our cares upon God; and shall always be satisfied with his disposal of events. We know not beforehand, whether this or that undertaking shall prosper. Anxious care is as opposite to our peace as to piety. When we go out or come in, in whatever business we are employed, whatever our rank or circumstances, our high calling should be uppermost. In the regular pursuit of the duties of life, we go to the offices of religion with a mind more serene and devout. In the regular attendance on the offices of religion, we shall be more diligent and faithful, cheerful and contented in discharging the duties of life. The true Christian is the best servant of his generation; and the good servant of his generation is the best Christian. The Author of our faith came not to subvert the distinctions and order of society. His followers are "blameless and harmless, the children of God without rebuke, and shine as lights in the world. They render to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour"

Soon, very soon, every interest of time will be swallowed up in eternity. May this solemn thought be habitual and familiar. So shall we *give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.*—AMEN.

SERMON XVIII.

DISSIPATION.

II. TIMOTHY, iii. 4.

LOVERS OF PLEASURES MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD.



IN a time of much licentiousness in principles and manners, a discourse ON DISSIPATION will not be thought unseasonable. It will be peculiarly applicable to the young people, whose language too frequently is, “ Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth ; and walk in the “ ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes.”

In discoursing on the love of pleasures, it is proposed, first, to give some sketches of this character. Secondly, to offer some cautions against the follies, vices and miseries involved in it. Thirdly, to recommend the opposite character.

We begin with some *sketches* of this character, *Lovers of pleasures.*

Religion forbids no pleasures which are worthy of intelligent creatures, designed for an immortal existence : It forbids such only as are injurious and dishonourable to ourselves, and to all with whom we are connected. Pleasures, innocent in themselves, become criminal when pursued beyond certain bounds. *Every creature of God is good.* It is his gift that we have power to enjoy our portion. Unremitting application fatigues and wastes both body and mind. Inter-

mission and amusements are needful to restore their vigour—not less so than taking rest by sleep. They are innocent and useful.

Amusements become sinful, when any duty of piety, or any moral obligation, is postponed to them; yea, when we do not return from them with more cheerfulness to the duties of our general or particular calling. They are sinful, when they take up an undue proportion of our time, stealing away the attention which should be bestowed on useful pursuits, and our highest concerns. Such fondness for amusements gaining strength, they at length are pursued as an employment. Business is laid aside, or attended in mere subserviency to the love of pleasures. Every excess in things lawful perverts them into an occasion of sin: It emboldens and impels to things unlawful.

Different amusements are adapted to persons of different habits, professions, occupations, stations and periods of life: But a *commanding* passion for them is an abuse of our faculties. An insipid round of pleasures, or laborious investigation of new ones, betrays frivolity, to say no worse. What just thoughts can have place in such a mind? This frivolousness of character appears in a fondness for splendour in buildings, furniture, apparel, attendants, and tables spread with every luxury and delicacy. The pleasure which depends on being gazed at, which is indebted to the courtesy of the world, what is it?

Solomon reviewed with deep regret the period of his life, when the pursuits of pleasure were his object. “I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure. I made me great works: I builded me houses: I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits: I made me pools of water: I gat me servants and maidens—“I had possessions of great and small cattle. I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and musical instru-

“ments of all forts. Whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy.” No one could be supplied with the means of pleasure more than he. No one could have made more thorough trial of all its various sources. His magnificence was insupportable to his subjects. The luxuries and delicacies of nature and art, the splendour of his court, corrupted his heart; and, on cool reflection, he exclaimed, *Vanity and vexation of spirit!*

The lovers of pleasures not only pursue to excess such as are lawful, but are addicted to those which are unlawful—to intemperance and lust—to all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.

There is a species of pleasure less gross, but, perhaps, not much less criminal, which is too prevalent. I refer to the vice of *gaming*. If to consume days and nights in a practice so pernicious be not criminal, tell me what is.

The love of pleasures implies a denial of religion, at least in *practice*. The name of religion has indeed been introduced to sanction every lust and passion. Mystical Babylon *hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously*. What acts of wanton lust, what sensual indulgence, what usurpations and barbarities hath she not practised in God’s name? The kings of the earth have given her their power, the gold, precious stones and pearls, the purple and scarlet with which she was long enriched. *By her sorceries were all nations deceived; and in her is the blood of prophets and saints*. Distinguished for ambition, cruelty and lust, given to pleasure, she yet kept up the form of godliness; yea, undertook to open and shut heaven at her will.

But the lovers of pleasures not infrequently avow the cause of infidelity. They assume the name of free-thinkers; and talk with as much confidence on the side of infidelity, as if it had been demonstrated that religion is founded in fraud; because they are ignorant of its history, evidence and effects. They catch at eve-

ry cavil against it, and are listless to every proof of it. Thus a life of dissipation is attempted to be justified by a stupid scepticism. Or if a direct disavowal of religion is thought ineligible, the system which opens heaven to all men is adopted.

II. We proposed, *SECONDLY*, to offer some *cautions* against the follies, vices and miseries involved in the love of pleasures.

The early stages of life are most addicted to the pursuit of pleasure. The appetites and passions are then strong, and experience is wanting. In every choice and pursuit, wisdom directs to pause, and consider the end, before we determine. Will pleasures compensate the time and cost? Will they bring the desired good? They are superficial: They are but for a season. The pain of review overbalances the enjoyment. The end is bitterness. These things will clearly appear on observation and attention.

Who will plead for pleasures which must defeat the ends even of animal life, and degrade man, in point of enjoyment, below the beasts that perish? Who will plead for such indulgences as must impair, and even destroy, the capacity for the pleasures of society? Who will say that it is a privilege to live without reflection on the past, or forethought for the future? Or is it a worthy part to cherish the pride, or emulate the wiles, of Satan? or to accept from him the glory of this world?

We are answerable for the employment of our time and powers. Shall they be wasted in useless and vain amusements? The morning of life especially is the opportunity to sow the good seed, which shall afterwards spring up in fruit advantageous and honourable to the sowers; joyful and beneficial to their friends and mankind. It is the season to form and fix habits of thinking and acting with propriety; of application to employments adapted to your talents and circumstances—the season to be on the watch against the al-

lurements and snares of sin, seduction from bad company, bad books, and inward corruption—the season to lay a good foundation for the succeeding stages of life. Laudable habits, formed in youth, strengthen with years. Illaudable habits, at that period, presage worse and worse. It is the part of wisdom to guard against the beginning of sin, which, like *strife*, is as *when one letteth out water*. It is easier to *shun* its paths than to *retreat* from them. Every advancing step in them increases the difficulty of a return. Those who venture to the utmost limits of what is lawful, are within the territories of vice before they are aware. The dividing line is not observed. Suppose they resolve to stop at this line: The thought of proceeding thus far is presumptuous. *Lust* has already *conceived*; and it may be expected that *sin* will immediately be *brought forth*. Pray that the thought may be forgiven: It calls the tempter, who, without a call, is ever ready to get advantage of us. He beguiled Eve: Her first answer to him was, “Of the fruit of the tree which “is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye “shall not eat of it, nor touch it, lest ye die.” Satan may tempt; but the tempted are guiltless until he has their consent. In every assault of his upon our Saviour, he was repulsed, and soon compelled to fly. His second suggestion reached the heart of our mother Eve. “The woman saw that the tree was good for “food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree “to be desired to make one wise.” Thus allured, “she immediately took of the fruit, and did eat.” In the avidity with which she viewed it, lust had conceived. The transition was quick and easy to the overt act. This parley with the tempter originated the wickedness and misery in which the world lies. Every pleasure, consistent with his supreme good, is allowed to man. But his heart is set on pleasures which admit no virtuous principles to take root; or check the growth and kill the seeds of them, as do

briers and thorns the natural feed—pleasures which enervate and debase body and mind ; cherish passions destructive of social order and happiness, of all human rights ; and lavish the bounties of heaven. They who are given to pleasures covet the things of others, and are prodigal of their own, *waxing wanton, and nourishing their hearts as in a day of slaughter*. Such pleasures hasten *the evil days wherein is no pleasure*. They are the source of inexpressible vexation and infamy. They make men wish there were no future existence, no God. Their votaries may find religion true, when too late to make choice of it.

View the prevailing love of pleasures in its aspect on industry, enterprize, morals and science—on public order and public spirit—on the councils and civil administration of nations, and their intercourse with each other—and on the tranquility of the world. Or take a nearer view, in its aspect on the harmony of neighbourhoods and families. Read, hear, remark within your own observation, the deplorable effects of dissipation—early dissipation. Those of firm health, good parts, regular families and good education, have been thus ensnared and ruined. Nor have they alone suffered the consequences. Partners, parents, children, kindred, friends, neighbours, associates in business have been irreparable sufferers ; yea, other and more extensive connections, according to the rank and influence of such dissipated characters.

Remark this evil in its rise, progress and effects. It may originate in allowing too much time for innocent amusements ; or in too great attention to dress and ornament ; or in a fondness for company, without judgment in the choice. Observe those whose diversions are ill-timed, or continued too long, or unbounded by any measure ; or who recur to such as are in themselves unlawful, though not so in any high instance. Their *beginnings* may be *small* ; but see how *the latter end is increased* ! Observe those who discover

a species of vanity, first in things seemingly trivial. As means and opportunity are afforded, the disposition grows up into all the pride of life.

As to those who find no enjoyment but in company, they *fall into temptation and a snare, into many foolish and hurtful lusts*. The young man void of understanding, passing heedlessly by the way, was met by an artful foe to his peace. "With her fair speech, she" despoiled him of his virtue. "He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: Till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. She has cast down many wounded. Her house is the way to hell."

Intemperance has slain millions and millions. Will you give to this the name of pleasure? "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging. Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babblings? who hath wounds without cause? They who tarry long at the wine. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eye shall behold strange women. The glutton and the drunkard come to poverty." They make a "god of their belly, and glory in their shame." What pleasure hath the epicure, which has not an immediate overbalance of pain? While his language is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," he lays up in store for himself a sure foundation of accumulated distress and infamy in time to come, when *his bones shall be filled with the sins of his youth*.

There are not a few who steal the property of others, or throw away their own, in *gaming*. If we are to judge from their intense application, this is to *enjoy pleasure*. Indescribable as their pleasure is, not a single quality or appendage of it can be named, which does not put good sense and virtue to the blush. It is a waste of time, youth and talents. It is a violation

of friendship, civility and humanity. Think you this censure severe? I venture to add, that open robbery is *brave* compared to it. He who demands a man's purse on the road, pretends to no politeness; he steps out boldly as a robber. He who takes from another, at a gaming table, all that he hath, is the familiar friend, who has, it seems, delicate sentiments of honour. Debts thus created, must be discharged, at the expence of honest creditors and nearest connections. If there is pleasure in acquiring property in this way, it is the pleasure of a robber, an assassin, or a burglarian. Superior skill in the game, is skill in which the greatest artists are the worst characters. What character more vile than theirs, whose time and talents are devoted to ensnare and spoil their fellow-men?—perhaps their intimate acquaintance? They must presume that they owe no duty to God, to their generation, or to any of the dearest ties in life. If they can by fraud, or (which is the same thing) by superior skill at the game, make provision for themselves and their dependents, it is well—certainly to be preferred to the drudgery of getting a subsistence by pursuing some employment, which, however useful, is full of labour.

But suppose their circumstances independent, and that they really have no occasion for an employment to procure a maintenance, it is demanded, *May we not do what we will with our own?* may we not take from others in like circumstances? You may indeed, if neither you nor they are accountable to God or man, or to your own reason and conscience—if you, who have received most, owe nothing to Him who *giveth you all things richly to enjoy*—if you are absolutely the proprietors of what you have—if you depend not either on God or man—if it is better to lavish your abundance, than to apply it to charitable uses. But if *much is required of them who have received much*—if the affluent should *be rich in good works*, and *trust in the living God*—if they must confess, *All our*

store cometh of thine hand, it is all thine own—if no man may live or die to himself, but to the Lord, then the above demand, May we not do what we will with our own? is licentious. It indeed takes for granted what is not true. What you possess is not your own. You are the steward of another's goods. Stewards may not waste or neglect their Lord's goods. The universal Proprietor, from whom cometh every good gift, distributeth to every one severally as he will. None may say to him, "What doest thou? Shall thine eye be evil, because God is good?" Let no man place himself in God's stead. Let none in their fulness say, "Who is the Lord? Our riches are our own, who is Lord over us."

Further, If you have an abundance, why do you covet that which is another man's? Why the mean avarice that would take from him, without any consideration, what he possesseth, and to which you do not even pretend to have the smallest claim? for the disposal of which he must account? Why this illaudable course to increase in riches? or why this waste of them, when great good may be done with them, in a variety of ways? Why this consumption of precious time? this waste of life, which God hath given for useful and important purposes?

Of all which goes under the name of pleasure, *gaming* appears to promise the least, however fascinating, and adopted by polite circles. By gaming I intend no one species more than another; but every kind which has for its object the taking from another his property without any return or consideration. Those kinds are the most criminal, which consume the most time, waste the most property, and expose to the greatest snares. The pleasure of *good* success, is that of impoverishing, and perhaps ruining, your unfortunate friend—stripping him of his last shilling—of the garment that covers him—of his furniture and habitation. The pleasure of *ill* success is that of being impoverished and ruined yourself.

Those who have not proceeded far in the enchanting path of pleasure may be reclaimed. The chief hope of success to cautions and admonitions on this head is from those in youth, and whose minds are yet open to ingenuous sentiments. The profligate would entice you to follow him in all his excesses, thoughtless of death and a future reckoning. Will you consent? What fruit has he of the way which seemeth right in his own eyes? the way in which he hath wearied himself? To what straits has it reduced him? What are his prospects in life? what his reflections, if he retains the power of reflection? What would he give, could he tread back his devious steps? If he has proceeded so far that there is no retreat, can his counsel be good? can his example be a worthy or safe pattern? Instead of hearkening to his counsel—instead of devoting the best part of life to dishonourable and destructive pleasures, observe in him the folly, infamy and misery of them. *Remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.* Remember your Creator, before those evil days come in which is no pleasure. Do not drown the voice of conscience and the voice of religion in the tumult of dissipation. With such a life is connected forgetfulness and ignorance of God, disregard to social duties, and insensibility to personal danger and welfare.

The virtues opposed to dissipation come recommended and enforced by the pleasure they yield. Religion is so far from being a joyless, that it is the only happy life. For the pleasures it forbids, it offers other and superior pleasures; those of reason and reflection, contemplation and love, inward serenity from the conscious approbation of God. These are pleasures worthy of intelligent, accountable, immortal beings. They will bear a review. They improve in proportion to the ardour with which they are pursued. They last for ever. There is no good in talents, power or external advantages, but to rejoice and do good. Would

you spend your years in pleasure? then obey and serve God. *Serve him with gladness of heart in the abundance of his gifts.* The pious man, the Christian, *goes on his way rejoicing: He walks in the light of God's countenance, and rejoices in his name all the day.* Shall the mirth of the sensualist, or of the gay, or the pageantry of the great, be compared with the gladness of *the upright man, to whom there ariseth light in the darkness? who shall not be moved for ever, his heart being fixed trusting in the Lord?* The former walk through dry places, ever enquiring, *Who will shew us any good?* but never finding rest. The latter can say, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God? Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee.— With thee is the spring of life. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart. In thy presence is the fulness of unmingled, everlasting joy. Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart."

Those who are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God are wholly insensible where their true happiness lies, and of the way that leads to it. *The way of peace they know not; because they have no fear of God before their eyes.* They who are "given to pleasures, dwell carelessly. They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." They have no apprehension of danger, when destruction is at the door. Sunk in voluptuousness, ancient Babylon was thoughtless of the hour when *all her pleasant things were laid waste.* She trusted to her opulence, to her high wall and towers, her gates of brass and bars of iron. She *glorified herself, and lived deliciously,* and blasphemed God. Pleasures infatuate the wise, and enervate the strong. Lulled into fatal security, the king and nobility of Babylon, his wives and concubines, were dancing, drinking, revelling, the

same night in which that great city fell. *In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.* Luxury, the unfailing attendant on opulence, takes off the heart from God: It drowns reflection, silences the voice of conscience, and banishes all concern for the soul. This country has advanced in dissipation and security as it has in wealth.—“Jesurun waxed fat, and kicked—Then he forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.”

Will you then resolve to enjoy pleasure, to the forgetfulness and contempt of God—the God who brought you into existence, and supports you in it? to whom you are indebted that you enjoy any thing in life? who, in addition to the outward favours which he heapeth upon you, hath above all given his own Son, to save you from sin and death? Would you banish this God from your thoughts? then cast in your lot with the lovers of pleasures. Will you join with them, and forget and slight the blessed Redeemer, who gave his life a ransom for you? Will you be thoughtless of your immortal souls, and of all the dearest interests of time and eternity? The love of pleasures alienates all the excellent powers and faculties of the soul from the knowledge and life of God: It makes a sacrifice of the worship, service and enjoyment of this God and Saviour, to the indulgence of the lower appetites—to superficial, evanescent joys—joys which are soon turned into heaviness.

What excuse? what vindication have you to offer for inconsideration, sensuality and addictedness to pleasures? *Produce your cause; bring forth your strong reasons*, to defend the forgetfulness of God, of the Redeemer of the world, and of your souls—to defend your putting *far away the evil day*—to defend the cry of safety, when sudden destruction impends. Or if such carelessness, indifference and impiety admit no defence or excuse, then acknowledge the truth and force of Solomon's

words, *Madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go down to the dead.*

You see, from the preceding discourse, the various and great sacrifices which the lovers of pleasure make to their favourite object. First, the sacrifice of their *time*. This is given to be spent in glorifying God and doing good ; in laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation for eternity. But, forgetting God and a future reckoning, the men of pleasure spend their years as though time was their own ; and demand, *WHO IS LORD OVER US?* They rob God, the author and preserver of life ; and rob society of the services they owe to it.

Therefore, secondly, they make a sacrifice of their *talents*. The voice of reason unites with that of scripture, "As God hath distributed to every man, as God hath called every man, so let him walk." But the lovers of pleasures, whether they have received five talents, or two, or one, waste their Lord's goods. They reflect not that they are stewards. They *wander from their place, and seek whom they may devour*. "To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath" no improvement "shall be taken away, even that which he hath. Take the talent from him, and give it to him who hath" improved his talents well.

A third sacrifice is their *reputation*. A good name is as precious ointment. But what claim to this have the lovers of pleasure ? Instead of contributing to public order, virtue and happiness, they make continual inroads on the peace and welfare of individuals, families, neighbourhoods, and the community. They make no due returns for what they constantly receive from others ; but injure and abuse them. They merit contempt, and can but be abhorred by the friends of virtue.

Their *substance* is a fourth sacrifice. They consume it upon their pleasures. They are reduced to the con-

dition of the prodigal, who squandered his inheritance in riot and gallantry.

A fifth sacrifice is their *health*. All excess impairs the animal frame. Whatever interferes with proper application to some laudable employment, and the useful exercise which animal nature calls for, brings on languor and disease.

A sixth sacrifice is the *tranquillity* of the mind. They walk in a vain shew, and are disquieted in vain. *I said of laughter, It is mad*; and of mirth, *What doth it?* A constant rotation of amusements, a laborious search for new ones, intense application to pursuits destructive of health, substance, reputation, order and morality, indicates a mind dissatisfied and restless, as well as vain and unprincipled—a mind resembling *the troubled sea*. They who know no enjoyment, but amidst amusements and pleasures; who borrow all their happiness from the company, perhaps from the spoils, of others; who are always uneasy when alone, are at great pains, not to acquire contentment, but to sacrifice it.

Not content to sacrifice their own tranquility, that of all the *tender relations of life* is a seventh sacrifice.—Those whose ease, comfort and delight, honour and usefulness they ought by all means to consult; to whom, by the laws of nature and society, their obligations are the greatest—To these they are a source of unutterable distress; sacrificing their comfort, depriving them of all advantages to enjoy life, degrading them from their rank and respectability, and lessening their good offices in society. The lovers of pleasures sacrifice every friendly and social affection, public and private virtue.

Lastly, they sacrifice their *souls*. We no sooner read of the death of a dissipated character, than we are told, that *he lifted up his eyes in torments*. His good things were all fled—fled for ever! An impassable gulf was fixed between him and bliss. In this probationary state he lived regardless of the voice of God in a standing

revelation. There is no reason to presume, that those, who are listless to this voice, would be convinced by an extraordinary interposition. Sayest thou, *Soul, take thine ease? This night thy soul may be required.* You may lift up your eyes in woe, and behold heaven irrecoverably lost. Guilty pleasures destroy soul and body in hell.

To what are the above mentioned great sacrifices made? What pleasure is there in fauntering days and sleepless nights, in the depths of poverty and neglect? in reducing your kindred, friends, or household to indigence, infamy and wretchedness? in seeing them dishonoured, reduced to the last straits, and pierced through with grief and disappointment, by your means? What pleasure is there in violence of passion, the very common attendant on dissipation? Ye lovers of pleasures, ye neither enjoy the world, your connections, nor yourselves. Your vain and empty pursuits choke all impressions of virtue, all sentiments of order, propriety and gratitude, of righteousness, temperance and a judgment to come. You lay a sure foundation for endless pain. *Consider these things, ye who forget God.*

What then is the dictate of wisdom? and what the course which her children choose? *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.* Put far away frivolous amusements, and learn to be sober minded. Consider the nature and end of every pursuit. Be emulous of order, economy and judicious arrangement in your private affairs, industry in the improvement of your time, and purity in your morals. Splendour and vain magnificence, waste of time, and the abuse of life can never unite with transcendent talents, patriotism, philanthropy, and true dignity of character. Indolence and any kind of profusion dishonour those who have the amplest fortune. Dignity consists in enjoying an abundance with strict virtue, and applying it to the best uses. Thus *using the world as not abusing it, there*

will be no room for inactivity and sloth—no room for the too common presumption of prosperity, *I shall never be moved*—never see misfortune, sorrow, sickness or death.

With the influx of wealth into our country, we observe, as is usual, an increase of luxury and dissipation. May our young people be guarded amidst the allurements which surround them. May any, who have erred in the ensnaring path of pleasure, think on the issue, and turn their feet into virtuous paths. Make haste, and make no delay to keep God's commandments. *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.*

THE INSTABILITY OF LIFE.

GO TO NOW, YE THAT SAY, TO-DAY, OR TO-MORROW, WE WILL GO INTO SUCH A CITY, AND CONTINUE THERE A YEAR, AND BUY, AND SELL, AND GET GAIN: WHEREAS YE KNOW NOT WHAT SHALL BE ON THE MORROW: FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? IT IS EVEN A VAPOUR THAT APPEARETH FOR A LITTLE TIME, AND THEN VANISHETH AWAY. FOR THAT YE OUGHT TO SAY, IF THE LORD WILL, WE SHALL LIVE, AND DO THIS, OR THAT.

FIRST, Of the confidence of those who presume on future time and opportunity to accomplish their secular projections.

Confident of to-morrow, of future years, they calculate on ways and means of accumulation, and pursue their object without respite, through every difficulty and hazard. This presumption forms the char-

after, not of the worshipper of mammon only ; but also of the lover of pleasures, and of the lover of fame. They alike presume on future accessions to their present gratifications, unmindful of HIM who holdeth their souls in life ; from whom come riches, and honour, and all the bounties of nature, with power to enjoy our portion. Far from having reached the summit of their earthly wishes, they pursue, with unremitting ardour, their favourite passion.

See childhood and youth presuming that they shall arrive at man's estate, and then enjoy life better than at present. See manhood presuming on years preferable to the past, seeking rest in some worldly good, pursuing it with increasing ardour, reaching forth to grasp it while it flies from them—consuming their precious time and advantages in exertions for that which satisfieth not. See the race of mortals sagacious in adapting means to their ends ; exerting all their powers in the use of those means, compassing sea and land, and searching the bowels of the earth, vigilant of every opportunity, to obtain and secure their hearts' desire ; laying their account for earth and time, as though nothing were superior or comparable—as though nothing were real, but things seen. To-morrow, or the next year, or in a few years at least, they hope to acquire such property, or fame, or rank in life ; or such connections and eligible situation.

Good men have too ardent earthly wishes. In their prosperity they are ready to say, *I shall never be moved*. They are in danger of taking too much thought for the morrow—of labouring too much for the things of this life—of favouring too much the things that be of men—of presuming on future seasons and advantages to improve their worldly condition, and provide for posterity—But,

SECONDLY, The future events of this world are unknown—life itself is extremely short and precarious. *We know not what will be on the morrow : For what is*

your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

The instability of human life, from infancy to gray hairs, is obvious. Admit that the infant may live to fourscore—or that the youth and middle-aged may reach that term. Is it known what is before them in the world? what will be their relations and connections, situation and circumstances; their state of body or mind? The scenery of the world is continually shifting. Some are coming forward on the stage, and others withdrawing from it. Some, who are qualified and inclined to act a worthy part, are prevented; for others step forward before them. Some, who were performing well their part, are thrust aside, as prejudice and party prevail. Some, in the midst or morning of usefulness, while the hopes of their friends and the public were raised, are, by the act of providence, removed, or rendered unfit to do the good for which they seemed to be raised up. The Arbitrer of events “setteth up one, and putteth down another. He maketh poor, and he maketh rich. He giveth wisdom and might; and he turneth wise men backward, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty;” while “to those who have no might he increaseth strength. He woundeth and healeth, he killeth and maketh alive.” Those who are in health, affluence or honour to-day, may to-morrow be under excruciating pain, or reduced to indigence, or fall into neglect. Those whose mental powers are now clear and strong, may, in an hour or moment, be deprived of the regular exercise of them. Those who are highly favoured, in the health, reputation, benevolent dispositions and usefulness of their tenderest connections, may experience a sudden reverse. There is no certain dependence on the prosperous state, or success, or kind aid, of those who are now our greatest outward comforters. Their change of state, in a very little time, may be as a sword piercing through the soul. Or they

may be removed to that world from which none return. When he who lent them calleth, we must resign them. We may not ask him why he taketh away what he gave. "He changeth the times and "seasons" in the natural, the civil, and the moral world—in respect to individuals, families and communities. The changes in the seasons of the year are not more certain than in the life of man. Spring and summer, seed time and harvest, autumn and winter have not ceased. In the natural world, a calm succeeds to a storm, and a storm to a clear day. After a bright, serene morning, the heavens blacken, the tempest gathers, the thunder roars, and the floods come. In human life, the candle of the Lord may shine on our tabernacle to-day. To-morrow may be a day of darkness. We may be *tossed with tempest, and not comforted*. We are constantly liable to a variety of disasters, pains, diseases and sorrows. In an instant the most eligible state may be changed. The height of prosperity may be followed by the depths of adversity. There is no reason to presume that a similar change can never take place in our own condition, as we every day observe in that of others. As well might we presume that we shall never die, although we are constant witnesses to the removal of all ages and orders.

"Every man walketh in a vain shew : Surely they "are disquieted in vain." If we look round us, or call to mind what we ourselves have experienced, we can but see the folly of a dependence on future health and success in life ; or on the continuance, health, usefulness, aid and comfort of those whom we most value. We see that human wishes are disappointed, human hopes destroyed. While we apprehend no evil, it may be at the door. When men cry, "Peace and safety," we may expect a sudden reverse. Nebuchadnezzar vaunted, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built "by the might of my power, and for the honour of "my majesty. While the word was in his mouth,

“there fell this voice from heaven, Thy kingdom is departed from thee. The same hour was the thing fulfilled.” Together with his kingdom, that monarch’s understanding departed from him, and he was sent to graze with the beasts ; because he knew not *that the heavens do rule*. Ancient Babylon, *the lady of kingdoms, given to pleasures, and dwelling carelessly, trusting in her high walls, her gates of brass, and bars of iron, was in one hour made desolate*. Men in honour, who reflect not from whom promotion cometh, are suddenly abased. “God will destroy, and not build them up ; because they regard not his hand.” The confidence of him who boasted in his *abundance*, and presumed on many years’ ease, presaged the summons from the Sovereign of life, *This night thy soul shall be required of thee*.

Do we *trust in man, and make flesh our arm* ? Our heart departeth from the Lord. Admit that our human friend is wise, and good, and able to help us ; he may, by the act of providence, be rendered unable. Or his breath may go forth, and all his thoughts for our welfare perish. We may, at any hour, be deprived of his counsel, support, sympathy, society and example.

Does any one know that a *firm constitution* will hold out many years ? A disease, or any accident, to which the strong are as much exposed as the feeble, may suddenly prove fatal.

Superior *talents* may be impaired or destroyed, as bodily health and strength ; and by the same means. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom ; nor the mighty man in his might ; nor the rich man in his riches.”

As to *fame*, however well deserved and spotless, it may be blasted. Never is it more exposed, than when security and self-complacency put men off their guard. But self-complacency and security aside : The most modest worth, the most circumspect behaviour, are no sure guards. Envy, ambition and pride are able to

tarnish the fairest character, and have, not seldom, risen on its ruins—risen indeed but to fall. For “the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.” Boasting of a false gift, elevated without talents or integrity, which alone can dignify an high station, their own counsel casts them down.

O man, whoever thou art, who boastest of to-morrow! thou knowest not what will be on the morrow, shouldst thou then be among the living. Thou knowest not what may befall thy person, property, or reputation, or thy dearest comforts—what may happen to thy body or mind. Thou dost not know whether thou shalt continue to enjoy soundness in thy flesh, and rest in thy bones, and the exercise of thy reason; or be chastened with sickness on thy bed, and the multitude of thy bones with strong pain; or thy inward powers suspended—Whether thy house shall be, as at present, thy children about thee, in vigorous health, and thy substance untouched; or whether some great alteration of state may be nigh—Whether thou shalt have further opportunity for any purpose, however laudable. Why should you be exempt from frowns of woe? You never knew an instance of unmingled, uninterrupted prosperity. Not to expect in this world the afflictions common to men, is to lay a sure foundation for disquietude and vexation of spirit. Would you lie under the imputation of this folly? If you know not what will be on the morrow, or the next year, on what ground do you determine that your condition will then be more happy than it now is? You may just as well determine that the coming day or year will be an evil one. Neither of these conclusions is wise: The first is presumption: The last is distrust. Wisdom dictates the medium between the two extremes. Neither presume, nor despond. Be content with thy present lot. In patience possess thy soul. Defer not until to-morrow, or the next year, what you should do to-

day. Trust the Providence which is over all, and do good; so shall you be provided for. The good you hope for shall be bestowed; and the evil you fear averted—if best.

Beside the mutability and uncertainty of every terrestrial good; and, of consequence, our entire ignorance of what may take place in time to come, admitting that we ourselves shall still live; it is further to be considered that life itself is altogether uncertain. *What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

This emblem of human life, has been verified in all times. A vapour vanishes while you behold it. *Thine eye is on me, said Job, and I am not. Life passeth as a weaver's shuttle; as a post that hasteth by; as the swift ships, which leave no track behind them; as an eagle hasteth to her prey. The wind passeth over the flower of the field, and it is gone. All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. When most fresh and fair, man is a prey for death. His days are measured by an hand-breadth: He is crushed before the moth.* By such emblems the scriptures have represented the brevity, the extreme uncertainty of life—the fading glory of man. *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*

How numerous the avenues of death! how considerable and unobserved the means! How early and how sudden with respect to a large proportion! Those of the firmest constitution, whose *strength is the strength of stones*, and their *flesh of brass*, are as liable to common accidents and instant death as any of the human race. The tallest trees in the forest are soonest torn from the roots. Elevated rank and flourishing circumstances are a conspicuous mark for death. Some, who by lingering diseases are reduced to skin and bones, who wait and long for death, are spared and revive; while those who looked for their removal from day to day, unthoughtful of their own, have left them behind in the world.

Great is their folly, who, neglecting the duty of the passing day, thoughtless of what may be to-morrow, are eager to get and keep all they can hold within their grasp—or eager in the pursuit of pleasures, or honour, or power, or fame. They waste all their abilities and advantages in projections for years which they may not live to see; or if they should live, they would not realize their ardent wishes. Shall beings of so short and uncertain date? shall probationers for eternal retributions, take so much care for this life, and be indifferent and thoughtless with respect to that to come? Shall they be thus forgetful of the vicissitudes of the world, and of the hour of their departure? Other thoughts and cares are enforced by the evident instability of men and things on the earth, the certainty and nearness of death, and the eternal consequences depending on the state in which it shall find us.

Do we know what a day may bring forth in respect to our moral and religious character? May the good man presume that no future temptation will overcome him? None could be more confident than Peter, that, in all circumstances of trial which might be before him, he should continue to own his Lord—that, if all others should deny Christ, he never would—that he would follow him to prison and to death. Call to mind his shameful defection the very night in which he thus resolved. See the great need of the caution, “Let him “who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” This instance alone is sufficient to prevent the supposition that our own virtue, or that of any other person, is impregnable to assault. Let the good man watch and pray, fear and tremble. Snares and dangers, of which he is not aware, may beset him. Faith may be weak. Love may grow cold. Courage may fail. Lust may entice and draw aside. Human strength is weakness. What character is there that has no vulnerable part?—that is exempt from passions and infirmities? The latent wickedness of the heart is not known till

the hour of temptation. "Be not high-minded, but fear. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins." What circumspection! what mighty aids of grace are requisite to keep the faint from falling! "Take heed to thyself, that thou lose not the things which thou hast wrought."

When the consciences of sinners are awakened, they are wont to stifle conviction, with the vain imagination of a more convenient season to repent and turn from the error of their way. Do they know what a day may bring forth? They may not live till to-morrow. Or should they be among the living, they may be cast on the bed of sickness. Sickness is not so convenient a season as health to do the work on which they were sent into the world. It calls for the joy of a good conscience, and the hope that maketh not ashamed. What assurance has the delaying sinner that he shall enjoy his inward powers to-morrow, or the next year? what assurance that divine influence may not be withdrawn? "The Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart."

In the last place, our subject points out the course of wisdom and duty. *We ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

The Sovereign of life only knows how long we have to live. The number of our days is with him. In his hands our breath is. It depends entirely upon him, whether we shall live another year or day, and do this or that. He is the proprietor of our time and talents.

From these obvious truths the plain instruction is, that all futurity is to be referred to him. In his natural and moral kingdom he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Whether we acquiesce in his will or not, the whole disposal of our life, the term and the circumstances of it, is with him. By

acquiescence we are prepared for all events : Without it we cannot enjoy life in any circumstances, however eligible : Without it we must be wholly unprovided against misfortunes, distresses and danger : We must be at the mercy of all who may wish and be able to injure us. And in what condition are we to appear before our Judge ? *The Lord is at hand.* The thoughts and intents of our hearts are open to him. Let us then, according to the apostle's instruction, refer the term of our life, and all our purposes to him, without whose will nothing comes to pass.

To say, *If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that*, expresseth a becoming sense of the infinite presence and providence of God, and our own dependence—a just confidence in his wisdom, power, goodness and faithfulness—a conviction of the transitory nature and insufficiency of things on earth—an holy satisfaction that we, and whatever concerns us, are in the hands of God—a willingness to live the time he hath appointed, and in whatsoever state he may appoint—a spirit of gratitude for his various gifts, and of resignation under any frowns of his providence.

Such a temper is the opposite to that which boasts of years to come—of great schemes to be executed, and great things to be enjoyed, in future years. It is the opposite also to impatience ; most of all to that impatience with our lot which impels to suicide ; as tho' we had a right, by our own presumptuous act, to desert our post, to quit life without a call. It is opposition to the will of God, whether men cut short their days by self-assault, by any excess, or by repining. He may justly demand of such, when they launch into eternity, How camest thou here before thy time ?—the work given thee to do not finished nor begun ? Life is the time which God hath given to serve his will in our generation, and to finish his work. This work, if not done while the day lasts, cannot be done at all : For no man can work when the night cometh.

Shall we pursue our secular business with ardour ; but in regard to our main business be *all the day idle* ? There is a time for every good purpose. Every thing is beautiful in its season. The wise and the pious refer it to the God of their lives, whether they shall do this or that, be it ever so just in itself.

Take all prudent care of life and health. Provide for your own. Guard your rights by all reasonable means. Do good to all as you have opportunity. Having, according to your means and ability, laid a foundation for safety, comfort and usefulness in time to come, should life be spared, hesitate not to leave it with God to *do what seemeth him good*. Whatever purpose you form, be sure that it be no other than accords with his will. Presume not to resolve on less or more. When he giveth time and opportunity for any good purpose, defer not the performance. For you know not what will be on the morrow. Another opportunity may not offer ; at least not a more convenient one than the present. You may not live. Or you may have no heart to improve a future season. Or you may be in no capacity to do the good you would. Your own state, or the state of your dearest connections, or of others whom you might essentially serve, may depend upon your embracing the first opportunity to do a necessary and good work.

“ The willing mind is accepted, according to that “ a man hath.” If, however, you do not lack opportunity, and yet neglect it, God may deny you another space to get, enjoy, or do good. Past opportunities never return : Future ones may not be indulged you. Have the past been misimproved ? The only amends you can make is to lay hold of the present—to *do with all your might whatsoever your hand findeth to do*. “ Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace : “ Hereby good shall come unto thee.”

Though we may not boast of time to come, it behoves us to review time past—past smiles and frowns,

and our behaviour under them—past advantages to be blessings to others and ourselves, to lay a good foundation against the time to come ; and the use we have made of these advantages. What have we done for God, for our generation, and for our own souls ? What have we left undone, which we ought to have done ? Have we, and how far, minded or neglected our own business ? Hath our youth, our manhood, or our decline been regulated by our Lord's injunction, *Go, work to-day in my vineyard* ? Hath past experience of the world taught us its emptiness ? the vanity of human wishes ? of all pursuits which do not centre and terminate in God ?

Ye who have chosen him for your portion, who make it your supreme care to know, obey and submit to his will, labour after a more entire resignation, and more constant attention to his footsteps. It is the sum of piety to govern ourselves by his direction—to have no separate will. The trial of this spirit is when our own wishes are denied, and our hopes disappointed. He is the proper Judge what is fit and best—by what means our chief good will be secured. He *hath kept the times and seasons in his own power*. His time is always the fittest. He *seeth the end from the beginning*. *One day and a thousand years* are alike to him. *We are of yesterday, and know nothing*. Events, which God meaneth for the good of his servants, may, in their own view, be against them. Hard as submission may be, it is owing to human imperfection that it is so. The end of the Lord in trying their faith and patience is not duly considered. Any want of submission, any impatience, is unreasonable and unthankful, harder to bear than the outward evil. Every wish to choose for ourselves is rebellion ; as is every complaint. Lay your hand upon your heart, and be humbled in the sight of God for every thing of this kind. “ Be watchful, and strengthen the things which are ready to day.” Remember your declensions, and repent.

Pray for this spirit more and more : “ Not as we will, “ but as thou wilt.” Keep in mind the Saviour’s example and counsel ; “ My meat is to do the will of “ him who sent me. Yet a little while have ye the “ light with you : Walk while ye have the light.” Thus will you be ready to say, when the hour of your departure is at hand, *Come, Lord Jesus.*

Are there not numbers present who have never realized so obvious a truth as that before us, *Your life is a vapour ?* a scene of disappointment, labour and sorrow. If past days, and years, and the history of the world have shewn that changes, grief and perplexity are inseparable from the condition of man, you have no reason to suppose that there will be an alteration for the better, until the period fixed in prophecy, *the times of the restitution of all things.* With all that earth can give, man saith not, *It is enough.* Shall he oppose the will of God, whose favour is better than life ? Shall he assume to be independent ? In his fulness, shall he deny the Being who giveth him richly all things to enjoy ? If poor, shall he fret against God, and envy others their possessions ? If sorrowful, shall he indulge to that sorrow which worketh death ? If joyful, shall he say, *To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant ?*

Would to God that all who have lived forgetful of him, all who have been indifferent to the work he hath given them to do, all murmurers, all who disquiet themselves in vain, might think soberly. He may require their soul this night. In what preparation are they to appear before him ? To those who say, To-day, or to-morrow, or the next year, we will get gain, or promotion, or take our ease, or acquire fame, what would be the advantage of many years to come ? Continuing in their present temper, they will but treasure up to themselves wrath. What is your life ? *Be sober, and watch unto prayer.* In vain will you ask, Who will shew us any good ? Rather learn to say, *The*

will of the Lord be done. Until this shall be your heart's desire and prayer, you will be far from your desired rest.

By the removal of our acquaintance, neighbours and kindred, with the attendant circumstances, we are constantly reminded of such truths as the following: The progress of time—the vanity of human hopes—the folly and danger of depending on future years—the high importance of an habitual sense of our own insufficiency, and of making God in Christ our hope—the wisdom of governing ourselves by the will of God in all relations and circumstances, waiting for our great change. If pain and sickness, disappointment and sorrow, whether our own or of others, have not taught us disengagement from the world, we have lived to little purpose. In vain are we afflicted in the distress or removal of those who are most dear to us on earth, if we do not sorrow after a godly sort—do not bring forth fruit meet for repentance. The way of peace is to have no will of our own—to seek first the kingdom of God—to wait on him, hope in his word, acquiesce and rejoice in his government, whatever may befall us. Have any present lived hitherto to the lusts of men? May the time past of their lives suffice them to have thus lived. May they live the rest of their time to the will of God. *The time is short. The Lord is at hand. We are not our own. Whether therefore we live or die, it highly concerns us to live and die to the Lord. We are strangers and sojourners on earth, as all our fathers were. Lord, make us to know how frail we are—to remember how short our time is. Teach us all, old and young, high and low, rich and poor, so to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

S E R M O N XX.

PROCRASTINATION.

LUKE, xiv. 18.

----- I PRAY THEE HAVE ME EXCUSED. -----



YOU find these words in the parable of the marriage feast. The gospel dispensation is illustrated by the parable of a certain king, who, in honour of his son, made a great supper, invited many guests, and spared no cost for their entertainment. I shall not tarry to examine the circumstances and application of the parable. The manner in which those, who were invited, treated the invitation, is observable. Upon different pretences, one, and another, and a third desired that their present acceptance of the honourable invitation might be dispensed with.

The gospel offers are full of grace and condescension : They are made with divine sincerity to all. All are invited to partake of the unfearchable riches of Christ. The promises in him are “exceeding great and precious. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have “entered into the heart of man the things prepared “for those who” cordially embrace the invitation of the gospel.

The children of disobedience, helpless and perishing, are inclined to excuse themselves, at least for the present, from accepting this grace. *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this ! and give ear, O earth !*

PROCRASTINATION being the subject which lies before us, we will consider, first, the *propensity* in man-

kind to postpone the greatest of all concerns, the care of their souls.

Secondly, The true *character* of procrastination, apparent in the excuses for it ; and the great inconsistency and danger of this character.

FIRST, Of the *propensity* to procrastinate in the greatest of all concerns, the care of the soul.

Examples in abundance, in all times, under every dispensation of grace, bear witness to this truth. The indulgence of a *false* hope, though it indicates much the same temper, does not come under the head of procrastination. Sinners *postpone*, because they presume upon a more *convenient season*. They cherish the hope of the *hypocrite*, because they presume that God is *altogether such an one as themselves*. The inclination to postpone religion, or to lower the terms, alike argues a mean thought of it. Nor is it easy to say who sinks it most—he who will not give immediate attention to it ; or he who accommodates it to his passions, undertaking to reconcile it to his *own iniquity*. But we are now concerned with the former.

Considering the worth of the soul, and the greatness of the salvation offered in the gospel, we might be ready to suppose that no rational creature could postpone religion. A multitude of instances, however, would lead us to imagine, that, far from being the *one thing needful*, religion is a *small* thing comparatively—that there is no good reason for the various injunctions, exhortations and admonitions of scripture on this head. “Go, work *to-day* in my vineyard. *To-day*, “if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. “Exhort one another daily, *while it is called to-day*. “*Now* is the accepted time. Acquaint *now* thyself “with him, and be at peace. Yet *a little while* have “ye the light with you, walk while ye have the light, “lest darkness come upon you—the night when no “man can work. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to “do, *do it with thy might*.” The conduct of mankind

rejects this counsel of God. When they hear the call of the gospel, they are ready with their excuses, occupied as they are in pursuit of gain, or pleasures, or other things.

The propensity to procrastinate being obvious, we proceed to examine the true *character* which it implies.

They who promise that they will, at a future time, apply their hearts to religion, and take pains to excuse their present delay, acknowledge that it justly claims their supreme love, and is to be preferred to every other object. Admitting this, what can be said for postponing it? What can excuse an intelligent, accountable creature in postponing the approbation of his God and his Redeemer? in acting from no principles worthy of the dignity of man? in limiting his views and pursuits, for the present, to earth and time? What one reason is there to support the opinion, that there may be a better season than the present to attend to the supreme concern of man? the greatest, most excellent, honourable and delightful work?

You reply, that it is peculiarly inconvenient in the days of *youth*. And you alledge, first, that it is a sacrifice of the *amusements* and *pleasures*, to which there is then a strong attachment.

We have shewn, on a former occasion,* that religion abridges you of no other pleasures than such as would be prejudicial to your health, reputation and worldly interest—such as impair the real enjoyment of life. We have shewn that it supplies pleasures far superior to those which it forbids—that, if you will be the friends of it, you shall *spend your years in pleasure*—that the God, whom you obey and serve, will grant the desires of your heart—that the preference of other pleasures, instead of bringing the satisfaction wished for, is vanity and vexation of spirit. To postpone religion, therefore, is not the course to obtain and enjoy true pleasure: It is a course which has a sure overbalance of ser-

* See Sermon xii.

row and pain. ' This excuse for procrastination must be given up. This objection to the early choice of religion is silenced.

You object, secondly, that youthful days must be taken up in making provision for an *establishment in life*.

The least reflection shews that this excuse is as groundless as the other. Religion forbids no just business or enterprize. It forbids you not to form connections with others, in the business of this life, on the basis of reciprocal advantage. Formed on any other basis, it can be of no lasting benefit. Religion does not forbid you to provide, in youth and health, for age and sickness. *Forbidding to marry is not the doctrine of Christ, but of devils.* And *he who provideth not for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." If so, you will have the best establishment in business and in a family state, by an humble acknowledgment of God and dependence upon him. Prosperity, on any other ground, is a snare, and has the worst aspect on your chief good. The divine blessing on the employments and possessions, relations and comforts of life is certainly to be desired: You must needs be unhappy without it. Do not therefore imagine that a good establishment in business, or in the nearest human ties, can be consulted by postponing religion.

Would you offer it as a reason for procrastination, that your circumstances are *straitened*? There is more occasion for the principles of religion, lest you should have recourse to dishonourable, unjust means to improve your circumstances. Would you improve them by fraud and unfaithfulness? If not, how are they to be improved by the postponement of your duty to God? This teaches you to abide in your calling—to prosecute your own business by just and laudable ways and means. Trust him in well-doing, *and verily you shall be fed.* The *handful of meal shall not waste, nor the cruise of oil fail.*

Some may urge the *pressure of many secular cares* as an excuse for procrastination. If these cares are multiplied, if riches increase, there cannot surely be less reason for trust in God, or less need of his direction and help. Would you be overcharged with cares of this life, and abridge yourselves of its comforts? Would you be in straits amidst a fulness? Would you withhold from the poor, the widow and fatherless their desire? If not, then confide in him who giveth man discretion—who giveth liberally, and requireth that you be ready to distribute. He alloweth you not to engage in more business than you can manage—to prosecute none beyond just bounds: Either must defeat your worldly views, destroy the enjoyment of life, and interfere with your obligations to your nearest connections. By an intense pursuit of the profits of this world, men trouble their own house, and deny themselves the rest and refreshments which nature calls for. Religion admits and requires a reasonable, prudent care for this life: Any other must, on the whole, be injurious to our worldly interest. And will you undertake to justify or excuse unreasonable, imprudent care? If not, then plead neither the narrowness of your outward means, on the one hand; nor the variety and hurry of your secular affairs, on the other, as an apology for deferring religion. If you do not find time for religion in youth, will you find time for it in manhood, when the cares of the world ordinarily increase? the cares of a growing family, for instance, and the service to which you may be called for your people? Many are the snares which attend the entrance on life, and going abroad in the world, which require the early, commanding influence of virtuous principles. If religion claimed attention only as men may find leisure from other pursuits, then the plea of external circumstances, or supernumerary cares, might be admitted. But those who promise themselves a future and more acceptable opportunity for the work of God, do not proceed

upon such a supposition as that just mentioned. They admit the great and superior importance of this work.

One more reason for procrastination, especially in youth, is this, that religion, at that early period, will be esteemed *affectation*. This consideration may have much influence with some, who otherwise might not be indisposed to attend to religion. Suppose it should be esteemed affectation to be sober-minded in youth; is this an excuse for casting off sobriety, in principle and practice, until manhood or old age? By whom is sobriety in the young thus accounted of? By those who have no fear of God, nor respect to earthly superiors. Is the standard of conduct for youth to be taken from the opinion of such? Will they not call it affectation, should you embrace religion at any future season which you may propose? Have they not much the same thought of religion in middle life and in declining years? If you are deterred by their opinion now, may you not be at any future time? What sort of excuse is this for procrastination? Shameful as it is, and backward as they may be to avow it, we presume that this miserable excuse is the best which some have.

The chief pleas for procrastination, especially in early life, have been considered. To what do they amount? What advantage will any future time have above the present in the cases which have been stated? Suppose the relish to youthful pleasures and amusements should be lessened, an addictedness to them will have lessened the impressions of religion. The cares of this world, and deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things will have a similar effect. The influence, which the opinion of the despisers of religion has had, must have a powerful tendency to fix in the mind low thoughts of it. Very rarely has the neglect of it conduced to a more eligible establishment in life, than the early choice of it. Indeed "godliness

“ is profitable to all things. It has promise of the life “ that now is, and of that to come :” It is connected with *contentment* : And this is happiness ; it is *great gain*. Why then should godliness be postponed at any period, in any circumstances ?

There is a time to every purpose under heaven. The wise observe and improve good opportunities in the concerns of this life, and adapt means to their ends. They do not postpone great affairs to small—their main business to some trifling matter. They keep in view what chiefly concerns them, and are not discouraged by difficulties and obstacles. They overcome by patience. The children of light have much greater reason to fix upon *the good part which cannot be taken from them*—to be engaged and fixed in the work of their salvation, that they may, if possible, obtain the end of their faith.

What could it profit a man, might he gain the whole world at the expence of his soul ? A great salvation is purchased : It is offered to all. If there is weight in the concerns of an immortal soul—in an eternity of happiness or misery—in the favour or anger of God, who is able to save and to destroy, why is religion postponed a single day ? While the importance of a state of reconciliation with God is admitted, shall the voice of reason and conscience be stifled by a delay to acquaint ourselves with him ? What future wisdom can make amends for such present folly ? Is it certain, that at a future season the delaying sinner will have a clearer conviction, than at present, of the reasonableness and necessity of religion ? or that he shall continue to enjoy his reason entire ? Yet he postpones the friendship of God, which is more than that of all the world, is content with himself, while abhorred of God, and taken captive by the adversary of souls. He means not indeed to proceed to the excesses of some. He means not to defer religion for any length of time. He is not in the grosser class of sinners, and resolves

soon to desist from the sin which easily befalls him. His connections, his associates, his amusements, the strength of his appetites, or his worldly affairs, or necessary avocations, render it peculiarly irksome and inconvenient, at present, to engage in a pious course. If any are ashamed directly to avow such objections and excuses as these, why do they not inwardly blush, while their own hearts and the great Searcher of hearts testify, that such objections and excuses bear sway?

Who will deny that the morning of life and vigorous health are more convenient for religion, than distress, sickness and decay? We are best able to judge of the nature of religion and our own state, when the mental powers are vigorous. Excruciating pains, languishing sickness, are wont to impede those inward exercises which religion requires. Pain and disease come suddenly upon all ages and orders. None can, with reason, presume on exemption from sickness and distress—on the continuance of firm health. Youth is the season to lay a foundation for comfort, improvement, usefulness and eminence in life. Why is it not the time to lay a foundation for an happy death and eternity? It is a period most susceptible of religious impressions. Impressions then made, whether good or bad, are commonly durable. The chief prospect of good effect to public religious instruction is from the rising generation. Shall their period then be neglected? Shall it be spent in pursuits of vanity? He, who would well accomplish the work of the day, begins in the morning. If the morning of life is devoted to God, your path will shine more and more unto the perfect day. But procrastination naturally increases the objections and aversion to religion.—Would you be *busy here and there*, but be unmindful of the work of God who made and preserveth you, and hath done great things for you? Would you, though called into the vineyard in the morning, lose this precious opportunity? If this is neglected, is there

not reason to fear that you may be *all the day idle*? Would you put off the business of the day to the last hour? Would you trust to a sick bed, and to the hour of your departure, in which to make preparation for the eternal world? Would you make work for bitter repentance? Would you endanger the withdrawment of all divine influence, so that you shall have no sense of sin and wrath? no desire to obtain heaven, and no fear of hell? The longer the strivings of the Spirit are resisted, the nearer is the approach to that state, when the language of God may be, *They are joined to idols, let them alone.*

Ye are bought with a price, and are not your own. The price of your ransom from sin and death is the source of all you enjoy, and the pledge of all you hope for. It is your highest duty and wisdom to “yield yourselves unto God as those who are alive “from the dead.” Will you delay to present to him this reasonable service? Will you thus requite the God of all grace, and the Redeemer of the world? Will a condemned rebel defer to accept the clemency of his sovereign, offering him a pardon for treason? Must not this shew how little he thought himself obliged? The traitor to an human government does not need to be importuned, time after time, to cast himself upon mercy, and save himself from capital punishment. Shall rebels against heaven, doomed to die, be intreated in vain, by an offended God, to accept redemption through the blood of his only begotten Son? What insensibility to infinite obligation is it, to defer a single day your acceptance of the gospel pardon? Gratitude to the Author of our redemption, and to the Father of mercies, dictates an instant, unreserved acceptance. Love to your own souls dictates this. To hesitate whether you will *now* accept the great salvation, purchased by the death of EMMANUEL—to conclude that you will postpone it, what is this but to love darkness rather than light? condemnation

rather than justification? alienation from God rather than reconciliation to him? conformity to the god of this world, the enemy of truth and righteousness, rather than a renovation in holiness? eternal shame and perdition, rather than glory and immortality? Those who procrastinate, say indeed in their hearts, The day of salvation will be prolonged, and therefore may be safely neglected for the present. But they are constant witnesses of human frailty. The instability of life was distinctly stated the last Lord's-day. Why then is it presumed that they shall yet live, and have a more convenient opportunity? Moreover, if every delay does not imply an heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, it yet conduces to bring the sinner into this sad state: And the longer he delays, the greater is the hazard that he may die in his sins. Did they verily believe that the present may be the only accepted time, would they not make haste to keep God's commandments? Would they not fly for refuge, and lay hold on the hope set before us?

The human prospect is, that the doctrine of religion may make impressions on younger life, rather than on those who have been long *accustomed to do evil*, the reformation of whose vicious habits is resembled to a natural impossibility. Those who have postponed religion in youth, and at their entrance on the stage of action, have usually become more indifferent and insensible to it in the after stages of life. They have become fearless of sin and its consequences—unmindful of their promises, that, at such a period, and in such a situation, they would apply themselves in earnest to the care of their souls. Far from fulfilling their promises, they have proceeded to treat the doctrine and institutions of religion, and its friends, with contempt and obloquy. The obvious tendency of procrastination from time to time, is, to fill the mind with light thoughts of the most momentous concerns—to harden the heart against impressions from the word and

providence of God, and against the strivings of his Spirit. In addition to the natural tendency of vicious habits, there is reason to fear that such may be given up to judicial hardness. *Because I have called, and ye refused—ye shall call, but I will not answer.*

If assured of the protraction of life, you could not expect a better opportunity to do the work for which life is given. On what grounds do you think that the middle stage of life, much less that its last stage, is best adapted to begin this work? There is great hazard in deferring it to either stage, because of the extreme difficulty of reforming early bad habits.

Consider the real character of procrastination in the light of the following particular remarks: First, it contradicts all the *reasonable* and *prudent* maxims, which govern men in the concerns of this life.

Secondly, It is a deliberate violation of *conscience* and your *highest duty*.

Thirdly, It is the most vile *ingratitude* to God. The tendency and design of his forbearance is to lead you to repentance. He condescends to beseech you, by the blood of the everlasting covenant, to turn and live.

Fourthly, It is the *most base* return to the Redeemer of the world, who gave himself a ransom for you, and laments over all delaying sinners, as over those of Jerusalem, *O that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things of thy peace!* He stands at the door, and knocks for admission. He calleth, *Open unto me.* To compel HIM to stand without, not to open unto HIM *immediately*, whose friendship to enemies infinitely transcends any human example of love to a friend, is the most shameful return.

Fifthly, The *folly* of procrastination is not less than the ingratitude. It is to postpone the approbation of God, and the hope of eternal life. To what are they postponed? To unlawful pleasures—to treasures which moth and rust corrupt, or which may take wing any

moment—to vain ambition. To things like these you would postpone the perfect peace and blessed hope of the gospel. You would postpone the bread of eternal life to that which perisheth—the food of angels, to husks; the true riches, to the mammon of unrighteousness; the friendship and honour of the King eternal and immortal, to the favour of mortal, unknowing and mutable man; the testimony of a good conscience, to the transient, superficial gratification of a vain and fleshly mind. If it be not folly to continue in hostility to God and the Lamb, to wrong your own souls, what is folly?

Lastly, The *danger* and *presumption* of procrastination are similar to the unreasonableness, baseness and folly of it. You run an amazing hazard, by remaining in a state of estrangement from God, whatever your resolutions may be, that you will, at no very distant time, acquaint yourselves with him. You know not whether you shall be among the living to-morrow; or, if living, whether you shall be in a condition to attend to your spiritual concerns—or whether divine influence may not be withdrawn. Is it not dangerous and presumptuous to neglect the means and quench the influences of grace to-day? to indulge a present indisposition and disgust to religion? If you cannot command resolution to withstand this indisposition and disgust to-day, what reason have you to suppose you shall, when grown stronger by your delay? There are periods and circumstances in life, when God peculiarly calls the attention of his reasonable offspring to their immortal interests: And, if at one period more than another, must we not fix upon the morning, rather than the afternoon or evening of life? Promises that you will *hereafter* attend to what is *now* your highest duty and wisdom, are no other than treacherous promises. Any delay is dangerous, whatever may be the pretence. You grieve the holy Spirit by it—death may be at the door. After death there

it no probationary state. Should a delaying finner, at some future time of life, be turned to the wisdom of the just, it may be *as a brand plucked out of the burning*. He may neither have himself, nor give the world, that proof of his conversion, which would result from having embraced the path of the just in early life. By procrastination you abridge yourselves of the present pleasures, privileges and hopes of religion; and put at a dreadful hazard your eternal state.

If such is the character, and such may be the consequences, of procrastination, it is utterly inexcusable at any period, in any circumstances. Most weighty are the reasons for instant attention to religion, for *all diligence in making our calling and election sure*.

Some flatter themselves that there may be a space of repentance *after death*. An apostle assures us, that after this is the *judgment*—that the judgment will proceed according to the deeds done in the *body*. Indeed, were there another state of trial than this life, the reasons against procrastination would still be forcible. On this supposition, it would be unreasonable, base and unwise to postpone our main business—to neglect our highest duty—to forego the true enjoyment of this life, and make work for repentance in the world to come. To establish the sentiment of a state of probation in another world, it must however be shewn that this will either be in the intermediate state; or subsequent to the judgment of the world. If in the *intermediate* state, then the judgment will not proceed according to the deeds done in the *body*; but according to the character formed in the world of *spirits*. If *subsequent* to the day of judgment, then Christ the Judge must sit on his throne of judgment a *second* time, or oftner. He must sit in judgment *after* he hath delivered up his mediatorial kingdom. Or salvation must be then offered, without regard to a *Redeemer*. But, be assured, he that shall then be *filthy*

must be filthy still. *The wicked will then be severed from the just—eternally severed.*

You will admit it to be at least *possible*, that those who neglect the present accepted time, may find all intercession for mercy after death to be unavailing. The general current and natural construction of the scriptures lead us to believe that this *will* be the case. Would you wrest the natural meaning and general current of the scriptures, to support your own ideas of rectitude? No person of reflection will presume upon a state of probation hereafter, if it be barely possible that the opinion may be a mistake. For if a mistake, it must be fatal to trust to it. And if no mistake, it is yet folly and impiety to defer the work upon which God sent us into this world.

If the obvious doctrine of scripture on the subject of future retributions accords not with human views of rectitude, must not the same be said of the present administration of providence? Can we not leave both its *present* and *future* scenes with him who only is holy, wise, just and true? It is enough that he now vouchsafeth us a day of salvation. The despisers of his mercy and patience, who *know not the time of their visitation*, cannot justly object to the indignation and wrath he hath denounced against such as live and die impenitent.

Ye who continue to make excuses, reflect how long you have postponed the vast concerns of the soul—how many invitations and admonitions you have already disregarded—the violation of vows made in trouble, and of the obligations arising from your early dedication to God in baptism, and from a Christian education—the stifled checks of conscience and influences of the Spirit. Have you now, after so long delay, any more relish to the things of the kingdom than heretofore? The present time does not appear more convenient to you than the past. Your language is, *A little more sleep, a little more slumber.* The

instances of such as have deferred the care of the soul from childhood to youth, from this to manhood, and from this to old age, are so many monuments of human deception and presumption—so many warnings to those in youth, to beware of following the example—As are also the instances of such as have put off this supreme concern of man from health to sickness and a death bed. Behold, now is the accepted time. In the day of grief, in time of sickness or danger, it is an unspeakable consolation, to be able to reflect upon a seasonable, faithful improvement of our talents and opportunities, upon our having presented ourselves a willing sacrifice to the God who made us, holdeth our souls in life, continually heapeth his blessings upon us; and hath given his own Son for our redemption; upon having consecrated our forfeited, ransomed lives to the Lord who bought us. It will be an unspeakable consolation, in the decline of life, if you can apply the words, *Thou art my hope, O Lord God—my trust from my youth.*

The present time is always the best for any good work. There may not be another. Many die in youth—die suddenly. Their removal brings this instruction to survivors of the same period of life, *Be ye ready also. Boast not of to-morrow.* Admitting you may live many years, it will be your wisdom to give God *the dew of your youth.* To be joint heirs with Christ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, is infinitely more than all that earth or time can give. We pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God before the evil days come. The instability of life, the immortal interest depending upon the improvement of life, are considerations which irresistibly enforce an early and fixed choice of the good part, which shall never be taken away from you. These considerations exhibit the character of procrastination as the height of folly and madness.

Felix, when Paul “reasoned on righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come, trembled; and” answered, Go thy way for this time: When I have “a convenient season, I will call for thee.” But though he sent for Paul again, from worldly views, he wished to *hear no more concerning the faith in Christ*. Fatal procrastination! Imminent danger, the admonitions of a friend, instances of mortality, may alarm conscience for the moment. But sinners say, *Have me excused for this time*. Business, amusement, or secular advantage induce them to believe, that, at such an age, and in such circumstances of life, they shall be under better advantage, and more disposed, to mind religion than at present. The Lord of our time and talents saith, *Go, work TO-DAY in my vineyard. Occupy till I come*. But through the instigation of Satan, sinners flatter themselves that another season will be better; and, while other concerns occupy their thoughts and time, the day of salvation is gone. God forbid that any of our youth should be thus deluded. May all of them be awake to the excellence and worth of the soul, and the great salvation offered in the gospel. *Yet a little while is the light with you: Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you—While ye have the light, believe in the light. Wisdom is justified of her children*. They attend to the language of the Holy Ghost, *TO-DAY, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*.

SERMON XXI.

THE REDEMPTION OF TIME.

COLLOSSIANS iv. 5.

—REDEEMING THE TIME.

THE *redemption* of time is the subject proposed for present consideration. Some general remarks on time and its progress will be offered, in the first place. Secondly, Illustrations of the subject, and reasons which enforce the redemption of time. Thirdly, Various ways and means conducive to this important duty will be pointed out.

FIRST, I shall offer a few *general remarks* on time and its progress.

The whole space from the birth to the death of time, though long, if compared with the term of human life, is as nothing upon a comparison with eternity—whether we speak of eternity which preceded, or which will succeed time. *An hand-breadth* is not to be compared with the circumference of the solar system, or even of the terraqueous globe. Yet there would be more propriety in such comparison, than in making one between time and eternity. In the former case there is a real proportion, however inconsiderable and imperceptible; in the latter, none. The magnitude, distances and revolutions of the heavenly bodies have been computed: But to speak of taking the dimensions of immensity is most absurd. He who filleth it, who inhabiteth eternity, is described as “measuring out heaven with the span, measuring the ocean

“ in the hollow of his hand, comprehending the dust
 “ of the earth in a measure, weighing the mountains
 “ in scales, and the hills in a balance.” The whole
 globe of the earth is as *the small dust of the balance* in
 his account. Now the years of eternity can no more
 be reckoned, than immensity can be measured. The
 shortest and the longest measure is the same with refer-
 ence to immensity ; so is the longest and the shortest
 space of time with reference to eternity. In the view
 of HIM, who is “ from everlasting to everlasting, one
 “ day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as
 “ one day. He seeth things which are not as though
 “ they were.” He is not older now, than he was
 when he created the heavens and earth : Nor will he
 be older, when they shall perish and wax old like a gar-
 ment, than he was when he spake them into existence.
 “ With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turn-
 “ ing. Thou art the same yesterday, to-day, and for
 “ ever—the King eternal and immortal.”

How short is our time compared with the duration
 of the visible creation, and of those intelligences who
 sang together when our world was formed ? “ We
 “ are of yesterday. We are strangers and sojourners
 “ on earth, as all our fathers were. One generation
 “ passeth away, and another generation cometh.”
 How many generations from Adam have already pass-
 ed away ? Where are those sojourners ? *Way-faring*
men, they turned aside to tarry for a night, and have
 been no more seen. The names of but a very few are
 preserved. Strangers, when they have made a tran-
 sient visit abroad, return home. The grave is the long
 home of all the dead, who, beyond all calculation, ex-
 ceed the number of the living.

We proposed, SECONDLY, some *illustrations* on the
 redemption of time, and to offer the *reasons* which
 enforce the duty.

Short as time is, an eternity depends on the im-
 provement of it. The more fleeting and uncertain

it is, the more weighty are the reasons for redeeming time, if the great Proprietor will render eternal retributions, according as we either neglect and waste it, or improve it with all diligence and fidelity to his glory. The redeemer of time lays the foundation of eternal life; the spendthrift of it lays the foundation of eternal death. Thus it is in the power of those, to whom time is entrusted, to make eternity either happy or miserable.

Reflect on the conduct of the children of this world, who are wise in their generation; it will give you an idea of what is meant by redeeming time. They deliberate on the means best adapted to the end they have in view, on the best manner of using them, and the best opportunities. Before they engage in any business or enterprize, they consider whether it be practicable—whether it becomes their station, and will answer their views—whether success will reward the pains and expence. In the choice of an employment for life, and with respect to a proper conduct in it, *wisdom is profitable to direct*: Without it, time, labour and cost are thrown away. The husbandman and artificer, the merchant and mariner, the statesman and philosopher are wise in their respective pursuits—observing times and seasons, and giving all diligence to obtain their object. Pursuits, just and laudable in themselves, prove unsuccessful through the carelessness, indolence, rashness, impatience or fickleness of those employed in them—not from any want of capacity, or the fault of others, or inevitable providence.

While some seasons are peculiarly favourable to secular pursuits, there are seasons altogether unfavourable, and which indeed cannot be improved. If opportunity is neglected, the ill effects, many times, are irretrievable by any after circumspection and industry.

Early habits of application to some useful business or studies—habits of prudence, sobriety and self-government;—of humanity, order, subordination, of a qui-

et and peaceable life, are of great moment. They are the course for improving time and talents to the best advantage. The beginning of life is the proper season to form every laudable habit. Much wisdom is required to discharge properly the trust of forming tender and youthful minds, according to their diversity, to think and act properly.

The above observations, applied to spiritual concerns, illustrate the subject of redeeming the time, as we are probationers for eternal retributions. *Walk in wisdom, redeeming the time.* Those act wisely, who observe the fittest seasons, employ the fittest means, and shew the most laudable industry, for the just ends of this life. Similar wisdom for the higher end of religion is recommended in the text.

We were sent into the world principally with a view to the work of our salvation. To this work we may accommodate the Saviour's words, *Your time is always ready*—In childhood and youth, manhood and age—whatever our rank in life, or talents, or circumstances—whatever our state of health or sickness, of joy or sorrow, God calleth us to his work, to do it with all our might, and while the day lasts—not discouraged by difficulties, nor dismayed by dangers—to forego a lesser present good from respect to a greater in reversion—to submit to present toil, pain and sufferings, that we may escape greater in time to come. A contemplation of the enjoyments and sufferings of the world, as they really are in themselves and in their consequences, would cure the immoderate love of earthly things. A contemplation of this transitory, uncertain life, as affording an opportunity to provide for a blessed immortality, might surely lead to a good improvement of every talent, every opportunity and advantage for the glory of God, the welfare of others, and our own progress in the divine life. This is the course to keep ready for the time of our departure out of this world. The desire of life is interwoven in our

frame. Religion does not root out this desire ; but regulates it, by instructing us in the redemption of time.

There are seasons in religion called *an acceptable time*, a time when God may be found. Such is the season of youth, of health, of a special effusion of the Spirit. The redemption of time comprises the laying hold of each of these for the purpose of fulfilling the chief end of life. Sickness and age have obstructions which do not attend on early life and firm health. Impaired powers cannot serve God with the activity and zeal of vigorous and growing faculties. The voice of religion is this, *Give me thine heart*. Those who betake to it first in distress, appear to do it by constraint, not willingly. They have a long arrear of neglected and abused time to redeem.

Men may labour for this life more than is meet, and in violation of their duty. They cannot labour too earnestly in the concerns of the life to come. They cannot be too much engaged to get this work done well. The engagedness they are wont to shew in various worldly pursuits might teach *all diligence in making their calling and election sure. Fervent in spirit serving the Lord*. Feeble, heartless exertions in religion can never succeed. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate*. Expect opposition, and be prepared to meet it. Salvation from sin is the one thing needful, and therefore the one thing to be sought after. Until it is sought first and above all, how can you think that you redeem the time ? To redeem it is to imitate the apostles, who, when many went back, and walked no more with Christ, said, *Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life*. The *others* laboured for the meat that perisheth ; but *these* for the meat of life eternal—the meat which Christ giveth. “ This is the work “ of God, that ye believe in him whom God hath “ sent”—that you hold fast the profession of him, and endure to the end. Temptations and opposition prove the faith and patience of his disciples, their la-

bour of love. It hence appears that they have root. He kept one end in view, the honour of his Father. They, being *armed with the same mind, keep the word of his patience*; and are kept by him *in the hour of temptation*. They are stablished and strengthened, so that they cannot be moved away from the faith of the gospel.

Let those whose worldly pursuits are ardent, who have a warm attachment to the things of time and sense, whose souls cleave to the dust, be ashamed that their love to Christ and the gospel is so cold—that their time and labour are spent for that which satisfieth not—that they are so unwilling to do and suffer for HIM who gave his life a ransom for their souls—that instead of redeeming time, they are wasting the day of life and grace. No part of life is given to be lost in sloth, in wasting our Lord's goods. An account must be given of every stage of it—of our temper and behaviour in every relation and condition. It can never be too early to set our face toward heaven—to be *wise to salvation*. When a foundation is laid in childhood and youth for improvement in knowledge, holiness and peace as life advanceth—when the path of the just is chosen in the morning of life, and shineth more and more unto the perfect day, this is the best redemption of time.

Were death the termination of our existence, all men must have been made in vain. The Epicurean principle might be adopted, *Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die*. But if death will decide our eternal state for bliss or woe, there are the weightiest reasons for the redemption of time. “All, all on earth
“is shadow; all beyond is substance—Yet man here
“buries all his thoughts—O time! than gold more
“precious—shall time be lost, and worse than lost, in
“anxious, fruitless cares about this life—when im-
“mortality is brought to light,” and may be secured?
“Shall the soul be swallowed up in projections” for

this life, which is as a vapour, and no care be taken to lay a good foundation for an endless existence? Good had it been for those who neglect the great salvation, had they never been born. The world and time will die together: But they who redeem time, shall, in the end of all things, obtain eternal life.

Can we be so deceived, as to think our time in this world long? We know not what a day may bring forth. Were we assured of many years, they would not be too many, in which to gather fruit to life eternal. Years to come cannot be more favourable for this purpose than the present time. The time which has been misimproved cannot be recalled. Reflections upon it call for double diligence in our main business. God forbid that more time should be lost. "Choose ye this day the Lord to serve him. Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

It was proposed, THIRDLY, to point out various *ways* and *means* conducive to the redemption of time.

Negligence, haste or indiscretion in men's secular affairs often involves them and their connections in irretrievable affliction. A prudent regulation of their various employments and interests, on the contrary, is conducive to their comfort, respectability and success. Judicious, fixed rules save time, and are indeed absolutely requisite to the proper employment of it. Regularity and harmony are the beauty of the natural world, and the ornament of civil society. No considerate man will set out on a journey, or embark on a voyage, of any length, without a previous arrangement of his affairs.

Would we well improve our time, we should be persuaded, in the first place, that the business we undertake *is proper for us*. The author of our time and advantages requireth of men *according to their several ability*. They may *not stretch* themselves *beyond their line*—may not invade the province of others, or un-

dertake business for which nature and providence have not furnished them. This would make schism in society: It must be a waste of time, a neglect of *the calling wherein God hath called* them. To approve ourselves to him, in all our ways and relations, is the first concern of every man. Let every man then *mind his own business*, and pursue it with industry and honesty. Instead of encroaching on the time and employment of others, we should, by our example and otherwise, stimulate and assist them to fulfil the duties of their place. It behoves us to eye the footsteps of providence, and govern ourselves accordingly. We may neither go before it, nor decline any work to which it appointeth us: By its appointment different orders, persons of different genius and advantages, meet together. It is in society as in the natural body. “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Those members which seem to be more feeble are necessary. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If they were all one member, where were the body. But now are they many members, yet but one body. Every man has his proper gift of God; one, in this sort; another, in that.” To violate the order of nature and providence is to rebel against their author, who requireth, as we have variously received his gifts, that we *minister the same one to another as good stewards*. Art thou called to an elevated place? refuse it not. Art thou consigned to a lower room? take it with contentment, not with shame. To ascend higher than thou art called, is an abuse of thy time and talents. Another would better occupy the place into which thou wouldst thrust thyself. The disappointment and mortification attend-

ant on being cast down from it, may forever prevent thy filling with advantage thy proper place.

Further, assign a *season* to every work, would you redeem time. “To every thing there is a season, and “a time to every purpose under heaven.” Time is lost, when too many things are undertaken at once; for nothing is finished. The way to accomplish much is to do one thing at a time. For then nothing remains to be done respecting that thing: Some other business may be attended; and much may be brought to pass. It is in the things of religion as in those of this life; one duty should not interfere with or thrust out another. The laws of God all harmonize—laws respecting our natural or civil duties, or those of piety. There are the small and the great duties. *These ought to be done; and the other ought not to be left undone.* There is therefore no interference. And if we have learnt to redeem time, we assign time and place to every duty of life and godliness.

Intimately connected with observing a season for every work, let it be noticed that *order* conduces to the proper filling up and redemption of time. He who neglects arrangement in his affairs does nothing in a proper manner. He sees neither beginning nor end—the aptitude or inaptitude of means. He that neglects to adjust his accounts for any length of time, will find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to settle them. Inattention to order obstructs and embarrasses every business. The duties of our relations and stations in life call for much of our time and thoughts; and while we walk in them as God hath called us, we are accepted of him, and approved of men.

Further, due *consideration*, preceding and accompanying every pursuit, contributes greatly to the redemption of time. No wise man undertakes to build, until he has first laid the plan of his building, and calculated the expence. No prudent government will engage in war, until it has compared its own strength

and resources with those of the enemy. Would we in earnest and to effect undertake the terms of the gospel, would we build on a *sure foundation*, and *fight the good fight of faith*, we must, in like manner, deliberate on this subject; otherwise our time and pains will be lost.

Some labour earnestly in trivial matters, while their main business suffers. They spend their talents and strength in doing little or nothing with great pains. This is the *consumption*, not the redemption, of time.

Again, observation of the course of *nature* and *providence* brings important instruction with regard to the redemption of time. Our heavenly *Father worketh hitherto*. His operation in his natural and moral kingdom is unintermitting: He never slumbereth. Numerous examples in the animal creation teach man discretion and industry.

You may let no time be *lost*, would you merit the character of those who redeem it. Those are wise and happy, who have learnt the art of improving every portion of time to some good account—to whom every business and occurrence, or society, or solitude, prove instructive in their duty to God, or man, or their own souls—who make every pursuit in life subservient to their supreme interest—who are every day *pressing forward to the prize of their high calling, waiting on the Lord, and renewing their strength*. They have learnt the most valuable use of the smiles and frowns of providence, and improve every price in their hands to get or do good, to “lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.”

Hence it is important to begin life under an impressive sense of the high value of time, as a precious gift of God. In him we live, and move, and have our being. He requireth *the first ripe fruit*. “In the morning sow thy seed, and at evening withhold not thy hand.” If the worth of time is not realized in youth, there is much reason to fear that it may not be in the

after stages of life. On the most favourable supposition, would you have these stages filled with the sins and vanities of your youth? What excuse is there for thus wasting and abusing your early period? so acceptable a period?

Born and educated under gospel light, what pretext can there be for putting off till the eleventh hour the work given you to do? It is impossible that you should repent the early dedication of your time and advantages to the Giver of life and of every good gift, on whom your well-being, in time and through eternity, entirely depend. But a neglect to do so can be expiated only by bitter repentance, if indeed a space for repentance may be given you.

Moderation in all worldly pursuits and concerns—in labour or rest, or amusements, or attire, or modes of living, conduces to the redemption of time: It disposeth alike to the duties of our general and particular calling. Religion neither forbids nor impedes a just attention to things of this life. Such attention is commanded by religion. But certainly we should be without *anxious* care. We should not be *overcharged with things of this life*. We should *seek first the kingdom of God*. Other things should not thrust out or interrupt the exercises of piety. All diligence should be given to make our calling and our election sure.

It conduces to the redemption of time to postpone *small* matters to *great*. When there is an interference, the weightiest must be preferred to the least, and must always have the greatest stress laid upon them.

As a further mean of redeeming time, an humble and daily *address to the bearer of prayer*, morning and evening, is recommended. We need his guidance, help and protection continually, and in every thing. On him it entirely depends whether this or that undertaking shall prosper; or whether we shall live, and do this or that. He guideth those who seek his direction, and giveth liberally to those who ask of him spi-

ritual wisdom. In all thy ways therefore acknowledge him. Beginning and closing each day with God, waiting on him thro' the business and occurrences of the day, committing your work and your way to him, you will be led in a safe and plain path—will proceed with cheerfulness, zeal and fidelity in all the duties of life, and sustain its sorrows and miseries with patience and humble trust. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Consider this as your privilege no less than duty. This habitual religion, *setting the Lord always before you*, living as in his presence, will conduce to regularity in all your concerns. Inclination will be an incentive to whatever he shall require of you in your relations and station of life. The time proper for devotion does not retard, but facilitates and sets forward, the just business of every man, be that business what it may.

A *decided* choice of God is unalterably requisite to the redemption of time. *Indecision* and *duplicity* are the greatest abuse of time, and an affront to all principle. The laws of morality are eternal and immutable. The relation and duty of the creature to his Creator are immutable. The author of our faith and his terms are the same for ever. The double-minded and irresolute, halting between variant opinions, fixing in none, are in a state equally unhappy and dangerous to themselves, and opprobrious to the cause of virtue. They consume time in deliberating on a question which should be immediately decided—on the decision of which consequences of the highest moment depend. If faith and scepticism are equally balanced, the former has no support under the evils of life, or expectation of death; and may as well be openly renounced as hold the mind in perpetual suspense. What is there in the gospel which makes you doubt? Its principles have been confirmed by the same works as those of nature: Its hope is sure and steadfast. Shall precious days and

years be consumed in hesitation whether to choose and fix in this matter—even in the only thing which can make life comfortable, and death happy? Be determined then to embrace and hold fast this excellent religion, as the anchor of your hope, would you redeem time.

As a further mean of redeeming time, do to *others* whatsoever ye would that they should do to *you*. By making their welfare your own, you will fulfil an important end of your existence. By the cultivation of the friendly and social affections, you will increase your own enjoyments, fulfil the obligations of your various relations and connections, and take the surest course to meet with the return of kind affections and offices from all with whom you have intercourse. In doing good, you will imitate the Parent of the universe, and the Redeemer of mankind. Time is spent in the best manner, when we live and die not to ourselves, but to the Lord—when we serve his will in our generation. What is this, but to do good in our lives? “Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others.”

Let this mind be in you which was also in CHRIST JESUS. Of him you will learn the greatest condescension and meekness, humility and charity. He was swayed by the purest views of glory to God and friendship to men. He went about doing good. Hence he could appeal, “Father, I have finished the work thou gavest me to do.” He was intent on doing this work while it was day. His life was full of benevolence. Whatsoever his disciples do is in his name—in imitation of his pattern, in obedience to his authority, influenced by his grace, and with a view to the divine acceptance and glory through him.

Finally, a frequent *review* of life would lead to the redemption of time. Recollection, self-examination and self-communion are most essential to this purpose. The conduct of life should be a subject of enquiry eve-

ry day: But it would answer a very valuable end to set apart particular seasons for a more full enquiry into the tenour of our lives, our aims and principles, our present views and exercises—to the end that our whole life, whether long or short, may be supremely directed to the use for which it was given.

It should be kept in mind, that the redemption of time involves an *habitual* and an *actual* preparation for eternity. Are we bound to an eternal world? will our state in that world be the consequence of our character and conduct in this? May any day or hour close our mortal life? We cannot have redeemed time, unless we have acquainted ourselves with God, and are at peace—in other words, are prepared for our change by death, and the judgment which will succeed. This preparation implies that the subject of it is passed from death to life—that the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is within him—that he liveth by the faith of the Son of God—that the time past sufficeth to have walked according to the course of this world—and that the rest of his time in the flesh is devoted to God. Should death overtake him at any time, in any manner, he will then enter into the joy of his Lord.

This *general* or *habitual* preparation differs, however, from what we understand by a *present, actual* readiness. Death may come to a good man *at an hour of which he is not aware*. At the midnight cry, *Behold, the bridegroom cometh*, the wise virgins were found slumbering, and had occasion to trim their lamps. Having done this, they were actually ready, as they before were habitually. The exhortation to good men is, *Be ye also ready—always ready. Set thy house in order for death. Watch, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping*. Both our secular and spiritual concerns should be kept in order. Before he is aware, temptation from within or without may allure a Christian. He has need to *gird up his loins, to be sober, and watch unto prayer*.

To keep the mind directly and constantly fixed on our eternal concerns and final hour, is impossible. Were it possible, it would unfit us for the duties of our stations and relations. To give attention to these is our indispensable duty. Still the things of our peace should employ our thoughts, when we lie down and rise up, go forth and come in. Their weight and influence should be apparent at all times, in all places and circumstances. In such a state of mind, all his concerns being in such a posture, under such regulation, the good man, when notified of approaching death, retires within himself, disentangled from worldly cares, and is entirely devoted to the contemplation of his change; and the invisible, eternal scenes opening upon him.

The psalmist prayed, *Remember how short my time is.* If our time is short, and our work great, no part of our time should hang heavy upon us—we should be busy in our particular and general calling all our life long, from its first dawn to its evening ray. The young have the Saviour's example, calling on them to *be about their heavenly Father's business*—to attend it *while it is day*, ever mindful that *the night of death cometh, when no man can work.* Put the case that they may be losers in the present world by being assiduous in the concerns of another and better; this would, notwithstanding, be the truest wisdom. Things seen and temporal are unworthy to be compared with things unseen and eternal. The sufferings of this transitory state are unworthy to be compared with the far more exceeding eternal weight of glory. The husbandman ploweth all day to sow, and waiteth with long patience for the harvest to reward his toil. The spiritual harvest, at the end of the world, is far more joyful and bright, than that of the husbandman returning with joy from his fields, bringing his sheaves with full grain. “Be ye therefore patient, stablish your hearts: For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” Be intent on the concerns of your high calling. “Be not weary in

“well-doing: For in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not.” Your spiritual and immortal hopes are far too dear to be postponed and sacrificed to the things of this empty and passing world. Suffer not these things to detain you from the wiser choice, or to obstruct and entangle you in working out your own salvation. In this chief concern of all orders and ages no pains or circumspection can be too great.

The voice of God’s providence constantly unites with that of his word, calling upon us to give the more earnest heed to the present subject. Our intimate friends, our dearest connections, languish and die to quicken us in redeeming time. When earthly ties are broken, when our connections in this world are lessened, where, but in religion, shall we find succour? This assures us, that the dead do not sleep eternally—that they shall rise again—that this mortal shall put on immortality, when earth and time shall be no more. Why should we be slothful? It highly concerns us to “shew the same diligence unto the full assurance of hope unto the end,” as those “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” With them time is closed. They have *received the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls*. Why should we not, by patience in well doing, by always abounding in the work of the Lord, *look for the blessed hope*? Why are any loth to meditate on the end of all men? why backward to lay to heart instances of mortality from day to day—examples of the frailty of man at his best estate? why slow to believe that the time is at hand? why unwilling to look into eternity? unwilling to examine into their own preparation to exchange worlds? unwilling to cherish, in the day of health and prosperity, the just sentiments which are excited by the day of adversity, sickness and death?

I would stir up myself and all my hearers to look forward to the end of time. My own time, in the course of nature, must be much shorter than that of

far the most who hear me. My daily and great concern is to possess the character of the steward, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching. May you, my brethren, whether young or old, or in the midst of life, duly appreciate time in this your day. You are hastening to the coming of the day of God. The redemption of time will be your best preparation for that day. Be diligent then that you may be found of him in peace. May God give you all grace duly to estimate and improve life and the price in your hands. AMEN.

SERMON XXII.

REFLECTIONS ON DEATH.

GENESIS iii. 19.

-----FOR DUST THOU ART, AND UNTO DUST SHALT THOU RETURN.



“**G**OD formed man of the dust of the ground, “ and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and “ man became a living soul. And God planted a garden eastward in Eden ; and there he put the man “ whom he had formed, to dress it and to keep it.-- “ And the Lord God commanded the man ; saying, “ Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat : “ But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “ thou shalt not eat of it : For in the day that thou “ eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Man violated the prohibition, which was the only test of fidelity to his Creator, the only condition of immortality. For that violation, the doom was passed upon him ; *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* The above recited passage is a summary history of his formation, his situation and employment in Eden, the condition on which he held life from the Creator ; and the threatened penalty to transgression. It is also a general comment upon the text.

The scriptures uniformly represent death as man's return to the dust, out of which he was taken. Then the dust returns to the earth as it was. Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

We propose from the words some *reflections on DEATH*—its nature and extent—its cause—the evils connected with it—and the improvement to be made of the divine decree dooming man to return to dust.

First, Of the nature and extent of this doom. *Unto dust shalt thou return.*

The *animal* part only of our frame was formed of the ground. This only returns to dust. In respect to this we must “say to corruption, Thou art my father : To the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister.” This animal part “consumes away in the grave. The worm is spread under it, and the worms cover” it. “That which befalleth the beasts befall-eth the sons of men ;” as die *those*, so die *these* : “They have all one breath. All go to one place. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” By disease, decay, or any accident, their breath goeth forth, and they return to the earth.

Thus much is common to man and the lower animals. But in another view there is an essential difference. “The spirit of man goeth upward ; the spirit of beasts goeth downward to the earth,” perisheth with the body.

With respect to man, the spirit shall return to God who gave it, the moment that the dust shall return to the earth as it was. To this “spirit the inspiration of the Almighty hath given understanding.” In reference to this spirit “God created man in his own image, and gave him dominion over the fish, and fowls, and cattle, and creeping things, and over all the earth.” All God’s works are marvellous ; but especially the human soul, the image of the Deity, capable of the contemplation, service and enjoyment of him : The exercise of its faculties, far from having a necessary dependence on the animal powers, may, for aught that appears, be most vigorous when the body is senseless, as in sleep ; or when the senses are otherwise suspended, as in a trance or extacy ; like that of Paul,

when he *knew not whether he were in the body or out.*— And if in these, or any similar instances, the powers of the soul are most active, what presumption is there that they are destroyed, or even suspended, when the body returns to its original dust? What presumption is there that souls departed are in a state of entire torpor? or that death is a perpetual sleep?

The state at and after death is indeed unknown. We are ignorant after what manner separate spirits perceive and act, enjoy or suffer, admitting the reality of these things. None come from the other world to inform us on these points. But an opinion prevailed among the heathen, that there is something within man which never dies. They expected to exist hereafter, in mind if not in body. The conscience within them suggested the sentiment of future account, future rewards and punishments. They saw that death was the destruction of the body; but did not suppose that the soul perished with the body. They had no knowledge of a resurrection; still they believed an after existence—at least the more intelligent heathen did so; not however without some doubts.

The immortality of the soul has been argued from its faculties and the enjoyments suited to these faculties; its capacity for endless improvement, and thirst for immortality; its hopes and fears. But the believers of revelation have not occasion for these arguments. They know assuredly, that though the body is mortal, the soul is not. This “vital spark of heavenly flame” allies man to the angels and to God.

That part of man’s frame, which sprang from the dust, and allies him to the animal creation, was not *originally* destined to return to dust. “For God made not death; neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. He created all things that they might have their being—and there was no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon earth. For God created man to be immortal,

“and made him to be an image of his own eternity.”²³ The penalty threatened to disobedience was an implied promise that man should not die, if he continued upright as God made him. The tree of life, in the midst of the earthly paradise, was an emblem of the immortality for which man was designed by his Creator. After his fall, this tree was guarded every way by *cherubims and a flaming sword, lest he should put forth his hand, and take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.*

Death hath reigned from Adam to this day over all mankind, with but two exceptions in almost six thousand years : And it will reign over all his future descendants, except those who shall be found alive at the second coming of our Lord. These “shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.” This change will be similar to that which the raised dead will experience—a change from corruption to incorruption, from mortal to immortality—from the fallen image of the earthy, to the glorious image of the heavenly Adam. Not only all *ages* and *orders*, but all *characters*, return to dust. No relation or conformity to, or interest in him who hath abolished death, and brought incorruptibility to light, exempts from the sentence, “Unto dust shalt thou return.—“There is no discharge in that war.” The wise and righteous die, and see corruption, no less than the fool and the wicked. *Precious as the death of the former is in the sight of the Lord, they are under the sentence of death as well as the latter. Their victory over sin and the grave does not exempt them from the power of the last enemy. Their earthly house shall be dissolved, in one way or another. One house is appointed for all the living,*

Thus extensive is the dominion of death. We need not point out its various forms. Let us attend to its cause.

Sin first entered into the world : Death followed as the effect. Had not the former entered, the latter

had been unknown, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin”—even by his first act of disobedience. “In Adam all die.” Those, who have not sinned after the similitude of his transgression, die—those who have no knowledge of good and evil, as well as others. Death, in every instance, is the execution of the sentence passed in the day of man’s fall—the penalty threatened beforehand in case of transgression. Whatever the more immediate cause of death may be in any instances, the original and universal cause is that we have mentioned.

Whether there was or was not a deadly quality in the fruit of the prohibited tree, is an enquiry of little moment. If that fruit naturally wrought death in our progenitors, when they had taken of it, God gave it the deadly quality. If otherwise, he connected this consequence with their disobedience; so that it was as sure as if it had naturally followed. The sentence of death might have been executed immediately: But, though their doom was denounced that same day, Adam lived till the birth of Lamech, the eighth generation from the first pair, and the father of Noah. The longevity of the antediluvians, and the gradual contraction of human life after the flood till the time of Moses, is rather to be resolved into the pleasure of the Sovereign of life, than to be ascribed to any natural cause. I mention the time of Moses; for the term of human life appears not to have been reduced since his day, when seventy or eighty was the period set to it. If the contraction of life had been owing to some natural cause, must not that cause have continued to operate alike after the time of Moses as before? If, in the space between him and the flood, it was reduced from almost a thousand to less than an hundred years—if the reduction had still continued in like proportion thro’

more than three times that space, what must have been the present term of man's life? rather must not the whole race have been extinct? We need not therefore enquire into the natural cause of the abbreviation of human life. *There is an appointed time to man upon the earth.* The giver of life hath, in all generations, *set the bounds which he cannot pass.* The few, who exceed three score and ten or four score, find, for the most part, that this late period is *labour and sorrow*—languor of mind and body—a period in which *is no pleasure, and desire fails*—which naturally prefigeth that the dust is returning to the earth as it was.

When our first parents had rebelled, they were stripped of a radiant glory, the symbol of the divine presence, which surrounded them in their innocence. “They saw that they were naked.” *An horror of great darkness* succeeded. They would have fled from God, their exceeding great joy before they had sinned; but become their terror through their fall. They anticipated their doom. They saw no ray of light, no gleam of hope. “They heard the voice of the Lord “God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; “and hid themselves from the presence of the Lord “God among the trees of the garden.” The man was ready to cast the blame of his transgression upon God. The woman cast the blame of her's upon the serpent. He was deceived by her, and she by the tempter. Each had a distinct doom. The serpent or tempter, who, through his subtilty, beguiled Eve, received his first. “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed “above all cattle, and dust shalt thou eat all the days “of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee “and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: “It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Next the woman was doomed to great sorrow in bearing children, and placed under the rule of the man. Then he, for hearkening unto her, who first transgressed, had the ground cursed for his sake. “In for-

“row shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground.” The woman’s peculiar sorrow, the man’s toil, the briers and thorns which the earth plentifully produces, are so many monuments of the fall; but especially so is death. Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Other evils are connected with this sentence—as a variety of bodily pains and diseases. For “in this tabernacle we groan, being burdened. Man who is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble.” The mortal body, which we derive from the fall, unavoidably subjects us to peculiar conflicts and temptations, mental darkness and perturbation. In this body of death, there is “a law which warreth against the law of the mind, and bringeth into captivity to the law of sin which is in the members.” The reign of sin in this mortal body is a deplorable proof of our native depravity—that we are, by the condition of our birth, polluted. Fallen Adam “begat a son in his own likeness, after his image. Dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” The necessity of being born *again*, born of the *Spirit* in distinction from being born of the *flesh*, proves our depravity. “The old man is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” and therefore must be *put off*; and the *new man put on, which after God* (after the image in which he first made man) *is created in righteousness and true holiness*. This new man is “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works. The old man is crucified with him, and the body of sin destroyed.” The new birth, the creation of a new man and destruction of the old, a renovation of the mind, all suppose

the loss of the image of God originally stamped on man's soul; the withdrawment of his gracious presence; a state of moral death. The gospel uniformly addresseth mankind as by nature diseased, enslaved, blind and naked, without strength, dead in trespasses, lost, perishing. It provides a remedy for the diseases of their hearts, freedom from their bondage, sight for the blind, robes for the naked, power for the weak, life for the dead in sin, salvation for the lost and perishing.

The depravity derived from Adam extends to all the bodily members, appetites and passions; and to all the powers of the soul, the understanding, will and affections. Those who are born of God, yet experience that "sin dwelleth in them. The spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit. Those who have received the first fruits of the Spirit groan within themselves, waiting for deliverance from the bondage of corruption." Yea, "the whole creation groaneth."

When we speak of the imputation of Adam's first sin, we mean not that his *personal* act was the act of all his posterity, or that they are all to be viewed in him in such sort as to be *one person* with him. For if so, it could be said of none of his descendants, that they "have not sinned after the similitude of his transgression." If they are not one person in him, then they have each one a distinct personality. Personal qualities, from their nature, cannot be transferred; but are appropriate to the individual. Adam's personal guilt therefore was his own; it could not be the personal guilt of all, or any one, of his posterity, any more than the personal righteousness of the second Adam can be transferred to believers. But by a divine constitution, all the progeny of Adam are so involved in his fall as to come into existence under condemnation. His first offence is visited upon them, as belonging to the family of which he was the head. They are born under the

law of sin and death—a natural darkness of understanding, and alienation from the life of God—with native propensities to wander from the paths of truth and righteousness as soon as capable of moral action. Hence there is none righteous, no not one. Such propensities, such seeds of sin, apparent in all generations from the fall, without a single exception, prove a common, universal depravity. “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners—judgment came upon all men to condemnation. Even so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Believers in Jesus are *made the righteousnesses of God in him*—absolved from the condemnation by Adam.

Thus we understand the imputation or reckoning both of sin and righteousness. Though merit and demerit are personal things, this hinders not but they may have great extent and effect on the state of others. The haters of God transmit to the third and fourth generation the fruits of their hatred. The lovers of him transmit yet further the blessed fruits of their piety. And if the character of immediate parents is thus visited with judgments or mercies on their children, why might not the fall of the parents of the human race be visited upon their descendants as above stated? Before their doom was denounced, it was promised that the woman’s seed should bruise the serpent’s head—the seed who came to destroy the works of the devil, who had the power of death—the seed who abolished death, and who imparteth the Spirit of life, which maketh free from sin and death—the seed under whose reign every curse shall cease. This Deliverer was promised in the day man fell, and before the doom was pronounced, Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return. The continuance of his life after he had transgressed, and the existence of his posterity, may then be referred to the second Adam. Under these circumstances the original sentence of death was passed. Mercy was intermixed with judgment. Our condem-

nation by the first man, who was of the earth, earthy, is accompanied with the hope of justification by the second man, the Lord from heaven—the hope that this vile body shall be changed, and fashioned like unto his glorious body.

That Adam's lapse greatly affects the whole human race, in body and soul, in state and character, hath ever been and must be confessed. How far the effects extend is impossible for us to say. The scriptures evidently favour the opinion, that we shall exist hereafter, not in our *relative* capacity, but in our *personal* character. None, therefore, will come into condemnation hereafter for the sin which brought death into the world, further than they personally consent to that sin. All who refuse the Saviour, will be condemned at the great day, not because they fell in Adam; but "because they believe not in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

How beings made upright could fall is a question very difficult to solve. Such have fallen, both on earth and in heaven. It would be presumptuous to say, that God is the *cause* of sin—that its existence was owing to his immediate interposition and efficiency. He *cannot be tempted with evil, and tempteth no being*. The creature *who committeth sin* is the only author and cause of it. All that we know in regard to the introduction of sin into our world is, That the serpent, called the devil and Satan, and probably the instigator and head of the revolt in heaven, tempted our first parents to rebel. God had expressly charged them, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat;" and annexed to the prohibition this penalty, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The tempter said, "Ye shall not surely die: For in the day ye eat thereof, God doth know, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Through this *subtilty* he *beguiled Eve*. She saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was

“pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make
 “one wife; and she took of the fruit thereof, and did
 “eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and
 “he did eat.” Thus they presumed that God was a
 liar, and that the tempter was the oracle of truth.

Thus sin entered into our world; and the consequence was the denunciation, Unto dust shalt thou return. Here is the source of death, and of all our woe. We know no more of the origin of evil. We here see that moral evil is the cause of natural. Man was made upright: He might have continued so. He might have believed God, and resisted the devil; but he did not. He sinned through unbelief. He believed a lie in the mouth of the tempter. God did not forcibly interpose to prevent his fall; but “left him
 “to the freedom of his own will.” His duty, the condition of life, could not have been more plainly declared than it was. A single instance of forbearance, in the plainest case, would have ensured him immortality: But, through the envy and artifice of the devil, “lust conceived, and brought forth sin; and sin, when
 “finished, brought forth death.” Every tree in the garden of God, with a single exception, was freely tendered to our progenitors; but Satan and lust joined to entice, and they could not submit to one restriction. Ever since their fatal fall, their progeny have inherited from them an unaccountable propensity to forbidden fruit—unmindful that their adversary the devil instigates and is ready to devour them. We are no further informed from the scriptures respecting the origin of evil; and further than the scriptures have informed us on this point, we shall *not enquire wisely*.*

* “If any one should enquire why Adam was exposed to a temptation, to which it was foreseen he would yield; or why his descendants are included in the consequences of his frailty, it must be replied, that these are questions which human reason can never solve. But it is very important to remark, that the difficulties which they involve are not peculiar to the subject of the fall of man; “they attach to the whole of the moral government of the Almighty, and meet us at every step, whenever we presume to enquire into the motives of his conduct.”

IMPROVEMENT.

Hath the divine decree doomed all mankind to return to dust for the first apostacy? Are the unavoidable evils of life and human depravity to be referred to

"As a created being, man is necessarily dependent; as a moral being, endued with liberty of action, he must be responsible. There could be no obedience before a law was promulgated, no responsibility before an obligation was imposed. The law which the Almighty gave to Adam was, *Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of a particular tree*. The prohibition was a test of his moral obedience to his Creator, and it was accompanied with a penalty to enforce the observance of it: it was simple, explicit, and appropriate to the situation of our first parents.

That the Almighty should permit the existence of a being constantly employed in producing evil," (for such is the character of the tempter) "is one amongst other instances of the divine dispensations, on which human intellect shews no light; and revelation, which affirms the fact, affords no information of the motive or design of the Almighty.

We readily admit the supposition, that there are beings of a superior order to men; all of whom, whatever their endowments may be, must stand at an infinite distance from the perfection of the Creator. As imperfect, we conceive them liable to error and transgression"—in which case their fall may involve "a degradation of nature, proportionate to the magnitude of their original endowments.

The moral government of the Almighty may, for what we know, be administered more or less, through the agency of spiritual beings, invisible to us, whose influence may be allowed to operate, in a greater or less degree, on our minds: They may be the instruments of temptation as well as of protection, prompting suggestions to evil as well as good.

"Temptations of the same nature" as that proposed to our progenitors "are, in the dispensations of providence, frequently proposed to us, as trials of our virtue and obedience; and there can be no difficulty in" their "temptation, but what results from their peculiar situation. The practice of self-denial is essential to the existence of religion. We are all sensible of the fatal consequences to which unrestrained passions must lead: We feel that they are subversive of our happiness as well as that of society: and the frailty of Adam and Eve contains a lesson of the highest importance to all generations. It teaches us also, that a desire of knowledge may be extended too far, and warns us against the presumption of investigating the counsels of God: It instructs us that obedience to his will is our first duty; and that we are bound to perform it, without enquiring into the motives of his conduct.

The corruption and depravity of mankind are certain. The cause of it assigned by Moses, leads to the most important consequences, whilst the attempted solutions of man lead to nothing, and afford neither consolation nor improvement. The account given by Moses of the fall of man is the foundation of the Christian religion. To renew him in the image of God, in which he was originally created, was the great object of our Saviour's incarnation.

The whole series of prophecy through ages, is connected both with the fall of man, and with the appearance of the Messiah—His coming, his character, his actions and sufferings are detailed with a particularity that identifies him, and excludes the possibility of the application of them to any other person who has ever appeared in the world."

that source ? We learn that sin is an evil of the greatest magnitude. This clearly follows, if it is the true cause of all other evils—of pain, sorrow, sickness and death—of every curse on man and beast, and on the earth. It is a deadly poison—the disease and death of the soul. It separates from God : It takes peace from the mind—is inconsistent with the enjoyment of ourselves, and makes the author of our being a terror to us. *If a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him ?* The sinner sets himself against the holy nature, law and government of God—forsakes the fountain of living waters, and hews out to himself broken cisterns. He seeks death in the error of his life. God cannot view him but with abhorrence. For he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. He hath awfully manifested his holy displeasure against it ever since its first existence : It banished angels from heaven, and man from the earthly paradise. The universal reign of death, the degeneracy derived from the fall, all the judgments which have been and are abroad, the groaning of the whole creation, proclaim the real nature of sin. *They who are far from God shall perish.* Do not once imagine that sin is a small evil—that any sin against the great God is small. All sin is against him, and against our own souls.

The sin of human nature calls for humiliation. We have fallen in the first Adam, from original rectitude and immortality to corruption, weakness, infamy, and a carnal mind, which is enmity against God. Our original is shame. *The whole world is become guilty before God.* Surely we have cause to lay our hand on our mouth, and our mouth in the dust. “ O Lord God ! thou art righteous in all that is brought upon us for our great trespass.” Man hath joined with apostate spirits to subvert the order of the universe. “ We are ashamed and blush to lift up our faces to thee our God. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us.”

Let not the offspring of the dust presume to “ reply
 “ against God. Woe unto him who striveth with his
 “ Maker ! Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds
 “ of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashion-
 “ eth it, What makest thou ?”

Must our earthly frame return to dust ? Let this
 thought hide pride from man. Shall he glory in any
 ornaments of person ? any exterior beauty or distinc-
 tion ? There is no distinction in the grave, the house
 appointed for all the living. “ Ashes to ashes, dust to
 “ dust” is the common doom of all. All must see cor-
 ruption. Their flesh shall be clothed with worms, and
 clods of dust.

Our subject enforceth divers counsels and cautions
 in scripture against undue human dependence, and
 disproportionate earthly hopes. “ Cease ye from man,
 “ whose breath is in his nostrils. Put not your trust
 “ in the son of man, in whom is no help. His breath
 “ goeth forth, he returneth to his earth. Set your
 “ affection on things above.” Creatures disappoint
 our expectation. The world and things of it pass
 away.

Blessed is the man whose hope the Lord is. “ He hath
 “ not dealt with us after our sins. Of the Lord’s mer-
 “ cy we are not consumed. Like as a father pitieth
 “ his children, so he pitieth them who fear him, and
 “ hope in his mercy.” He formed us “ of clay, and
 “ knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are
 “ but dust. As for man, his days are as grass ; as a
 “ flower of the field so he flourisheth : For the wind
 “ passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof
 “ shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord
 “ is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear
 “ him. Thy loving-kindness is better than life :
 “ Therefore the children of men put their trust under
 “ the shadow of thy wings.” He hath provided an
 all-sufficient Saviour for fallen man. Our only relief
 and hope is in the second Adam. He hath made “ re-

“conciliation for iniquity, and abolished death,” having been “delivered for our offences, and raised for our justification.” *The last Adam is a quickening spirit.* He hath procured more blessings for believers in him than the first lost. *There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus*—who have his *Spirit of life* in them. “The gift of God through Jesus Christ is eternal life. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” The second Adam hath not exempted his disciples from the common mortality of mankind; but they are subjected to it in hope—the hope of bearing his image in glory and immortality. “He must reign till all enemies are put under his feet: The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” At his call, all who sleep in the dust shall awake. The dead shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; some to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation.” Of the former number are all *who sleep in Jesus*, all who are by faith in him “justified from all things”—all who are “crucified with Christ, dead to sin, but alive unto God”—who live in the flesh by the faith of Christ. In the latter class are all who believe not in him whom God hath sent—who say by their practice, *We will not have this man to reign over us.*

Men find means to exclude from their mind the thought of death, though no event is more certain or more interesting. They can act as though assured of immortal youth. The time when, and manner how, we shall die is concealed from us, that we may attend the duties of this life, and be always ready for our change. “Every man, at his best state, is altogether vanity.” Let none presume that they themselves are exemptions from the frailty of which millions and millions have been examples. Whoever reflects as he ought on the irreversible decree, *Unto dust thou shalt return*, and on the evils of the world, will stand in awe, and not sin, make diligent enquiry into his spiri-

tual state ; be quickened to a faithful discharge of the duties of life ; attend to the voice of God in his word and providence ; and be in subjection to the Father of spirits, that he may live forever. To improve this mortal life in such a manner as will bear a review at death—to consider our eternal state as dependent on our improvement of this probationary state, implies a like comparative indifference to earthly things, as strangers and foreigners manifest to the country where they occasionally sojourn. Great is the danger of neglecting a present opportunity—of indulging a false hope—of dying in sin.

To those who have not been enlightened by the beams of the Sun of righteousness, the shadow of death is gross darkness. His rays dispel the darkness, so that the believer in him is persuaded that death will be the dawn of an eternal day. He considers himself as a child of immortality ; and lays up in store for himself a good foundation for eternal life. Habitual consideration of the hour of departure, and care to be prepared for it, is to be wise in the estimation of all the inhabitants of heaven, and in the judgment of the only wise God.

The unlimited dominion of death, the lusts and passions of men, and all the fruits of sin, witness the holiness and justice of God, and the wisdom of his government. He hath taken occasion, from the apostacy, to shew the riches of his mercy in the sufferings and death of his own Son. Thanks be unto God, who giveth the victory over death through Jesus Christ our Lord. To him let us refer the time and manner of our death ; ever mindful, that the spirit returns to him when the dust returns to the earth as it was.

Every death admonishes us to prepare for our own, to prepare for the coming of our Lord. Darkness and the shadow of death veil human prospects at the early and most eligible stages of life. Why should things seen swallow up our thoughts ? Why should we be solicit-

ous when or how we shall die? What properly concerns us, is, to wait our appointed time, until our change shall come, that we may die the death of the righteous.

O death! it is thine to “tread out empire, and to “quench the stars.” *The last enemy to be destroyed*, thy wide dominion shall end with the frame of nature. He who tasted death for the human race hath set bounds to thy sway. He is *alive for evermore*; and hath *the keys of hell and of death*. He *redeemeth from death*, and *ransometh from the power of the grave*. “O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave, I will be thy destruction. The sea, and death, and hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them.” The heavens, earth and elements shall be dissolved. New heavens and a new earth shall be created: And *time shall be no longer*.

SERMON XXIII.

JUDGMENT.

ECCLESIASTES, xi. 9.

—— BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL
BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT.



THESE words, though alike applicable to all stages of life, are immediately addressed to the young. In a course of sermons to this class of my hearers, on various subjects, the last was on *death*. To remind and assure them of a judgment to come, an event equally certain as death, the text now read has been chosen for the subject of present contemplation.

The evidence from scripture of this solemn and weighty doctrine is clear and incontrovertible. But we will attend, *first*, to some considerations which the light of NATURE suggests on the subject.

First, the sense of *moral obligation* and capacity for religion in man shews that he is accountable to a moral Governour and Judge. He can enquire, "Where is God my Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?" Why is man thus distinguished, but that he might glorify God, and pursue an happiness fitted to his elevated rank? He was, doubtless, designed for enjoyments as much superior to those of sense as he excels the animal creatures in the scale of beings. He can survey the frame of nature, which declareth the wisdom, power and Godhead of its author—can survey his own frame. *The spirit within him is the can-*

dle of the Lord, so that he discerneth between good and evil, revieweth the past, looketh forward to the future, and observeth the aspect which his temper and conduct have on his own state and that of others. He can cultivate divine and social affections. He feels that he is a probationer. The conscience within him summoneth him to its bar; assuring him that he hath acted under the eye of a Being who *loveth righteousness*, and is of *purer eyes than to behold iniquity*; who *will judge the righteous and the wicked*. Hence these opposite characters, on the review of themselves, have inward joy and hope, or grief and fear. No abstract view of the beauty of virtue or deformity of vice can yield the perfect peace which the virtuous man feels, or the perturbation which agitates the vicious. They are conscious that they *have to do with* a Being to whom *all things are naked and open*—who will reward the good, and not suffer the bad to go unpunished.

The heathen expected rewards and punishments in another world according to men's behaviour in this, as appears from the places of happiness and misery which they contrived for men after death. All their religious rites shew the same thing. To enforce civil subjection, their legislators had recourse to the retributions of another world. The man who saith, *There is no God*, at least fears there is one, who weighs his actions and principles.

Some maintain, that God is the only agent in the universe. Yet every intelligent creature feels that he himself is an agent, the author of his own volitions and actions; and therefore accountable for them. He is considered and treated by others as an agent, and views and treats other intelligent creatures as such. Conscience does not applaud or reproach us for our volitions and actions, considered merely or principally as they affect our outward state in this world: For when we obey its dictates, at the expence of worldly reproach and sufferings, we most approve our conduct upon re-

fection: We connect the approbation of conscience with that of God. How much soever men's worldly interest may be promoted by violating their conscience, its reproaches, whenever they reflect, shew their folly. They therefore believe that they must give account to God.

Secondly, The objects of God's love or hatred are not *distinguished*, uniformly, by the present distribution of his providence.

Retributions, doubtless, take place in this world in more instances, and to an higher degree, than we perceive. In many cases we find that we had misjudged. The presumption is, that in a much greater number our judgment is wrong. We judge from what appears, and frequently from detached parts of a character. It is easier, in some cases, to determine, from appearances, who are vicious than who are virtuous. All who may seem to be virtuous are not so. The character of the upright may also, from various causes, lie under suspicion. Moreover, happiness or misery depends much more on the state of the mind than on outward circumstances. A little with virtue and inward peace is to be preferred to an abundance with vice and vexation of spirit. The circumstances which some may consider as eligible and enviable, others would neither desire nor enjoy. Let it be added, there are various instances wherein those, whose sins are open beforehand, are signally punished upon earth, and the eminently virtuous as signally rewarded.

These things notwithstanding, no certain and manifest difference is made between the righteous and the wicked. Some of the openly profligate and impious flourish in health and affluence, are in a manner exempt from outward crosses, and (so far as appears) from inward perturbation. Others, who are the excellent of the earth, live in poverty and neglect—are persecuted, it may be, for their firm and unblemished virtue. Or they are exercised with acute pains, of long

continuance---or linger away life by slow consumption---or are in great mental darkness, *subject to bondage all their life time through fear of death.* Shall any who live and die impenitent finally escape with impunity? Shall the hope of any upright man be finally cut off? The supposition destroys the foundation of virtue, and opens the flood-gates of vice. Moral government requires, that, in *every* case, a difference be made between the righteous and the wicked. It requires also a further difference according to the progress of moral agents in virtue or vice, according to the talents which they have improved or abused.

This difference could not be made in the present state without a constant miracle. The state of individuals is intimately connected with that of society. Good and bad are common sharers in public blessings and calamities. The same remark is yet more applicable to nearer connections. A virtuous head of a family cannot be sure, cannot engage, that his household shall walk in his ways: If any of them make themselves vile, and fall under the judgments of God, he is a sufferer with them: He must be much affected with their crimes, whether any signal punishment is or is not inflicted on them. The connections of life must be dissolved, in order to a perfect retribution. The promiscuous allotments of providence have, in all ages, afforded much exercise to pious men. Not finding their rest in this world, they have acquiesced in the hope of a better, where their present labours, sufferings and temptations shall be recompensed.

3. The soul of man ardently *thirsts for immortality.* The supposition that it ceases to exist upon the dissolution of the body, would take away all its present peace and joy. All intelligent creatures, for aught we know or can reasonably suppose, have a period of probation assigned them. Revelation informs us, that some superior beings kept not their first estate, as man did not. Others may be now confirmed in rectitude. We know

not how long they might be on probation, nor under what circumstances. The permission of moral evil and apparent disproportion of natural are points, the elucidation of which must be referred to a future judgment. The existence of moral evil implies a misimprovement of a probationary state: It is the procuring cause of natural evil. Here is the source of human sorrow and distress, corruption and temptation, and the mystery of providence.

But amidst the mysterious ways of providence, the instances of a divine interposition to restrain and punish the bad; to protect, redress and reward the good, have, in all times, been sufficient, both in number and magnitude, to establish our faith in the moral perfections of God. The support of government, whether family or civil government, may be mentioned as establishing the same truth: Both are ordained of God, for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well.

It appears then from the moral capacity in man, his natural sense of accountableness, his thirst for immortality, and the present administration of God, that he will bring us into judgment. His distributions at present, and the operations of our own minds, prove that he is a spectator, not an indifferent spectator, of our conduct and of our hearts—that his *throne is established in righteousness*. They shew, at the same time, that this world is our probation—that we see but a little portion, detached parts, of the divine government. They lead us to anticipate a future day of reckoning. The verdict of conscience refers us over to the tribunal of a perfect moral Governour and Judge.

II. The book of REVELATION confirms these dictates of reason; and assures us more expressly, that “God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing—that every one of us must give account of himself to God. To whomsoever much is given,

“ of him much is required. The servant who knew his Lord’s will, but did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who knew not,” (comparatively) “ and committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few.” Five talents, well improved, shall receive a proportionable reward ; but, neglected or abused, a proportionable punishment. The single talent, if improved, shall in no wise lose its reward ; but, if buried, the slothful servant, charging his Lord with partiality, shall be *condemned out of his own mouth*. From him that hath no improvement, the original talent shall be taken away. However clouds and darkness at present surround the government of God, the whole intellectual world shall behold his righteousness at the great day. *The books will be opened*—the faithful registers of conscience and of divine omniscience ; the book of nature, of revelation, and *the Lamb’s book of life*. Out of these books mankind will be judged *according to their works*, including the principles and motives which have had commanding influence ; and the circumstances they have been under, whether more or less advantageous—Yea also, including the *fruit* of their doings : For we are answerable for the consequences of our actions—for what we have opportunity to do, but do not ; for what we would do, were opportunity given. We must give account of our actions open or secret, our inward principles and affections, our voluntary thoughts. The thoughts and intents of the heart are all open to the view of our Judge. Out of the good treasure of the heart proceeds good fruit ; and out of the evil treasure of the heart, evil fruit. “ I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins ; even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. The judgment of God is according to truth :” It “ will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”

Charitable deeds, performed as to him who feeth in ſecret, will be particularly remembered and openly rewarded at the day of accounts. The poor cannot recompenſe them; but the Judge will. He loveth a cheerful giver. He hath ſaid, “It is more bleſſed to “give than to receive. Forasmuch as ye did it unto “one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye did it unto “me. Ye know the liberality of our Lord Jeſus “Chriſt, who went about doing good. Though he “was rich, yet for our ſakes he became poor.” His religion and his example require that we do good, as we have opportunity, to all—enemies and perſecutors not excepted. He that ſheweth mercy to the children of diſtreſs, whether known or unknown, of whatever nation, profeſſion or character, is neighbour to them. Bleſſed are the merciful; for they ſhall find mercy, in that day when they will ſtand in moſt need of it.

Thoſe who do and ſuffer moſt in the cauſe of truth, will have the brighteſt eternal crown. Hypocrites, who fight againſt God under pretence of zeal for him, perſecutors and oppreſſors, ſhall receive the greateſt damnation. It had been better for all goſpel impenitents, had they never known the way of righteouſneſs. It is their condemnation that they love darkneſs rather than light.

The conſtitution by which we ſhall be judged is *full of grace*. “If thou, Lord, ſhouldeſt mark iniquity, “O Lord, who ſhall ſtand? But there is forgivenes “with thee, that thou mayeſt be feared. With the “Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. Let Iſrael hope in the Lord. God now “commandeth all men every where to *repent*; becauſe “he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the “world in *righteouſneſs*.” He may be a righteous Judge, and yet accept repentance. He may be *juſt*, and the juſtifier of *believers*. The great atonement, the blood of the everlaſting covenant, diſplays his

character, A JUST GOD, AND A SAVIOUR. The terms of this gracious constitution are fixed and unalterable; even "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and grant unto us to serve God in holiness." He "came to call sinners to repentance. Except ye repent, ye shall perish. He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The character of all who are in Christ Jesus, and to whom there is no condemnation, is, that they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The Spirit of life in him hath made them free from sin, and the servants of righteousness." Eternal life is the end of having the fruit unto holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

We do not undertake to say what imperfections may consist with evangelical repentance, with saving faith. The doctrine of human perfection is not the doctrine of Christ. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and his word is not in us." Our only plea is, that "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins." Many, doubtless, will appear at the right hand of the Judge, who, in the judgment of their uncharitable brethren, are consigned to the left. A consciousness of our own failings and imperfections will incline us to make every allowance for those of others. *Judge nothing before the time.*

The judgment will be *universal*. "Small and great must stand before God"—rich and poor, men of high and low degree, every free man and every bond man—the quick and the dead, all buried in the earth or sea, and all who shall be found alive at that day. Vast will the concourse be, when the first human pair, with all their descendants till time shall be no more, will meet in one general assembly. Apostate spirits will be brought to the judgment of that day. While

earth and hell are to be judged, the countless hosts of heaven will minister to the Judge. How solemn and interesting the occasion! Since time began, no event may compare with that which will close time, and begin eternity—when the irreversible decree will be pronounced, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

Does any one suppose, that in the vast assembly he himself may be overlooked? The supposition contradicts the omniscience of the Judge, without which he could not discern between the righteous and the wicked. If a single individual might be overlooked, why not millions and millions? Why one more than another? There is no respect of persons with God. His eye looks on all at the same instant. He will render to every accountable creature, not according to the circumstances which distinguish men in a probationary state, but according to real character. I repeat the words already recited: *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

You may object, that, this being the case, the business of the Judge can never be finished. To this we answer, the design of such a particular account cannot be to satisfy HIM. He needeth no enquiry. None can inform HIM. The design therefore is, to manifest his righteousness to the whole intellectual world. After what manner this will be done we know not, nor what space it may require. Further, what account will be made of time, when *time shall be no longer*? The heaven or the hell of every soul will begin with that day. Every one will be as certain of his own judgment as of his existence. The arrangement on the right and left will shew to every one, and to all, *who* are absolved and *who* condemned. *Characters* may then be known as we now know *persons* by their face. What new modes of perception we may then

have, in what manner the Judge may enable all intelligences to discern and applaud the wisdom and equity of his sentence, is not for us to enquire. The mouth of every impenitent will be stopped. Or should any one attempt to offer a plea in bar of judgment, he will but furnish materials for his own condemnation.

The doctrine of a future judgment vindicates the ways of God to men. They are a great deep; but they are preparatory trials for future retributions, and can be explained only in this connection. From what we observe or experience, let us not deny or censure his administration. These are but parts of his ways. We do not pronounce on any work of art until it is finished. We do not judge of the whole from disjointed parts; but of the parts from the whole. The time hasteneth when the mystery of God will be finished—when he shall make up his *jewels*—when it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. Solomon observed, that the worst characters are sometimes in great prosperity and dignity, and the best held in contempt, and under oppression—that the rod of the wicked was on the lot of the righteous. “He
“ expresseth great ignorance of the works of God, and
“ the method of his providence in the government of
“ the world; great labour in the search and observa-
“ tion he had employed himself about; and great dif-
“ appointment, pain, and even vexation of mind, up-
“ on that which he had remarked of what was going
“ forward upon the earth.” Yet he fixed on this conclusion, that there is a righteous Judge, and that the fear of God is man’s highest duty and happiness. If the wisest of mere men confessed his ignorance, shall we not confess ours? If the assurance of a judgment was the only solution of his perplexity, let us rest in the same belief.

Not that the discoveries of that day will give finite minds a *comprehension* of the divine plan. *Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* The works of art,

however exhibited, are fully comprehended only by the artist. The systems of philosophers and statesmen are sought out and comprehended only by philosophers and statesmen. Still ordinary minds may be satisfied of the skill and wisdom displayed in the greatest works of art, and most admired human systems. In a somewhat similar manner may the works and government of the only wise God be admired by finite minds at the last day—With this two-fold difference; first, that the most finished works of art, and the best human systems, are imperfect; whereas the work and plan of God are perfect. Secondly, no possible accessions to the faculties of men or angels can enable them to see as God seeth. In that world where they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, saints and angels do not *comprehend*, but *adore*, the unfathomable wisdom, purity and grace of God. His will is entirely theirs. They have no doubts, night or darkness. Their conviction of his perfect wisdom, rectitude and goodness may be as clear and full, as we have at noon, in a clear day, that the sun shineth in his strength. But as our feeble sight cannot steadfastly behold the meridian sun, so a finite capacity must always be too feeble to behold the Father of lights in the immensity of his counsel. The darkness of the present world will soon be passed, and succeeded by an intuitive view of him who dwelleth in light unapproachable by mortal eyes, and full of glory. In his light his children shall see light. But saints and angels are before the throne of his glory in a posture of profoundest reverence, with veiled faces, crying one to another, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. Implicit faith and resignation are man's duty and comfort. The certainty of a judgment powerfully enforceth obedience and submission to God. "Though
"a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be
"prolonged; yet surely there is an end." There is an end to prosperous vice and afflicted virtue. Therefore be in the fear of the Lord all thy life long.

Will the judgment fit? Is it impossible that the Judge should be deceived or pervert judgment? Where then shall the sinner and ungodly appear? Will the scoffer continue his derision when the judgment is begun, still demanding, *Where is the promise of his coming?* Ye who forget God, ye despisers, know assuredly that for all these things he will bring you into judgment.—Should you dare to sin, could you see him? Now it is certain that his eye is in every place, beholding the evil and the good. There is therefore the same reason why you should stand in awe, and make it your care to please him, as if he were visible to you. He “is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

In vain then do any draw near him with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, while their heart is far from him. The day of judgment will strip them of every artifice and disguise. “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and they that are otherwise shall not be hid. There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed.” In this view it must be “a small thing to be judged of man’s judgment.”

Do we realize the present truth, that God will bring us into judgment? Are we prepared to stand before his bar, to receive the things done in the body? This subject, if any, should arrest our attention. While the work of God is neglected, the work of our salvation, all other pursuits are preposterous. Yet alas! how remiss are we in this work? how indifferent and forgetful? My hearers, of every age and order, it is given in charge to the ministers of religion to persuade men by *the terror of that day*. II. Pet. 3. 14.

The text being immediately addressed to those in youth, I must particularly intreat them never to suffer youthful follies and vanities to call off their thoughts from the solemn truth which has been under consider-

ation. Know for certainty that God will bring you into judgment—that all holy conversation and godliness is the only course to peace in life, hope in death, and the final approbation of your great Judge. *The ungodly shall not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

SERMON XXIV.

THE PERSON AND CHARACTER OF THE JUDGE OF THE WORLD.

JOHN v. 27.

AND HATH GIVEN HIM AUTHORITY TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT ALSO,
BECAUSE HE IS THE SON OF MAN.



THE *certainty* of a future judgment was the subject of discourse in the morning. From the words now read, our meditations are turned upon the *person* and *character* of the Judge of the world, his *authority*, and the *reason* of his appointment to this high office.

FIRST, Of his *person* and *character*.

From the moral perfections of God and his promiscuous dispensations in this world, we justly infer an after state and judgment: But that he will judge by the ministry of another is a truth which could never have been conceived, had not God declared it. The ransom which God hath provided for sinners transcends our thoughts; connected with this is the doctrine that our Ransomer shall be our Judge. What we know of his person, character and office is from revelation, and in no respect from any other source. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."

He had "a glory with the Father before the world was. His goings forth have been from everlasting. By him all things were created and consist." He was made flesh; and hath therefore the appellations, the *Son of man*, the *Son of God*. Being found in fashion

as a man, he became obedient unto the death of the cross, that by this act of "obedience, many might be made righteous—that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death." He was declared, by his resurrection, to be the Son of God with power. Hereby he brought life and immortality to light.

Perfect *knowledge* and rectitude are qualities essential to a perfect decision on the characters of moral agents. The knowledge of hearts is therefore necessary. For the habitual frame of the heart constitutes the moral character. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every one according to his ways"—implying that the frame of the heart must be known in order to an impartial judgment. The Son of man expressly claims this prerogative. "I am he who searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." He "needeth not that any should testify of man; for he knoweth what is in man." He declared the most private reasonings and the unuttered thoughts of men, the most secret parts of their character and circumstances of their lives. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight. Lord, thou knowest all things." The sins of some will not be brought to light till the Son of man shall be revealed from heaven. And there are many excellent characters, of whom the world is not worthy, who are suspected, through prejudice or misrepresentation—who are the objects of envy and hatred.—Their "righteousness shall be brought forth as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day."

The *rectitude* of the Judge is as perfect as his knowledge of characters. He is the HOLY ONE AND THE JUST. He *knew no sin*, and in this respect was not *made like unto us*. He *offered himself without spot to God*, actuated by fervent zeal for the honour of divine moral government and unexampled friendship to perishing

finners. "I delight to do thy will, O my God! thy law is in my heart." All who receive him have an availing plea for mercy and grace. He who is in the bosom of the Father is their Advocate, and was made a sin-offering for them. He "loved righteousness and hated iniquity. For the suffering of death he is crowned with glory and honour; and with righteousness and equity shall he judge the world. He was approved of God by the works he did in his Father's name"—but especially when "God raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion; and gave him to be head over all things to the church." The church and world had the fullest proof of his exaltation, in the miraculous gifts of the apostolic age. The accomplishment of prophecy, in every succeeding age, hath been a further proof of his divine mission—of the truth of his declaration on the day he rose; "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth." In the day of his power, his people are willing. Their hope is, that he "shall change this vile body, and fashion it after the likeness of his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself."

This leads us to speak of his *authority* to judge mankind, and the *reason* of his appointment to this high office.

We read v. 22. con. "The Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." And v. 28, 29. "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." And v. 21. "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will."

Again, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into his hands—hath given him power over all flesh. God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. He liveth for evermore ; and hath the keys of death, the last enemy to be destroyed."

"As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself ; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also ; because he is the Son of man." *Because he is the Son of man.* You see his *authority* to judge the world, and the reason why this authority is given him. Shall we be at pains to assign various conjectural reasons for this appointment ? We have one plain revealed reason for it, which ought to satisfy us. He humbled himself to take our nature upon him. And in the character of *the man* CHRIST JESUS, he will sit in judgment. We have a Mediator and a Judge "who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

Daniel, in his vision of the dominion and glory of the Son of man, describes him "coming with the clouds of heaven. Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The judgment was set, and the books were opened." This corresponds to St. Matthew's description of his glorious appearance, and to other passages in the new testament, "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him : Then shall he sit on the throne of his glory ; and before him shall be gathered all nations ; and he shall divide them one from another—on his right hand and on his left." Saith Paul, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with

“his mighty angels—with the voice of the arch-angel, and the trump of God.” His transfiguration was an emblem of the power and grandeur of his second coming. “He will come in the same manner as he was seen go into heaven.” At his ascension, “a cloud received him out of the sight” of the wondering disciples—meaning *angels* by the cloud. These are his chariots. “The chariots of God are thousands of angels. Thou hast ascended on high, and received gifts for men.” Thus he was seen go into heaven; and thus he will come to judgment. “All the angels worship him: They are all his ministering spirits. He will come in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.”

The throne of judgment, as we learn from St. Paul, will be fixed *in the air*. John describes it as *a great white throne*; and observes that *from the face of him who sat upon it, the earth and the heaven fled away*. “He shall send forth his angels, with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather all nations before him”—all that have been buried in the earth or sea, and all who shall be found alive at his coming. These last “shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye; and the dead shall be raised incorruptible,” when the trumpet shall sound. The dead in Christ shall rise before the living saints ascend. Then the raised and the living “shall be caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord.” Angelic hosts, who guarded them through life, will convoy them to his throne.

The Son of man will not come, as the Jews supposed, to preside over them, and subject all other nations to them. No difference of any one nation from another will then be known. Mankind will stand, not in a national, but in their individual capacity in that day. The governments of the world and the frame of nature will be dissolved. “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements melt with

“ fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein
 “ be burnt up. The heavens and earth which now
 “ are, are reserved unto fire against the day of judg-
 “ ment and perdition of ungodly men.” To this
 day, the prophet Daniel may allude, (chap. vii. 9, 10,
 13, 14,) “ I beheld till the thrones were cast down,
 “ and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was
 “ white as snow, and the hair of his head like the
 “ pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and
 “ his wheels as burning fire. A burning stream issu-
 “ ed, and came forth from before him.”

St. Matthew has instructed us, that the righteous will be *first* judged. And it is supposed, that, having received the plaudit of the Judge, they may bear a ministering part in the judgment on the wicked. *The saints shall judge the world.* Yea, they *shall judge rebel angels.* The same sentiment is favoured by those words, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.*

We attempt not to describe the blessedness of those in whom the Son of man “ shall come to be admired “ and glorified”—to whom he shall say, “ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for “ you.” It is indescribable: The things prepared for them have not entered into the heart of man. They “ shall be like him, and see him as he is.” But what this vision and likeness denote, *does not yet appear.* Is it not enough that they “ shall behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness?” Among those who shall appear with him in glory, the only emulation will be, who shall admire, and love and extol him most. Their hearts and tongues being one, they will, with infinite hosts of angels, cast their crowns before the throne. The temple of God in heaven will eternally sound with this triumphant song from angels and saints, “ Blessing and honour, and “ glory, and power be unto him who sitteth on the “ throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever.”

The sentence on the unbelieving and impenitent, which shall be pronounced by the Son of man from his judgment-seat, will be, "Depart, ye cursed, 'nto everlasting fire. These shall go away into everlasting punishment. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven—in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from his presence, and from the glory of his power."

If, as some suppose, and as St. Peter may have intimated, (2. Eph. iii. 7.) the conflagration of the world will be the hell of the wicked, this may be considered as a comment on such scripture emblems of the place and nature of their punishment as these—*a furnace of fire—a lake burning with fire and brimstone—the worm dieth not—and the fire is not quenched—the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever.* Whatever may be the import of this language, we may conclude that the punishment of the wicked will be beyond conception and remediless. Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul who persists in his trespasses. Lively remorse and utter despair are included in these words. Sometimes the pains of hell appear to have taken hold on presumptuous sinners in this world, in such horrors of conscience as the son of perdition experienced, reflecting on his having betrayed innocent blood—even the blood of his Master, the Prince of life. *Our God is a consuming fire.* He can kindle an hell in the breast of sinners. Often have they presaged the day of the Lamb's wrath, when they who derided him shall "cry to the rocks to fall on them, and to the mountains to cover them from the face of" the Judge on the throne. "Behold, the Lord cometh with thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon the ungodly."

Do you ask, *When* will he come to render a reward to his servants, and to punish those who hate him, and

say, "We will not have this man to reign over us?" The answer is in his own words; "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of God, nor the Son, but the Father." All the information we have as to the *time* of judgment, is, that it will be *at the end of the world*. "The heavens must receive him *until the times of the restitution of all things*, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." The things still to be accomplished before the second coming of Christ will all be fulfilled in their season. Not one shall fail. But "the Father hath kept the times and seasons in his own power. With him one day and a thousand years" are alike. The period assigned to the reign of antichrist and to the Mahometan imposture has not expired. Events since the reformation, and some very recent ones, appear strongly to indicate that the former may be hastening to a close. The ten kings, who with one mind gave their power to the beast, have some of them fallen off; and all of them have concurred to reduce his power and authority. Indeed, his temporal power is reduced to a shadow, and that even in Rome itself. The power which first placed him on a temporal throne, hath been first to strip him of it. This power has, at the same time, *made war with the Lamb*. What will be the end of the wonders of the present day, it is impossible to foresee. The European kingdoms appear to be in the midst of the vial full of war and bloodshed, foretold to precede the final and utter fall of mystical Babylon—to precede the first resurrection and the new heavens and new earth.—The Mahometan imposture still exists in full strength in Europe and Asia. The Jews are not restored from their dispersion; nor do existing events bear any immediate aspect on their speedy return. We are taught to expect a glorious prevalence of religion for a thousand years before the last judgment—that "the king-

dom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the MOST HIGH." In the view of prophecy on these various subjects, it cannot be presumed that the coming of Christ to judge the world is very near. The only opportunity we have to prepare for his coming is, however, very short. The day of death can be at no great distance. No one who reflects that man's probation may be very speedily closed, will postpone the great business of it a year or a day.

How widely different will the coming of the Son of man, with authority to execute judgment, be from his first coming? Then he appeared in a state of abasement. Then *the Son of man had not where to lay his head*. He was despised and abhorred, and loaded with every opprobrium; he was arraigned and condemned as the vilest malefactor, and suffered the most infamous and cruel death. The powers of earth, in league with those of hell, exhibited him as a spectacle of wretchedness. There was no sorrow like his. He was made perfect through sufferings for our sakes. He could have commanded legions of angels to his rescue. With a word he could have destroyed all his foes. But it behoved him thus to suffer, in fulfillment of his own and his Father's love to a guilty world. When he shall come again, he will be arrayed in majesty as universal Judge. None will be seen to put on him a scarlet robe and crown of thorns—to bow the knee in derision—to scourge and buffet him—to pierce his hands and his feet—to thrust him with a spear. No scoffer will appear to mock him. Among his bitterest enemies, not one will be able to endure the day of his coming. All will be covered with shame, and flounder to lift up an eye to their Judge. All will be *brought and slain before him*. His "divine essence will then be so visibly prevalent and conspicuous, that his human nature will seem as it were absorbed in

“the radiancy of the Godhead; and the majesty of his presence be so great,” that (as St. John represents it) *earth and heaven will flee away*. “His head and his hair as white as snow, his eyes as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters, his countenance like the sun shining in its strength.” We read of *the wrath of the Lamb*—The Lamb of God, meek and lowly in heart, who taketh away the sin of the world—who was slain, to redeem by his precious blood every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation—who is therefore most “worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and glory, and honour, and blessing.” Lowly as he is, and having salvation, he hath wrath for his enemies. They “shall not be able to stand in the great day of his wrath. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.”

Did we hear the sound of the last trumpet, accompanied with a mighty voice, “Arise ye dead, and come to judgment”—did we see the graves open, and the dead rising—did we see the Son of man coming in his kingdom, his heavenly guards round him, and all our race collecting from every part of the earth, to attend the great audit, we certainly should think the scene more solemn and interesting than any we ever witnessed. That such a scene will open in some future period, is declared in the oracles of infallible truth. Shall it then be forgotten? Will one soul here present presume to act as though he had no personal concern in it? Indescribable as its glory and terror are, it is astonishing that it makes no more impression.—Remote as the scene may be, its certainty and importance are sufficient to awaken and arrest our immediate attention. Who but has all possible reason closely to examine himself? who but should let this thought sink into his heart, Am I ready to stand before the Son of man? Can I, on good ground, look for the

bleſſed hope ? He ſeeth me. Do I walk as in his preſence ?

In the view of eternal judgment, the folly of envying the proſperity of the *wicked* appears in a ſtrong light. Much inquietude is mingled with their ſhort triumph, their momentary joy. Their table becomes a ſnare, and that which ſhould have been for their welfare, a trap. They are ſet in ſlippery places. Death, at ſurtheſt, will for ever deprive them of all the things for which they are envied. In their life time they receive all their good things. Pity rather than envy them. Choofe none of their ways.

Would you envy *good* men their proſperity ? This is the leaſt part of their happineſs. They purſue and enjoy higher pleaſures than the world can give, and which depend not on the world. If in the world they have tribulation, this worketh patience, experience, and hope that maketh not aſhamed. They wait for their promiſed reſt—for the hope of righteouſneſs by faith. Fix your ſupreme wiſh on the ſame object, and you will rather rejoice than repine that they at any time proſper. To be envious, becauſe others proſper, indicates a mind which ſeeks a portion in this life only.

Under the immediate direction of the Son of man at the great day, his angels ſhall ſever the wicked from among the juſt. He doth not permit his ſervants to make the ſeparation in this world. He hath admoniſhed thoſe who undertake to gather out the tares from the field, that they will “ root up the wheat. Let both “ grow together till the harveſt. And in the time of “ harveſt, I will ſay to the reapers, Gather ye together “ firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn “ them ; but gather the wheat into my barn.” Let us not aſſume the prerogative, and anticipate the judgment, of the Son of man. Let us have compaſſion on our fellow ſervants, as he hath on us. Let us refrain from uncharitable thoughts and cenſures, forgive injuries, love our enemies, do good to them who hate us,

and pray for our persecutors. The *charity*, which is inculcated by his precepts and example, *hideth a multitude of sins; endureth all things, hopeth all things, thinketh no evil, seeketh not her own.* He will particularly enquire, when he cometh, whether we have put on charity, the bond of perfection, which is greater than faith and hope, and never faileth. “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

Well may those, who are persecuted for the Son of man’s sake, rejoice: For great is their reward in heaven. Are good men at any time impatient to know when their sufferings will end? Do they call upon God, *How long, holy and true?* Let them rather *rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him:* For they *shall stand in their lot at the end of the days.* The afflictions of life are momentary, not worthy to be compared with the far more exceeding eternal weight of glory.

Do we take pains to be on good terms with the world? It infinitely more concerns us to be approved of him who trieth the reins and heart. Is a good name on earth more valuable than gold? much more a name in the Lamb’s book of life. It is a small thing to be judged of man’s judgment. May we be remembered by Christ, when he shall come in his kingdom, we need fear no opprobrium on earth. “Yet a little while, and he will come, and will not tarry. The just shall live by faith.” But where will the disssembler then appear, who hath made the form of godliness a pretext for the vilest of crimes? where they who have lived by fraud? where all the secret workers of iniquity, and whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie?

The present truth enforces fidelity to every trust—a circumspect walk in every relation, in every place, at all times. Under the habitual influence of it, we shall improve every talent, and lay a good foundation against

the time to come. We shall not presume to act as tho' our great Judge saw us not, because we see him not. "A book of remembrance is written before him for them who fear him, and think upon his name." Men are influenced by the presence of the great, wise and good. *The Judge standeth before the door.* Shall they then venture to do, under his eye, what they would be afraid and ashamed to do before their fellow mortals? Why is HE forgotten? Why do any defer their preparation for judgment? Life and the day of grace are extremely uncertain. Yet the most pitiful excuses are made for procrastination. What account can be given of neglected and wasted advantages? of mispent, abused time? "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. He that is faithful in little, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in a little, is unjust also in much."

We should call ourselves often to account. Is there a sin which does easily beset us? Let it be laid aside. Has any plain duty been neglected, or performed in a wrong manner? Let it be no longer thus performed or neglected. Let the unresolved and double-minded no longer halt and waver. Take heed of an heart of unbelief. Remember the heart is deceitful. The riches of God's goodness and forbearance lead to repentance. Do any take occasion, from his long-suffering, to persist in sin? Their punishment will be heavier when executed. *Their judgment lingereth not; and their damnation does not slumber.* Behold, I come quickly, saith the Judge. Who then art thou that sayest, *My Lord delayeth his coming?* Madness is in thine heart. The early stages of life are no more exempt from death than the late. *Let me die the death of the righteous* is the common wish of old and young, high and low. But whom will the Judge own before his Father? Then shall the righteous be absolved, and inherit a kingdom: But the wicked and slothful servant shall be adjudged to

“ outer darknefs : There fhall be weeping and gnaffing of teeth.”

I have reasoned with you, my hearers, on a judgment to come, not with a view to excite unreaſonable and unavailing fear ; but that reaſonable and uſeful fear which reſtrains from ſin, and is a motive to holineſs. It is moſt reaſonable that we make HIM our fear, who can *deſtroy ſoul and body in hell*—that we work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling—that we, as we are warned, fly from the wrath to come—that we lay hold on the hope ſet before us—the hope which is as an anchor to the ſoul, and entereth within the veil, whither Jeſus the forerunner is entered. If we are of the happy number who have fled for refuge, we ſhall lift up our heads, and behold our eternal redemption ready to be pronounced by him. Our robes made white in the Redeemer’s blood, we ſhall, with all the redeemed “ before the throne of God, ſerve him day and night “ in his temple—ſhall hunger no more, neither thirſt “ any more. The Lamb in the miſt of the throne “ ſhall feed, and lead us to living fountains of water ; “ and every tear ſhall be wiped from our eyes. Rejoice “ in the Lord, O ye righteous. Light and gladneſs “ are ſown for” you. Your higheſt hopes will then be fulfilled *exceeding abundantly above all that you aſk or think*. The Saviour, who endured the croſs for you, will then be arrayed in all his glory. Now you ſee him only by an eye of faith. Then you will have an intuitive view of him, admire what you behold, and receive the crown that never fades. “ Then ſhall ye “ diſcern between him that ſerveth God, and him that “ ſerveth him not. For, behold, the day cometh, “ when the wicked ſhall be turned into hell.”

Might the glory, the triumph and the terror of that day, which will finiſh the mediatorial plan, be impreſſed on your minds, my young hearers, you would feel the weight of all the arguments and motives to Chriſtian ſobriety, which have been uſed in a ſeries of diſ-

courses, written and delivered with a particular view to your benefit.

May the solemnity of that day, when the ordained Judge of quick and dead shall appear, be present to all our minds every day. In the assured expectation of it, may we always keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God and men; neither doing those things which ought not to be done, nor leaving undone those which ought to be done. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." Receive and abide in him whom God hath sent: "that, when he shall appear, ye may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

SERMON XXV.

THE STATE OF SUCH AS DIE IN THEIR SINS.

JOHN, viii. 24.

I SAID THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT YE SHALL DIE IN YOUR SINS: FOR IF YE BELIEVE NOT THAT I AM HE, YE SHALL DIE IN YOUR SINS.



THUS our Lord addressed the infidel Jews, and particularly the Pharisees, his most implacable enemies. But the words are applicable to all who finally reject the evidences of his divine mission. The declaration that unbelievers *shall die in their sins* turns our attention, FIRST, to the final state of such as die impenitent under the light of the gospel.

SECONDLY, To the only way of escaping their fearful doom.

FIRST, Of the state of such as die impenitent under the gospel.

To suppose that sin is a less evil than the sacred oracles have declared it to be—to cherish sentiments of divine benevolence inconsistent with what the general tenour of these oracles holds forth on the future punishment of sin, is to err in a matter of the last importance. He only, against whom sin is committed, can teach us how great an evil it is to violate his laws, and despise his grace; and what punishment such violation and contempt call for. Every citizen is not a competent judge what punishment might be proper for crimes against the state. Much less are we competent judges what penalties the only wise God may annex to the breach of his holy laws, the rejection of his of-

ferred grace. He hath not denounced an heavier punishment than he can consistently inflict. We must be guided by the plain light of revelation, would we have just sentiments on the nature and consequences of sin. We shall but sport ourselves with our own deceivings, if we wrest the scriptures to vindicate opinions contrary to their general and obvious import.

“The wrath of God abideth on him who believeth not the Son. He that believeth not shall be damned.” They who *die in their sins*, and they who *die in the Lord*, pass at death into states as opposite as their characters. In our Lord’s prayer for the faithful, are these expressions: “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, to behold my glory.” Of those who die in their sins he saith, v. 21. con. “Whither I go ye cannot come.” Dying in sin is therefore to be excluded from his presence. At the great day, they will come forth from their graves “to the resurrection of damnation—to shame and everlasting contempt.” He will say to them, “Depart from me: I know you not. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” The impenitent “treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath.”

The day of grace is limited to the present life, otherwise death would not be called the *night wherein no man can work*. Nor would it be said, that men will be judged according to deeds *done in the body*—that the door will then be *shut* and barred against impenitents. Nor would it be said, *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation*—now appropriately, to the exclusion of an after space of repentance. Some resist the offers of mercy so long, and with circumstances of such high aggravation, that they are represented as abandoned of God: His Spirit no longer striveth with them: They live but to *fill up the measure of their iniquity*.

Where do the scriptures warrant a belief that there will be a space of repentance between death and the judgment? Or where do they inform us that after the judgment, when the wicked shall be doomed to associate with infernal spirits, they may be recovered to holiness and happiness? The kingdom of the Mediator will then be delivered up to God even the Father. If there is redemption out of hell, it cannot therefore be through the only Mediator between God and men. If there is redemption out of hell, those may be saved who reject the only way of salvation revealed in the gospel—the only *name whereby we must be saved*. The great salvation, purchased and offered by him, may be neglected, and yet the neglecters of it escape.

“Righteousness hath no fellowship with unrighteousness. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” This being admitted, sinners must repent and reform, or cannot be qualified for heaven. Certainly then it is a mad part to live and die in their sins, under any presumption that they may confess and forsake them after death—that they may be reclaimed in hell. For suppose this may be, who will stand up to vindicate the conduct of those, who would go to hell to be reformed? If dying in sin means only a *temporary* punishment in hell, what man in his senses would run the hazard of this? It is the unquestionable design of the gospel to bring sinners to faith and repentance in the present probationary state. It must weaken the argument to repentance in the present time, if revelation warrants the belief of another space. “The holy Ghost saith, To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” If the scriptures reveal any other day of grace than the present, they must contradict and defeat their own end. If they reveal no other, the state of those who die in their sins must be remediless. Heaven must be irrecoverably lost to them, and intercession for mercy unavailing. An impassable gulf is fixed between the place of torments

and the climes of bliss. In the intermediate state, they look up only to an incensed Judge, and have a fearful looking for of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary. What will be their doom, when their sleeping dust shall revive, and be re-united to the soul, its companion in sin, in order to be its companion in punishment? There will be a resurrection of the unjust. Therefore those who die in their sins will rise in a state of uncanceled guilt. The state of unembodied spirits will not alter their character. And from the judgment seat, "whosoever is not found written in the "book of life shall be cast into the lake where the "worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. This "is the second death."

The scriptures describe hell as a place of despair, not of hope—a place where they blaspheme God, because of their pains, and *repent not of their deeds*.—Their punishment, far from having a tendency to lessen, to cure, their malignity and rage against the HIGHEST, doth but increase this spirit—a spirit which indicates utter despair. The opposition of fallen angels to his government has not, so far as we know, abated since they were cast down to hell. The church of God, under the old testament and new, have had a severe conflict with the gates of hell. The Redeemer of mankind was every way tempted by the devil, who constantly tempts good men, and reigns in the hearts of the bad. Unwearied are his exertions to corrupt and obstruct the gospel, seduce its disciples to apostatize, or to indulge a false hope. He goes about seeking whom he may devour. After he shall have been bound a thousand years, he will once more be loosed from his prison. His *wrath* will be *great*; because he will know it to be his last effort against the kingdom of Christ, and that his time will be short. If abandoned sinners of the human race will be doomed to associate with the devil and his angels, will they repent and give glory to God? Must they not

rather, in such company, be strengthened and confirmed in their opposition to him? A profligate youth would certainly proceed to greater excess, if turned over to the company of veterans in iniquity, in whom more evil spirits dwell than in himself. Would you go on in your trespasses, unawed by the anger of Almighty God? *The mountains quake, the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his presence. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.* The finally impenitent may well adopt the language, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. From thy face shall I be hid. Let the day perish wherein I was born. Let it not be joined unto the days of the year.”

You object, that an interminable punishment exceeds all proportion for temporary crimes. I am addressing those who believe that a submission to the terms of the gospel is the only way of deliverance from the ruins of the apostacy. What *human* ideas of the divine rectitude may be, is not the question; but whether the *gospel* denounces a remediless punishment against those who die in their sins. That it doth, appears, I think, from what has been suggested. “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from them, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.” You will allow that a civil government may cut off the traitor, robber and murderer—that the maintenance of order and peace, public and private security require the excision of such offenders—that a community must otherwise be brought to desolation. He who dies in sin under the gospel resembles the condemned malefactor, who should refuse a proffer of pardon, and treat with the highest indignity the messenger and purchaser of it. God may punish sin as well as pardon it.

He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, as well as rich in mercy. And certainly the contempt of mercy and forbearance calls for forer punishment.

Sinners are much inclined to lessen the heinousness of sin. It is against the supreme authority of heaven and earth, against the order and happiness of the universe. It is the cause of all other evils—of all the judgments sent upon the world. It should be viewed as the scriptures declare it to be in its nature and consequences—such an evil as it appears to be from the sacrifice of the Prince of life to expiate it, from the bitter effects of it in this world, and from the punishments threatened to it in the world to come. The intent of the gospel, and the business of its ministers, is, to persuade men to be reconciled to God in the present state. The language of such as go on in their trespasses, is, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” “They say unto God, Depart from us.” If annihilation is to be the end of the unbelieving and impenitent, what must be the perversity of those who merit such a punishment as this? Formed to know, love and enjoy the greatest and best of Beings; and, when by disobedience become obnoxious to his judgment, provided with a ransom from sin, death and hell; yet so estranged from God!--such contemners of infinite mercy, that they must be blotted out of existence! I repeat, God who is rich in mercy can punish as well as pardon sin. Mercy slighted enhances guilt. Whatever the perdition of those may be who finally neglect the great salvation, it is sufficiently terrible to persuade perishing sinners to fly for refuge.

SECONDLY, Our subject points out the only way to escape the doom of those who die in their sins. This is FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

The wages of sin is death. This punishment of it is reasonable, if the law of which it is the transgression is reasonable. Rather the unspeakable gift of God, is trampled upon by impenitent sinners. And is it not fit that such contempt should seal their condemnation?

Mercy interferes not with rectitude. God will not deny himself. The way of pardon through the Mediator of his appointment can be doubted only on the ground of our unworthiness, and the mystery of GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH to take away our sins. Shall we, who infinitely need mercy, reject it on account of the mysterious way in which it is offered and dispensed? In appointing his own Son to be our ransom and advocate, the love of God is displayed to the admiration of angels. He will not pardon sin without a sacrifice. Shall sinners reject the sacrifice HE hath provided? Shall traitors prescribe the way in which their lives, forfeited to public justice, may be spared? All the promises of God to a guilty world are made through the atonement and intercession of his well-beloved Son. We must have an interest in Christ, or die in our sins. He redeemeth from the curse of the law: The Spirit of life in him maketh free from sin. A ransom and a moral renovation are necessary to the restoration of apostates. We "are bought with a price, even the "precious blood of Jesus, who knew no sin." And the eternal Spirit of his purchase "purgeth the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from "all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, "zealous of good works. To as many as receive him, "to them he giveth power to become the sons of God, "even to them who believe on his name." Having sent him to be a propitiation for our sins, God "may "be just, and the justifier of believers in Jesus." Gospel faith purifies the heart, and worketh by love. In the subject of it the strong holds of sin are "pulled down, "and every thought is brought into captivity to the "obedience of Christ." The believer has no confidence in the flesh: His only reliance is on the mediatorial righteousness of Christ. He contemplates the purity and extent of the divine law, his own pollution, impotency and misery. He denies himself, takes up his cross, and follows Christ. He loathes sin, is vile in his

own eyes, and repents in dust and ashes. He discerns the beauty of holiness, and his conversation is as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

There is salvation in no other. No other *hath the words of eternal life.* The consequence of rejecting him must therefore be fatal. If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. The words were addressed to those who were invited to come to him for life—whom he would have gathered—whose obstinacy he thus lamented: “O that thou hadst known, in this thy day, “the things of thy peace! If we sin wilfully, after that “we have received the knowledge of the truth, there “remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain “looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, “which shall devour the adversaries.”

It has been maintained, that men are neither to be commended for believing, nor blamed for disbelieving. The reason assigned is, that if such evidence is offered as convinces the mind, its assent cannot be withheld; and otherwise it cannot be given. Perhaps no sentiment is more fallacious, false, and dangerous. The reason given for it is as fallacious. The existence and perfections of an invisible Deity are evident from the frame of the visible world: Yet there have been and are those who say there is no God. Is atheism then no crime? The atheist declares that the evidence for the first principle of religion affords not conviction to his mind. This, according to the above reasoning, is a full justification of his atheism. The theist, on the contrary, clearly sees a God in the works of nature, and is impressed with the belief that he governs the world, and is the rewarder of such as diligently seek him. Is it not indispensable to believe a God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; and to glorify him accordingly? Is it for want of evidence that the atheist is not convinced? “The heavens declare the “glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his “handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and “night unto night sheweth forth knowledge. God

“hath not left himself without witness” in any spot of the universe. In all his works a voice is heard. The voice of reason and conscience within unite with the voice of nature without to prove a God. But neither the voice without nor the voice within is heard by the atheist. He will not be persuaded. He cannot but feel his dependence, though he will not acknowledge it. He can neither account for his own existence or preservation, nor that of any thing else, without admitting a God. Still he will not believe. A review of the past, an apprehension of the future, are calculated to impress the sentiment of a Creator, a moral Governour, and accountableness. Yet a Creator, a moral Governour is disowned. There must then be great criminality in the temper of the atheist. His *unwillingness* to believe a God is the true cause of his atheism. The divine perfections and providence are displayed to his view, no less than to the view of others. But the language of his heart is, I would there were no God: Hence all his thoughts are turned to the side of irreligion. Were he not hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, he would believe. Is it no crime, that through the pride of his countenance he will not seek after God?—that he hath corrupted his mind, and doth abominable works?

The same observations are applicable to the rejecters of revealed religion. Their deeds being evil, they love darkness rather than light. A revelation from heaven is possible—is greatly to be desired: Man’s necessities call for it. Shall he not enquire, whether the Father of lights hath vouchsafed the instruction so necessary? whether the Father of mercies hath pitied man in his dark and perishing state? hath laid a foundation of hope for the guilty? If the guilty will not be at the pains to examine whether God hath offered the light and grace which their circumstances loudly call for—will not receive his testimony—will not attend to the evidence laid before them, they refuse to hearken unto God.

It is criminal, in an high degree, to fix down in the conclusion, that whatever may be offered to mankind as divine revelation must proceed from fiction and fraud. This is neither more nor less than to determine that God never will nor can make a revelation of his will; or if he should, that his creatures are not obliged to receive it—that they may refuse to be taught of God. If we demand irresistible evidence, or such as the nature of the thing does not admit—If we examine with a view to cavil—If we will not admit the evidence which is abundantly satisfactory in other matters, a plain account may be given of our unbelief—such an account as furnishes the materials of our condemnation. To neglect and abuse the means and opportunities of faith is to reject the counsel of God against ourselves. The love of the truth is requisite to the knowledge of it and establishment in it.

You see the source of infidelity in an enlightened age. Unbelief is a sin; yea, it is the source of all other sins. The Spirit of truth reproveth the world of sin; because they believe not in Jesus Christ as sent of God. The first apostate and deceiver, who abode not in the truth, was assiduous to involve the human race in the same condemnation with himself. In imitation of him, infidels take pains to involve as many as they can in their own guilt. Their folly and presumption must be confessed, if they shall die in their sins.

The nominal Christian, while he censures avowed infidels, should reflect that his own faith is no other than that of devils. For such is faith without works. If unbelief is an heinous sin, faith is a precious grace. But faith of what kind? Not the faith of such as love the praise of men more than that of God. Nor the faith of such as fall away in a time of trial: But *believing with the heart unto righteousness—faith which overcomes the world—faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen—the faith of such as are crucified with Christ—such as live in the*

flesh by the faith of the Son of God—such as are *rooted and grounded in love*, who are *conformed to the image of Christ*—in whose *hearts he dwelleth by faith*. This faith is the great principle of evangelical obedience—an inward submission to Christ, a consent that he should reign over us. The believer, to whom he is precious, is “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.” He came to save from sin. Sin hath no dominion over Christians. They “yield themselves un-” to God as alive from the dead. Having their fruit “unto holiness, the end is eternal life.”

Sin and righteousness, enmity against God and reconciliation to him, unbelief and faith, walking after the flesh and after the Spirit, death and life, damnation and salvation, are expressions used in scripture to describe opposite characters and states. What foundation is there for the opinion that the *whole* human race are actually in a justified state through the Redeemer? What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? or what part hath a believer with an infidel? Should the opinion of the final salvation of all men be true, nothing is hazarded by embracing and acting upon the doctrine which denies it. But should it prove false, irretrievable ruin must be the consequence of presuming upon its truth. No wise man can hesitate a moment, which side to embrace, where the difference in point of safety is so obvious and great. While nothing is hazarded by embracing one side, every thing is hazarded by venturing on the other. One will certainly issue in eternal happiness; the other may issue in everlasting destruction. He must be a fool indeed, who would venture his soul on the presumption that all men will be saved, and on this presumption shall neglect the present day of salvation.

Those who die in their sins, and those that believe in Jesus, who came to save sinners, are distinguished

from each other in character and state. They are distinguished here, and will be hereafter. The Lord knoweth them who are his. They are made meet for the society, employments and bliss of the world above. They, as the friends of Christ, shall have an entrance ministered unto them into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord. But his enemies shall be cast out. Revelation guides us no further. Men may indulge any conjectures: But they run an amazing hazard in trusting to conjecture against the clear voice of the sacred scriptures. We have no concern but with the public revelation in the old and new testament. Suppose a further revelation may be made, we know not what it will be: It certainly cannot contradict that already made, which is the only rule of faith and practice to us.—“To the law, and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.”

A sense of future judgment and retributions is impaired, and may be destroyed, by a vicious life, and by the doctrine of fatality. While reflection is asleep, while refinements in scepticism are cherished, sinners are unconscious that they are on the brink of a fatal precipice—that hell from beneath is open to receive them. “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall” those appear who *harden in sin*?

Gloomy indeed must the shadow of death be to a sinner under guilt uncanceled, scarce daring to lift his eyes to heaven, and beg for mercy. A review of life wasted and abused—counsel, warnings, reproofs, offers of mercy slighted, will naturally awaken apprehensions, that it may be unavailing, too late, to solicit what has been long slighted. Or should such, as are yet in their sins, be unconcerned, and even confident, in the day of death, this is to rush into the presence of their Judge *as the horse into the battle*.

Will no after proposals of reconciliation be made to such as die in sin? Why should any sinner flatter him-

self that he may have a more convenient season to turn to God than the present? It is surely *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, while estranged from him. *Before judgment examine thyself; and in the day of visitation thou shalt find mercy. Think upon the wrath that shall be at the end, and the time of vengeance when he shall turn away his face.*

It is not that the death of sinners is any pleasure to God. He is not willing that any should perish. He waiteth that he may be gracious. He expostulateth with them, Why will ye die? But they take occasion, from his forbearance, to harden against the denunciations of his wrath. The fabled *tartarus* of the heathen proved a greater restraint to them, than the revelation of the wrath of God against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men is to many under the light of the gospel. The scenes of eternity, being out of sight and future, are forgotten, or regarded as fictions. Sinners would not be disturbed in their sins. Though assured that iniquity, persisted in, must be their ruin, they go on in their trespasses. They either flatter themselves that they shall have a further space for repentance, or disbelieve that soul and body shall be destroyed in hell, if they die impenitent. An awakened sinner can excuse no delay to his conscience. Every plea for procrastination is to plead for the privilege of living without reflection. Is this a privilege? You are an intelligent and accountable creature. You are bound to an eternal world, to exist in bliss, or woe, according to the character formed in this short probationary state—a state which may not continue till to-morrow. Sinners have every reason to make haste, to make no delay, in turning their feet into God's commandments. The declaration of the God of truth, the anguish and horror of impenitents in the day of calamity and danger, their own inward reproaches and apprehensions, unite to shew that unamending wickedness will be bitterness in the end.

The pleasures of sin are momentary, sensual and brutal; or they are infernal. They are overbalanced by the pain and torment which accompany and follow them. Life and death are set before us, blessing and cursing. Either depends on our own choice.

Should it not then be the earliest and most importunate enquiry, *What shall I do to be saved?* The answer is, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.* He only hath power to save from sin and wrath. He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. For he offered a perfect sacrifice for sin, and ever liveth to make intercession for transgressors. Admit a conviction of your guilt and misery, your impotency through indwelling sin. Know that sin is exceeding sinful, the accursed thing, the cause of all other evil. believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ. Commit your souls to him in well doing, before the day of the Lord's anger. Think not of continuing in sin, that grace may abound. For what is this but to make the gospel, which was *ordained to life, a savour of death unto death?* Those, who despise the riches of mercy and long suffering, are vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. Believe and fly for refuge before the decree bring forth, which cannot be reversed, appointing your portion with those who *believe and tremble* in hell.

The words, which have been under consideration, set before us the way of life, and the way of death. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and you shall have life through his name. No other hath the words of eternal life. If you will not come to him for life, if you live in sin, you are in the way to eternal death. Consider the opposite issue of faith and unbelief: And the Lord incline your hearts to choose life.

SERMON XXVI.

THE FUTURE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

I THESSALONIANS, iv. 14.

FOR IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN, EVEN SO THEM
ALSO WHO SLEEP IN JESUS WILL GOD BRING WITH HIM.



THE words call our attention to the future blessedness of believers. It is incumbent on me to state and to evince this doctrine.

The scriptures speak of death as a *sleep*. The common death of all men is thus represented. "Man lieth down, and shall not awake, nor be raised out of *sleep* till the heavens be no more. They who *sleep* in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." Speaking of those who perished in the deluge, Moses saith, *They are as a sleep*. The psalmist prayed, "Lighten mine eyes, that I sleep not *the sleep of death*."

But to sleep in *JESUS* is appropriate to such as *die in the Lord*; that is, in the faith and hope of the gospel—the contrast to dying in sins, alienated from God. We meet with the same expression as that before us, 1 Cor. xv. 18. *They who are fallen asleep in Jesus*. Death to a good man is resembled to taking rest by sleep; because he "rests from his labours" and sufferings. "David, having served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." Some of his last words were, "Thou hast made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure."

The doctrine of the torpor or insensibility of the soul at death is inadmissible upon the principles of our faith. These assure us, that those, who sleep in Jesus, *enter into the joy of their Lord*—are with him *in paradise*. Says our apostle, “We are confident and willing rather to “be absent from the body, and to be present with the “Lord. I have a desire to depart, and to be with “Christ, which is far better.” When the righteous are taken away, *they enter into peace*. Lazarus at his death was conveyed by angels to Abraham’s bosom. *Now he is comforted*. “I am,” said God, (after the death of the three patriarchs) “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. *Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living*.” After they slept in the dust, they lived to God, and enjoyed him as their portion. The pious dead “inherit the promises.” To *inherit the promises*, to be *present with the Lord*, implies a state of perception and bliss. Nor is there any reasonable presumption against the opinion, that the soul, dislodged from its earthly tabernacle, perceives and acts more freely, than it does in union with it. This material body may rather clog and embarrass the faculties of the soul than assist them.

Indeed, mental perception is often clogged, and sometimes appears to be wholly suspended, while body and soul are united. Will it therefore follow, that, when the union is dissolved, the soul does not resume its activity? Do perception, intelligence and vigour depend on a connection with matter? There are, you will admit, intelligent beings, who excel in mental discernment and activity, though they never had any such connection. He who is perfect in knowledge, is a pure and perfect Spirit.

If they who die in the Lord, are *blessed from thenceforth*—if it is *far better* with them, than while they abode in the flesh, then the soul is not inactive at death. For in this probationary state, Christ’s *joy is in believers*: His *peace passeth all understanding*. True, they have to struggle with tribulation and temptation: But

these are “working out for them a far more exceeding weight of eternal glory.” Their continuance in the flesh also subserves the cause of Christ. Would it then be eligible to forego this peace and these advantages for a state of entire insensibility? Why was Paul in a strait whether to die or live? how was death *gain* to him, if it wholly suspends the noble powers of the soul? To him to live was Christ. No one possessed a warmer, or a more enlightened, zeal for the gospel; or contributed more to the spread of it—to the support, proficiency and consolation of its disciples. When his life was so much to the honour of Christ, and the immortal interests of Christians—when he knew how much Christ would be magnified in his body; why had this chief of saints a wish to depart, if departed spirits are as senseless as the body in the grave? Let us not cherish the uncomfortable—may I not say the unscriptural and unphilosophical opinion?

The spirits of just men, of them who sleep in Jesus, are made perfect. We cannot say after what manner they exist—what are their employments—what is their bliss. But the scriptures warrant us to say thus much: They are released from all the burdens under which they groaned in this earthly tabernacle—from all affliction of body or mind—from all imperfection and sin—from all temptation and danger. They have an intuitive view of Christ in the separate state—an immediate assurance and unintermitting manifestations of his special love—such fulness of unmingled happiness as the separate state will admit. *Their flesh rests in hope* of a joyful resurrection.

The scriptures are our only guide on the subject of a future life. They inform us in general of the future blessedness of them that sleep in Jesus; and, by a variety of expression, lead us to conclude, that this blessedness commenceth at death. Why then should any suppose that it will be deferred until the resurrection? why

suppose the intermediate state to be a state of insensibility? Though the world to come is very much unknown, it is yet a satisfaction to be assured in general, that the exchange of worlds not only liberates the faithful from all sin and temptation, from all sorrow, pain and anxiety; but also introduceth them to the presence of Christ—that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. In this view *the day of death is better than the day of their birth*. At their birth they came into a world full of trouble and snares. Descended from a corrupt stock, pollution was the condition of their birth; but death, the last enemy, dissolves their connection with the first Adam. *The body is dead, because of sin; the spirit is life, because of righteousness*. “The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise, their departure is taken for misery, and their end to be without honour. But they are in peace, and their hope is full of immortality.” While they lived, the seal of the Spirit was “the earnest of their inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.”

They sleep in him who *bath the keys of hell and of death*. Our subject refers us to his second coming, when the body, redeemed from corruption, raised in glory, will be a fit habitation for the purified, perfected spirit. *If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him*. The resurrection and second coming of Christ are here mentioned as truths assuredly believed. Did Jesus die and rise again? There is a sure hope of the resurrection and glory of all who sleep in him. *Them will God bring with him*. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also, who are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of

“them that slept. Every man in his own order :
 “Christ the first fruits ; afterwards they who are
 “Christ’s at his coming.” He *abolished death, and
 brought life and immortality to light.*

The resurrection of the body was wholly unknown to the heathen : It is declared but in a few passages of the Jewish scriptures, and but obscurely in some of these. By the first Adam came death ; by the second, the resurrection from the dead. He is able to quicken the mortal bodies of those who sleep in him. They “have borne the image of the earthly, and shall also “bear the image of the heavenly. It does not yet appear” what this means. But while they abode in the flesh, their “conversation was in heaven, from “whence also they looked for the Saviour, the Lord “Jesus Christ ; who shall change their vile body, that “it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able “even to subdue all things to himself.” In this hope, they sleep in him, *waiting for the redemption of the body.* “The Lord Jesus will come to be admired and “glorified in all them that believe.”

From the 15th verse of the context we learn, that those who shall be “alive at the coming of the Lord, “shall not prevent them that sleep.” The next verse explains this : *The dead in Christ shall rise first.* “Then “they who are alive shall be caught up with” the raised saints, “to meet the Lord in the air. We shall not “all sleep,” says the same apostle ; “but we shall all be “changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, “at the last trump ; and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.” The mortal bodies of the living saints will, at the appointed time, be instantly changed, and *put on immortality.*

Do you enquire, What body will the saints assume at the coming of the Lord ? We can answer you only in the words of our apostle : “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption : It is sown in dis-

“honour, it is raised in glory : It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power : It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”

St. Peter exhorts believers, “Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” St. Paul, speaking of this grace, describes it as *a crown of righteousness*, which the Redeemer, on his throne of judgment, shall assign, “at that day unto all them who love his appearing.” That day will be *the manifestation of the sons of God*—their deliverance from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty. The second death hath no power over them. How changed at the resurrection ! What great alterations of the body of sin and death are necessary to fit it for the residence of a spirit no longer subject unto sin ?

Whatever the blessedness of believers, as soon as they sleep in Jesus, and during the separate state of existence, additional perfection and glory await them when they shall rise in his image. “When his glory shall be revealed, they shall appear with him in glory. The children of the resurrection are as the angels of God in heaven.” What new sources of information ! what extended capacities of enjoyment and improvement, when associated with angelic hosts, who never revolted—united in worship—assimilated in holiness and bliss ! “To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will, at that day, give a crown of righteousness unto all them that love his appearing ; and they shall reign as kings for ever and ever.” The redeemed from among men, with thousands of thousands of angels, have one heart. Their worship is one : It hath no languor or intermission. Perfect love casts out fear, exempts from all doubts, and makes the bliss of each the bliss of all. In the presence and enjoyment of HIM “who only hath immor-

"tality, who dwelleth in the light unto which no
 "man can approach, whom no man hath seen or can
 "see, there is fulness of joy. There is no night there,
 "nor any need of the sun. The glory of God and
 "the Lamb is the light of" that world. "There is
 "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, pro-
 "ceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb.
 "There is the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of
 "fruit, and yielding her fruit every month; and the
 "leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."
 But who can speak of these things worthily? Were
 we to dwell on the subject, we could speak only as
 children. It satisfies the Christian, that he knows
 whom he hath believed; and is persuaded that HE is
 able to keep what is committed to him. Hope unto
 the end for the expected grace at the revelation of
 Jesus Christ, who endured the cross for our sakes.
 Therefore "God raised him from the dead, and gave
 "him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God"
 through him: "Which hope we have as an anchor to
 "the soul, sure and stedfast; and which entereth into
 "that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for
 "us entered, even Jesus."

The heathen, entirely ignorant of the doctrine of
 the resurrection, and in great darkness with respect to
 the immortality of the soul, were *without God*, and
without hope. They sorrowed for deceased friends, as
 though death had blotted them from existence. Even
 the wiser and better part of the pagans had many
 doubts as to any future existence. Those whose
 minds preponderated in the belief of the soul's im-
 mortality, seem to have limited it to a few great and
 good men. Or if they spake of the future existence
 of the generality of mankind, they assigned them a
 transmigration into various kinds of animals, and
 thus brutalized the rational nature. This confusion
 and uncertainty respecting a future life accounts for
 their wild lamentation over the dead—*making them-*

selves bald—cutting themselves with lancets—ascending the funeral pile—entombing the living with the dead—embalming, &c. Some, with philosophic apathy, resigned themselves to their *fate*, affecting a total indifference to the sorrows, miseries and enjoyments of life, and to its closing scene. The desire of fame after death proved an incentive to some laudable deeds. How precarious are such motives? how vain such pretences?

The Christian, with clear and incontestible proof of eternal retributions, looks for the blessed hope, and endures to the end of life, whatever its crosses. His work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope bear witness to his superior principles, motives and maxims of conduct. Affliction is not joyous, but grievous. At the same time, “the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever.” He believes that all pain, sorrow, darkness and temptation will be succeeded by eternal rest, joy, light, and exemption from sin and temptation. He believes that his friends, who sleep in Jesus, are now reaping the harvest of their labours and sufferings—that in a little time he shall be with them, never to be separated, in the world of endless joy. What abundant consolation does his faith yield him concerning pious friends removed from him, never to return? They are *not dead, but sleep*—sleep in Jesus, who is *the resurrection and the life*. The believer in Jesus is not at the mercy of chance or fatality: He is in the hands of an all-wise, powerful, holy and merciful God, the rewarder of them who diligently seek him—a God who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able. The gospel of Christ, elevating our prospects above earth and time, teaches to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and to weep as though we wept not—to let our moderation be known; because the Lord is at hand: It recommends a life of faith,

hope and charity ; of acquiescence in the will of our heavenly Father, whose *good pleasure it is to give the kingdom* to all of this character. “ If ye then be risen
“ with Christ, seek those things which are above,
“ where Christ is at the right hand of God. Set your
“ affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
“ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in
“ God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear,
“ then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

The gospel is the charter of all our privileges and hopes as fallen creatures. The counsel of peace therein revealed is immutable as the promise and oath of the God of truth—immutable as Jesus Christ, “ the faithful and true witness, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” Compare the immortality brought to light by him, with the uncertainty and darkness, in which the heathen nations ever have been and are involved respecting a future state. We may be said to have received ten talents, and they but one. Had it not been for the light of the gospel, what would have prevented our embracing the doctrine of transmigration, or of annihilation ? Either of these overcasts the mind with impenetrable gloom. The moral character and government of God will eternally remain inexplicable, if these doctrines are true. We might as well worship the vanities of the pagans, as the only true and living God.

It belongs not to us to enquire why the idolatrous nations were, in times past, or now are, *left to walk in their own ways*. “ We thank thee, O Father, Lord
“ of heaven and earth, that thou hast revealed unto
“ us the things hid” from them—the *redemption of the body*—the immortality of soul and body in re-union ; and that, as a pledge of the glorious truth, Jesus died, revived and ascended ; and is Lord of the living and the dead.

We have been also called out of the darkness of Romish superstition. Hence we do not embrace their

doctrine of purgatory, of the merit of good works, of supererogation, of masses for the dead, the worship and mediation of departed saints. We believe that Jesus, who died and rose again, is the only Mediator and Advocate. Our only plea is grace, through the atoning blood of Christ. Those who sleep in him rest from all their sufferings and toils. They do not pass into a state of far greater pains than any endured on earth. They need no place of purgation from remaining pollutions. Their trial is past. Their spirits are made perfect. The days of sorrow, sin and imperfection are ended. Death does not transmit them to a trial by fire. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from" thenceforth.

The ingratitude and perversity of man could in no case be more vile, than in the refusal of the light from heaven, and embracing the opinion that death is an *eternal sleep*. Nothing more than this could prove that men love darkness rather than light. Or what reason can be given for so strange a preference, other than that the Saviour hath assigned; *Their deeds are evil*? Men of corrupt minds and morals seek refuge in the speculations of infidelity. No error is too gross for them. "Every one who doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." What a return is this to the Father of lights and God of grace! What a return is it to Jesus Christ, the light of the world, the purchaser of immortality for dead sinners! Such folly and presumption turn the greatest possible blessing into an occasion of greater damnation. They might fly for refuge, and lay hold on *eternal life*; but they try to persuade themselves that they shall be at death as *the beasts that perish*. Such is the last desperate wish of men who have pleasure in unrighteousness. We should scarce believe that madness like this could possess the human heart, were there not before us many affecting instances of it. Infidelity gropes at noon-day: Its whole

force is spent to eradicate principles, which are the only consolation and support of affliction, and which give the victory over death—truths which, if made known to the dark corners of the earth, would be *as life from the dead*. Infidelity, the greatest reproach of an enlightened age and country, demands a proof of a future state of retributions—of a moral government. It saith, there is neither an heaven nor an hell. When asked, Where are the departed spirits of good men? it answers, No where. It takes away hope from survivors. Who but a fool can be an infidel? He is a fool from *choice*, and therefore without excuse. His heart departeth from the living God. This alone can account for his unbelief.

It is the privilege of the followers of Jesus to glory in tribulation. His first disciples could say, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; as dying, and behold we live; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” They counted it all joy, when they “endured a great fight of affliction; knowing that the trial of their faith, being more precious than gold” refined by “the furnace, would be found to praise, honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” They were fearless of death, in any form which persecutors could inflict. They rejoiced in their sufferings for him; because these are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” Such were they who slept in Jesus in the time our apostle wrote. They are now “before the throne clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands.” Let us call to mind their fervent love to Christ and his cause—love which many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown. Their stedfast faith, exemplary patience and resignation, un-

der trials not common to men, exhibit *the power of the gospel of Christ*. And shall our love grow cold, though we are not called to *resist unto blood*? though no other than common temptations attend us? No pains should be spared to obtain, and to be satisfied that we possess, the same spirit of faith and love, however we must come short in the measure of it. Considering human imperfection, and the strength of corruption in good men, there is abundant reason for *working out salvation with fear and trembling*.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Those who mourn the removal of such, have great reason to intermingle joy with their sorrow. Their friends, who sleep in Jesus, are now reaping the immortal fruits of attachment to him, and firmness in his work. They do not mourn as others, who are hopeless. Their beloved friends have exchanged a world of grief, pain, languishment, darkness, temptation, and subjection to bondage, for a world of joy, rest, ease and vigour, of cloudless light and glorious freedom, where perfect love casts out fear. Their enjoyments, society and employment are, beyond conception, superior to any on earth. Sleeping in Jesus, they shall be found on his right hand, when he shall come in his glory. Reflect on the spirit of Christ in them, their conversation becoming the gospel, and the commencement of their eternal blessedness. Follow their faith and patience, that with them you also may inherit the promises. Behold the union in heaven: How superior to the earthly one which is dissolved, and the dissolution of which hath filled your hearts with sorrow! Your friends sleep to awake to immortal life. Look forward to that morning when they will hear the voice, *Awake and sing, ye that sleep in the dust of the earth*. Now is come the hour of your eternal redemption.

A certain disengagement from the world, a comparative indifference to sublunary things, distinguisheth

the heirs of salvation. They are not of the world, even as the author of their faith was not. Their hope in him influenceth them to purify themselves even as he is pure. They embrace that course in this world, which *gathereth fruit to life eternal*. None of them “liveth or dieth to himself. Whether they “live, they live unto to the Lord; or whether they “die, they die unto the Lord: Whether they live, “therefore, or die, they are the Lord’s. We are “more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Prone as mankind are to put death far off, it is ever drawing near. Our attention is called to it by instances of constant occurrence—and, a great proportion, instances of sudden death: Yet many exclude the thought of it. The remembrance, a realizing sense, of death is rare, judging from the conduct of mankind. They go away from the funeral of their acquaintance, neighbours and kindred, and scarcely believe that they themselves are mortal. Or however affected at the time—or how lasting soever their outward sorrow, do they mourn as becometh Christians?

Men *doubt* the doctrine of immortality, in proportion as it has little or no practical influence. They know that they must die; and that death may come suddenly. If they believe a future life, they must know that their state hereafter depends upon their conduct in this life. What then is the language of their putting far away the day of death? Plainly this, that they shall not be called to judgment. They do not act or think as though they should. Their friends and neighbours of every age and order are removed. They weep over the grave of those who were dear to them as their own souls; but forget that, in a little time, they must lie down with them in the dust. They disregard admonitions from sickness and imminent danger. Do they not doubt the gospel doctrine of life and immortality? They suffer serious impressions to wear off: They presume upon a more convenient season. He who should forego the reversion of an im

menſe eſtate for a morſel of bread, could not, at the time, believe himſelf to be heir to ſuch eſtate. We ſee men forego an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, for uncertain and perifhable riches. Take a view of different occupations and profeſſions. Did they ſuppoſe that they ſhall never die, could many be more unthoughtful of the event? The hope of immortality, or the apprehenſion of the deſtruction of ſoul and body in hell does not perſuade. Did they verily believe the doctrine of future retributions, they would demean themſelves as probationers—would ſeek firſt the kingdom of God; and fear him who hath power to caſt into hell. Thoſe who ſeek their portion on earth have not faith. This conduct has no excuſe or palliation in men under the light of the goſpel, whatever extenuation it may admit in the heathen, who are in darkneſs with reſpect to immortality beyond the grave.

It is the univerſal prayer, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my laſt end be like his.* This implies the univerſal commendation of his life. Would you then decline that courſe of life, which all agree to commend? Would you, againſt the judgment of all men in the view of death, and againſt your own judgment, live and die impenitent? “There is a way
“ which ſeemeth right to a man; but the end thereof
“ are the ways of death. The way of life is above to
“ the wiſe.”

A well founded hope of heaven is appropriate to thoſe who purify themſelves, even as Chriſt is pure. Being created anew in him, and having the witneſs of the Spirit that they are the children of God, heaven is begun in them. “Theſe things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God,
“ that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” The beſt idea of heaven is from the ſanctifying influence of the goſpel—from the fellowſhip which believers have with the Father, and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt. Our young people, knowing this gift of God,

will have comfort and hope treasured up for that late stage, when the powers of body and mind are impaired. Or should death come early, the true fear of God *is the gray hair unto men.* This *is honourable age.*

It is but a little while before you must lie down together in the dust, with all who are fallen asleep. The words and example of him, who died for our offences, and rose for our justification, should be ever in your minds and govern your conduct: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: The night cometh."

The youth are a class of hearers who claim the special attention of the teachers of religion. Impressed with a sense of pastoral duty, to them my voice has been directed in a course of sermons, of which this will be the last. I will not burthen you with a recapitulation of what has been offered in such a number and variety of discourses; but only remind you, that the following subjects have been under our consideration: FAITH and PRACTICE—the enquiry concerning ETERNAL LIFE—religion our own CHOICE—INDECISION in religion—the PRINCIPLE of virtue—God's GLORY man's end and happiness—ENCOURAGEMENT to early seeking—SELF-DEDICATION—PRAYER—observation of the LORD'S DAY—the EXCELLENCE of religion—the HAPPINESS of life—the standard of HONOUR—GOOD company recommended—caution against BAD company—caution against BAD books—FRUGALITY—DISSIPATION—the INSTABILITY of life—PROCRASTINATION—REDEMPTION of time—reflections on DEATH—JUDGMENT—the PERSON and CHARACTER of the Judge—the state of those who DIE IN SIN—the FUTURE BLESSEDNESS of the righteous.

You are reminded merely of the TITLES of my discourses, each of which has been restricted to a single point, with the view of giving you more distinct ideas of your highest duty and happiness. Justice to yourselves requires that you think seriously and closely on these things.

Knowing that shortly I must put off my tabernacle, and wishing you the best blessings, outward, spiritual and eternal, it was incumbent on me to address you in a plain, faithful and earnest manner on things of the kingdom of God and your own peace. For this reason you should *remember how you have received, and heard, and hold fast and repent*. Allow me to hope that all which has been offered, on so many and interesting subjects, will not be as seed cast by the way side, or in stony ground, or among thorns. Search the sacred oracles; let them decide whether the words of truth and soberness have been spoken to you. Pray to the Father of lights, that he would give you a good understanding in the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. May his effectual influence accompany these feeble attempts for his glory and your chief good. Might it please him to open your hearts to receive his truth, you will rejoice your best friends on earth, and all the angels in heaven.

You enter on life at a perilous time in the world.—Suffer me to warn you of the snares and allurements attendant on the increasing population, commerce and dissipation of this city. Your virtue will be assailed from various quarters heretofore unknown. Religious profession and practice are become very unfashionable. Family religion is in a manner extinguished, and the Lord's day profaned. Sound principles and morals have almost ceased to be considered as a qualification for office. Those in younger life are strongly inclined to fall in with the fashion. Dangers will surround you on every side. Be ye therefore sober and vigilant. Quit you like men. Dare to be singular in the cause of God and your souls. The Lord preserve and bless you.

Finally, my young brethren, we *commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to keep you from falling, to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified*.—AMEN.

PRAYERS

FOR YOUNG FAMILIES.

INTRODUCTION.



“ BE careful for nothing ; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanks-giving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. This is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”

Those who begin life, in a family state, without the morning and evening sacrifice, will be apt to continue in the neglect. To excite young persons to this duty, as soon as they commence a family connection, the following forms have been drawn up. These are offered to their consideration with no view of restricting them. General forms may be useful, though they do not apply to all variety and diversity of circumstances.

Plain and important as the duty of family devotion is, the prevailing disuse of it must be acknowledged. When the author of the preceding sermons, by the advice of judicious friends, concluded to make them public from the press, it occurred to him, that they might be seasonably and properly accompanied with prayers for young families, as an excitement and small assistance to them in this reasonable service. Those who may be disposed to use the following prayers, will either take them in their order, or select such as best accord with their own judgment and state.

In some instances, great embarrassment may arise from trusting too far to memory. If, for this or other reasons, any should prefer reading the prayers, at least for a time, this mode can furnish no just objection.

The hour of prayer should be fixed. As early as the family can be collected, is the proper time to attend morning prayer. And it may, generally, be most convenient to collect the family before breakfast. Reading a portion of the scriptures, in the morning especially, is recommended. A deep sense of our wants and unworthiness is the best help to prayer. This remark is illustrated in the ninth of the preceding sermons.

MORNING PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God ! the high and lofty One who inhabitest eternity ; who dwellest in the high and holy place ; assist us by thy good Spirit in offering up our morning prayer.

Thou art the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He continually presenteth before the throne of glory the value of the sacrifice which he offered for our sins. We approach before thee in his name, and plead his merits. May our prayer ascend with acceptance out of his hand.

We thank thee for thine eternal love in Christ Jesus to a lost world. May his atoning and purifying blood be applied to our souls, and the Spirit of life in him make us free from sin and death. Give us the contrite, humble spirit which thou revivest, and with which thou dwellest. May corruption daily grow weaker, and grace stronger. With the armour of God may we withstand all our spiritual foes. May we choose the path of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness ; they know not at what they stumble.

We thank thee for the preservation of the last night—that we are awaked from refreshing sleep in the enjoyment of health and reason, of things needful and convenient. Through the business, temptations and events of the day now begun, be at our right hand, that we may not be moved. Guide and prosper our just labour in the things of this life. May thy fear be in us as a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. A sense of our wants and entire dependence constraineth us to pray, Give us this day our daily bread. A sense of our unworthiness constraineth us to pray, Forgive us our debts. They

amount to an immense sum. But thou art rich in mercy.

To thee it belongs to appoint our condition in the world. Command thy blessing on our prosperous days. In the night of affliction may thy song be with us, and our prayer to the God of our lives. Be our sun and shield; give us grace and glory. Withhold no good thing from us. Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Make us blessings to each other. May the younger members of our household be subject unto the elder, and all be subject one to another with humility and love. It is good and pleasant to dwell together in unity.

May our kindred and friends prosper and be in health; especially may their souls prosper.

Relieve, support and comfort all in adversity. Send prosperity to our nation and to Zion. May thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Through Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and holy Ghost be ascribed eternal praises.—
AMEN.

EVENING PRAYER.

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. When we consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him next in rank to the angels, that with them he might celebrate and triumph in thy praise. But we are fallen from original rectitude. In us there naturally dwelleth no good thing. We lament the condem-

nation, pollution and wretchedness in which man's first act of disobedience has involved all his posterity. We rejoice that the HOLY ONE and the JUST suffered for the unjust. The plea of his sacrifice cries for mercy in behalf of rebels against heaven. Accept the expiation he hath made of our offences against thy holy law and boundless grace. May they be the grief, shame and burden of our souls. Turn us unto thyself. Thou art the Lord our God.

Will the Lord smell a sweet favour in our evening sacrifice? Because thy compassions fail not, another day has been added to our unprofitable, forfeited lives. The day of grace is lengthened out. The long-suffering of God is our opportunity. May we give all diligence in our great work, before that night cometh wherein no man can work. May it please thee to work in us to will and to do.

Give us quiet rest and refreshing sleep this night. May no plague come nigh our dwelling. May we awake in the morning, fitted for the duties and events of the morrow.

Hitherto the Lord hath helped us, or we had dwelt in silence. Thou hast been our defence in a variety of dangers, and a very present help in trouble—hast eased our pains, and healed our diseases—hast given us food and raiment. Thy favours have been heaped upon us, though we have been evil and unthankful—have forsaken the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns.

May no continuance of outward health and success tempt us to deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? May no afflictive scenes, of whatever duration, tempt us to murmur or despond. Teach us how to pass through honour and dishonour, evil report and good report; how to abound, and how to suffer need.

Own us and our children, as thine. Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breast must be taught knowledge, and made to understand

doctrine. Precept must be upon precept, and line upon line; here a little, and there a little. May we who are parents teach the things of God to our children, when we sit in the house, and walk by the way; when we lie down and rise up.

May all endeared to us be blessed in him in whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

Shew pity to all the afflicted. May the gospel have free course in this place and every where.

May the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, and all the inhabitants of the earth know and serve thee the true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

We leave ourselves and all our great interests with thee. Make us to know how frail we are—that the world and things of it pass away—that we have an eternity to provide for. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death may we fear no evil. May thy rod and thy staff comfort us. In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures evermore. Through Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

MORNING PRAYER.

O THOU who hearest prayer! all flesh are encouraged to come unto thee. We thank thee for Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and men.—Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Assist us this morning to offer up a spiritual and acceptable sacrifice.

Give us a view of ourselves as sinners, who have forfeited life, with all its blessings and hopes. Give us a view of thee as glorious in holiness, and plenteous in mercy, reconciling a guilty world to thyself in Jesus Christ. He was delivered for our offences, and

raised again for our justification, and maketh continual intercession for transgressors. Our mouth is closed to every plea but mercy in thy dearly beloved Son. Seal to us the remission of our sins, according to the riches of thy grace, through the redemption in Christ Jesus. May we abhor sin and repent in dust and ashes. Give us thine holy Spirit to renew us after thine image, to guard us against all the snares and allurements of sin, to strengthen and animate us to all the duties of life and godliness.

There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us. This shall put greater gladness in our heart than all outward things.

We thank thee that we have lain down, and our sleep has been sweet: that we are awaked and have arisen in the enjoyment of our powers of body and mind, surrounded with the blessings of goodness. Keep us from all evil this day. May we watch that we enter not into temptation. Wherever we are, or however employed, help us to reflect that all things are naked and open to thee, with whom we have to do. O that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all thy commandments. May we be content with such things as we have. We brought nothing into this world, and can carry nothing out. May we lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.

May we, and all endeared to us, be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Comfort the afflicted. Provide for the poor. Plead thine own cause. May thy kingdom come, and thy glory fill the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Redeemer.--AMEN.

EVENING PRAYER.

LORD God Almighty! thou hast stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him. From thee the Father of lights cometh every good and perfect gift. They who are far from thee shall perish; but it is good for us to draw near to God.

We would daily recollect and acknowledge thy ever attentive providence and unwearied goodness.— Make us unfeignedly thankful for the salvations of another day, and for mercies more than can be numbered, with which our past lives have been crowned. Especially impress this truth on our souls, that we are bought with a price, and are not our own.

In many things we daily offend, and in all things come short of thy glory and our duty. Our heart condemneth us: Thou art greater than our heart, and knowest all things. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord who could stand! Thou magnifiest thy mercy above all thy name. Have mercy and abundantly pardon us through our Mediator and Advocate. May we sorrow for sin after a godly sort. May old things be passed away, and all things in us become new. By thy grace may we live the rest of our time in the flesh as becomes those who believe that life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel. Watch over us for good through the night before us. May we see the light of another morning in mercy. Be our shepherd, and we shall not want. Lead us in paths of truth, righteousness and peace.

Teach us to rejoice that we and all our interests are in thy hands, and to commit all our concerns to thee with undoubting confidence.* By all means of pro-

* If the family is under affliction, proceed as follows O righteous Father! it hath pleased thee to visit us with thy chastening rod. It becomes not a living man to complain. The correction is far less than our deserts. We need this dis-

vidence and grace, may the Christian temper and life be improved in us. In the end of our days, may we receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

Children are the heritage of the Lord. Remember us and our children with new covenant blessings. May we train them up in the good and right way. May they hear counsel and receive instruction.

May rulers be thy ministers for good ; the churches have rest, and be edified, and their pastors be able ministers of the new testament ; wisdom and knowledge be the stability of the times, and the fear of the Lord our treasure. May the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord. Glory be to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, world without end.—AMEN.

MORNING PRAYER.

WE bow our knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Teach us how and for what to pray.

The displays of thy adorable attributes in creation, providence and redemption call for the united celebration of men and angels. The inspiration of the

cipline. May it teach us to make a true estimate of earthly things. Strengthen and comfort us in our affliction. May we neither despise nor faint under it. May it embitter sin to us. Father, if it may be, let this cup pass from us. Nevertheless, not our will, but thine be done. May we learn of the Saviour obedience by suffering, whatever burden of pain or sorrow is laid upon us. Blessed is the man who endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them who love him. Sublunary enjoyments are mutable, transitory and vain. Manifest thyself to us as thou dost not unto the world. May we be able to say, In faithfulness thou afflictest us. Under tribulation in the world, if we believe in God and in Christ, our heart shall not be troubled nor afraid. To whom else shall we go, but unto Christ ? He hath the words of eternal life. In his Father's house are many mansions. May we comfort ourselves with these words.

Almighty hath given us understanding. We will praise thee, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvellous are thy works, and that our soul knoweth right well. How precious also are thy thoughts unto us, O God! how great the sum of them! Thou numberest the hairs of our heads. A sparrow does not fall to the ground without our heavenly Father. Thy mercies are new every morning and evening: Great is thy faithfulness. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us bless his holy name for the preservation of the last night, and for all his benefits, personal and relative, common and special.*

We have destroyed ourselves. And doth a God of spotless purity open his eyes upon such polluted creatures as we? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. But thou hast commended thy love toward a world lying in wickedness, by sending thine only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins, that we might be justified by his blood, and saved from wrath: To them who believe in him greater things are promised than eye hath seen, or ear heard, or have entered into the heart of man. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. May we be found in Christ, and possess the character of those to whom no condemnation belongs.

We commit our work and our way to thee this day. Proportion strength to our various duties and temptations. Whither shall we go from thy Spirit? or whither shall we flee from thy presence? May we endure as seeing thee who art invisible. Supply our future wants. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

As probationers for eternity, may we become every day more disengaged from the world in which we are

* Any particular instance of salvation to a family may be here introduced thus: From the fresh instance of thy great goodness may we feel our renewed and increasing obligations to love, fear, and trust in thee. Perfect and confirm the mercy in which we now rejoice. Teach us the true value and improvement of this and all thy gifts. Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

strangers and pilgrims ; and more intent to overcome all obstacles in the way to a world of everlasting perfection and bliss. May we finish the work given us to do.

O thou who makest the members of a family to be of one heart ! may peace ever be within our walls. May we never experience the miseries of an house divided against itself. May our example, who are placed at the head of a family, be as the precious ointment on the head of Aaron, which ran down to the skirts of his garment. Union in an house is as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion. There the Lord commanded the blessing. Search us, O God, and know our hearts ; try us, and know our thoughts ; see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. Through Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

EVENING PRAYER.

EVER-BLESSED GOD! We believe that thou art, and that thou art the rewarder of them who diligently seek thee. Assist us this evening to draw near with a true heart, by that new and living way which thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ hath consecrated.

As transgressors of thy holy law, the punishment of sin stares us in the face. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Make us sensible of the diseases of our hearts, and the adequate remedy provided for them. From a view of sin as exceeding sinful, may we look to Jesus as the Lord our righteousness—the deliverer from sin, and death, and hell ; the restorer of light and life, joy and hope to a perishing world. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that he came into the world to save sinners. Open our eyes and our hearts to receive him as the Son of the living God, able and willing to save to the

uttermost—the way, the truth, and the life. Justify us by him from all things. Sanctify us in spirit, soul and body. May the life we live in the flesh, amidst so many vanities and dangers, be by the continual influence of the faith of the Son of God. Daily may we regard him as our instructor and ruler, our ransom and intercessor, our strength and example, our forerunner and judge. In all relations and circumstances of life, in all parts of duty, may we look to him, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame: so shall we lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth easily beset us; and never be wearied or faint in our minds. Whatsoever trials may be appointed us, may we imitate the Saviour, The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?

Whatsoever we would that others should do to us, may we do the same to them. Make us blessings upon earth. Human enjoyments and hopes are mutable and vain. Teach us to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, to weep as though we wept not, and to use the world as not abusing it. Give us hope in death, and joy in thy salvation.

We thank thee for the mercies of the past day. May we be in thy keeping through the night, and ever be mindful of the sleep of death. O satisfy us with thy loving-kindness. Never leave us; never forsake us.

May it be our supreme concern for all under our care, that they may choose the good part, which shall never be taken away from them. O that there were such an heart in us and in them!

Vouchsafe to all, under any afflictive visitation, contentment and resignation, the peace of God, and an happy issue to their affliction. May our kindred be the subjects of thy care and grace, and the instruments of thy glory. Reward our benefactors. Forgive our enemies. May we from the heart forgive them. As thou mayest prosper us, may we be ready to distribute, willing to communicate. Blessed is he that considereth

the poor: The Lord will remember him in time of trouble.

Build up Zion; and appear in thy glory. Peace be to our nation, and to all nations. The Lord give that which is good, and may our land yield her increase. Continue health where it is enjoyed, and restore it where it is not.

Be our God in life, our comforter in death, and our exceeding great and everlasting reward. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER.

OUR Father who art in heaven! If earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children, much more wilt thou give the holy Spirit to them who ask thee. May thy Spirit help our infirmity, and make intercession for us, while we approach thy throne, encouraged by the gracious words, Ask, and ye shall receive.

Fill our minds with exalted thoughts of thee, the only living and true God; and of Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, not to destroy, but to save. Fill us with the lowest and justest thoughts of ourselves. Behold, we are vile: what shall we answer thee? We will lay our hand upon our mouth. Thou hast made HIM, who knew no sin, to be a sin-offering for us; may we be made the righteousness of God in him. We are weak through sin dwelling in us. Of HIS fulness may we receive grace, that we may be sufficient to every duty, kept in every hour of temptation, and supported in all trials. We are insufficient to think any thing as of ourselves. Guide our thoughts. Govern our views. Convince our consciences. Purify and exalt our affections. May we watch and pray that we enter not into tempta-

tion. May we keep a conscience void of offence towards God and men. In prosperity may we trust in the Lord, and do good. In adversity may we be in subjection to the Father of spirits. May all things work together for our good. He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely. For us to live may it be Christ, and to die, gain.

We thank thee for the mercies of the last night, and the light of this morning. It is thy sun which warms us, and thine air which we breathe. Thou hast fed us all our life long unto this day, and given us raiment to put on. Thou hast been the health of our countenance—hast given us soundness in our flesh, and rest in our bones, and set an hedge about us. We thank thee for the blessings of infancy, childhood and youth—for the relations in which thou hast placed us. Our immortal powers are thine. When we were lost, thou didst send thine only begotten Son to seek and save us. Thanks be unto God for spiritual blessings in him—to the Son for his stupendous love—to the Spirit for his influence.

Through the day before us, we commit ourselves to thee. May it please thee to build up our family. May we fear thee with all our house.

Do good to our kindred—to the children of want and sorrow—to our nation and the Israel of God—and to all the families of the earth. Through Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

SATURDAY EVENING.

WE thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for thy distinguishing grace in calling us to the knowledge of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We thank thee, that, having suffered for our sins, he en-

tered into his rest. We thank thee, that we are brought to the confines of that sacred day, which the Christian church from the beginning hath observed as a memorial of redemption by Emmanuel, God with us. We thank thee for all the mercies of the day and week, and of our past lives—mercies great and numberless. Call in our thoughts this evening from terrestrial concerns, and fix them on the things of the kingdom of God.

We are unworthy to lift up our eyes to heaven. But thou art well pleased for the righteousness' sake of our Mediator and Advocate. Teach us our own meanness and vileness. Give us clear views of his divine dignity and glory, his wonderful love and mediatorial fulness. Other foundation of acceptance with God can no man lay, than the cross of Christ. At the right hand of God he pleads our cause. He knows how to have compassion; for he was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all points tempted as we are; yet without sin. As the head and wise lawgiver of the church, he hath all power in heaven and earth. May we see his suitableness to all the wants and distresses of perishing sinners. Fill us with deep self-abasement, that we have abused and wasted life and the day of grace. Cast us not away from thy presence. Create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us. Increase our hatred of sin, our faith and love. Give us a more pure and warm zeal for the honour of a crucified Redeemer. May his yoke be easy, and his burden light to us. May we regard him as our best friend. It was his meat and drink to do and suffer thy will. May the same mind be in us. Amidst all temptations, opposition and danger, be present with thy mighty grace, that we may stand fast in the Lord. May we never be careless of our souls—never forget our eternal account. They whose faces are toward Zion, wait on the Lord, and renew their strength. Quicken us according to thy word: For our souls cleave to the dust. If our

affection is set on things above, where Christ is, all other things will be added to us.

We know not the time or manner of our death. We know not what a day may bring forth. If we are thine, thou wilt take care of all our interests in time and eternity. We are hastening to the great day, when the Redeemer of the world will appear to judge it in righteousness. May we be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. The Lord grant that we may then find mercy.

We commit ourselves to thy protection this night. May we commune with our heart on our bed. Bring us to the light of thy holy morning, prepared for the solemnities of the Lord's day.

Bring Jew and Gentile into one sheepfold under the chief Shepherd. May every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Pour out thy Spirit upon all orders and ages in our nation. In wrath remember mercy.

May our kindred and friends be the friends of Christ. After his example, may we love, pray for and forgive our enemies. Withhold from us whatever would prove hurtful. Bestow on us what thou seekest to be needful and best. Train us up for the rest which remaineth to the people of God. Through Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

LORD'S DAY MORNING.

GLORIOUS and eternal God! Thine infinite perfections shine through the immensity of thy works. Thou keepest covenant for ever. In dispensing the gifts of nature, providence and grace thou doest what thou wilt with thine own. It hath seemed good in thy sight to visit our part of the world with the day-

spring from on high. The sun of righteousness hath risen upon us with salvation in his beams. Blessed are the people who hear the joyful sound.

With reverence and godly fear we would bow before thee, in the prevailing name of our great high priest, a minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

We thank thee for the mercies of the last night and week. This is the day which the Lord hath made—the day on which the blessed Redeemer rose from the dead, having by his cross accomplished our redemption. The assemblies of Christians on earth unite this day with glorified saints and angels in heaven in the worship of God and the Lamb. Glory to God on high, that through Jesus Christ there is peace on earth, and good will to men.

We thank thee for the holy Spirit, given to reprove the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, to set the last seal to the gospel, to sanctify through the truth, and be a constant guide, helper and comforter to the church.

May we be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Compose our souls to a due attendance on its private duties and public solemnities. May retired meditation and devotion prepare us for a spiritual performance of the worship of the sanctuary. May we love the place where thine honour dwells. Display to all assemblies of the saints thy power and glory. May thy ministering servants glorify thee before all the people. May the hearers attend with meekness to the word preached, and search the scriptures daily, whether those things are so. May we be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Make us deeply sensible of the fall and corruption of our nature—that as children of disobedience, and therefore children of wrath, we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. From this condition thine only-begotten Son came to redeem us

by a price more precious than gold. He counselleth us to buy of him refined gold and white raiment. He giveth light to the blind, and quickeneth the dead in trespasses. The most wretched prodigal may return, and cast himself on the mercy of our offended Father in heaven. There is joy in heaven over every penitent. In the ransom which Jesus paid, may we see the awful demerit of sin, the boundless grace which pardons it, and the stupendous love of our Ransomer. Thy thoughts and ways are high above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. May our polluted souls be purified in the fountain opened in the blood of Christ. May we behold him exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, and no more be so guilty of the accursed thing. Give us an humble confidence in redeeming love, and grace to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. This is our reasonable service, and our true honour and felicity. May we learn of Christ Jesus lessons of meekness and humility, self-denial and resignation; and in him find rest to our souls.

May many this day believe, and turn to the Lord. Open the way for the gospel to be preached in all the world for a witness. Remove the vail cast over the nations devoted to Pagan, Mahometan and Romish superstition. May Zion's light come, and the glory of the Lord rise upon her.

Teach us so to improve this sabbath, and all the blessings of life and godliness, as that we may be able to render a good account of them at the appearing of Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

LORDS DAY EVENING.

O LORD, who fillest heaven and earth! We thank thee that the tabernacle of God is with men; that thou wilt dwell with them, and be their God. Thou

lovest the private dwellings of Jacob, as well as the gates of Zion. Assist us in our family devotion this evening.

We thank thee for all our mercies ; for the blessings of providence, and the richer blessings of grace—for the privileges of this holy day. We would not despise thine house and ordinances. We would not forsake the assemblies of thy saints. Teach us and all thy people to profit by the services of the sanctuary. May we know, by our own experience, that the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation. May we never be ashamed of him, or of his friends ; but reverence him as the wisdom of God, and the power of God ; and honour them as the excellent of the earth. Neglected and reviled as he is by others, we would regard and build upon him as the foundation of our immortal hopes. Would we serve thee day and night in thy temple in heaven, our robes must be washed, and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, may we obtain like precious faith as his first disciples, elect through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

We confess our want of love to God, of zeal and activity in thy service ; our forgetfulness of the Redeemer and our souls ; our formality and unbelief. We have abused the day and means of grace, and grieved the holy Spirit. Our sins have been aggravated by the privileges we have enjoyed. Of thine infinite mercy pardon our barrenness and unfruitfulness in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May we strengthen the things that are ready to die. Whereto we have attained, may we hold fast, that no man may take our crown. We are called to a warfare with inward corruption, with the customs and examples of the world, and with the hosts of hell. We have no might against these enemies. Lord, that the weapons of our warfare might be mighty to the pulling down of strong

holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. May we be followers of God as dear children. By the observation of a weekly sabbath, and the services of thine earthly courts, may we be training up to unite with all the redeemed and infinite hosts of angels, in the worship of that temple which is filled with the glory of God and the Lamb.

Succeed the ministry of the gospel in this and every place, to the conversion of sinners, and to the confirmation and building up of saints in their most holy faith. Set up a standard against the foes of Zion: May her children be joyful in their King. May they so let their light shine, so stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, as to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

May we abide under the divine protection this night, and see the light of another morning in health and comfort.

May no member of our family fail of thy saving grace. May we have wisdom to instruct our household in the principles and duties, the privileges and hopes of the gospel. Deliver our souls, O Lord, from the wicked—from men of the world, whose portion is in this life. May we behold thy face in righteousness; and be satisfied, when we awake, with thy likeness. Thro' Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

SERMON I.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

DEUTERONOMY, vi. 7.

AND THOU SHALT TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY UNTO THY CHILDREN, AND SHALT TALK OF THEM WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THY HOUSE, AND WHEN THOU WALKEST BY THE WAY, AND WHEN THOU LIEST DOWN, AND WHEN THOU RISEST UP.



HEATHEN writers have said much of the reverence due to the gods. But of what gods do they speak? What kind of reverence do they inculcate? They have said much of private friendship and the love of our country. But what have they said of love to all mankind? They taught the government of the passions and appetites. But from no other than temporal motives. *The things that are revealed belong to us and to our children.* From revelation are derived all just thoughts of God and of man's duty. The most important things in the sacred oracles are comprehended in loving God with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. To believe the existence, perfections and providence of God, is to acknowledge that we owe him superlative love. Nor can there be any difficulty in understanding the precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," if we keep in view the golden rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Whatever belongs to piety and good morals is included in the things which Christian parents should teach their children. The course of instruction is to

begin with things plain and easy to be understood; and, from simple fundamental truths, to *go on to perfection*. “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept; line upon line; here a little and there a little.” This implies the earliest instruction. The earliest and principal thing to be taught them is *the wisdom from above*. Were they not susceptible of this, as of other instruction, why hath the teacher, who came from God, mentioned them as patterns of docility? “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”

The food of the mind must be suited to its faculties. The dawn of reason calls for some information respecting the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits. The acquisition of this knowledge should be made easy, by the frequent communication and proper enforcement of a few plain and weighty truths, not burdening the opening faculties with too great a variety. A multiplicity of documents, not understood or digested, promise little or no good effect. Representations of religion as *gloomy* and *austere* may serve the cause of superstition; but true religion is a reasonable service. Lively ideas of the moral perfections of God and of redemption, of the worth of the soul, of the account we must give of ourselves to him with whom we have to do, are peculiarly useful.

The duty of religious education devolves on *parents*. They are required to take the greatest care in the performance of this duty. They are immediately addressed in the text. Their advantages for the pious instruction of their children are peculiar. They are first and most interested in them. They have every inducement, and are under the strongest bonds, to give special attention to this thing. All, under whose immediate guardianship children are placed, occupy the

room of parents ; and are obliged to educate them with parental and religious care ; that is, to talk of the truths and duties of religion, when they *sit in the house, and walk by the way, when they lie down and rise up.*

We will consider, first, the *source* from which this instruction is drawn.

Moses went near and received the oracles of infallible truth from the mouth of God, and then declared to the people what God commanded. These words they were to teach to their children. When our Lord commissioned his chosen ministers, he said to them, "Go, teach all nations to observe whatsoever I have commanded you."

When the Jews forsook the oracles of God and received for doctrines the commandments of men, neither the teachers, nor those who were taught, went into the kingdom. When the guides of the Christian church locked up the scriptures from the people, all deceptableness of unrighteousness was introduced. The infallibility of the Roman pontiff was said to be proved by the scriptures, and the sense of scripture determined by his infallibility. Helps for understanding the sacred scriptures may not be refused ; but to determine whether these things are so, recourse must be had to the scriptures, and spiritual things be compared with spiritual.

Every teacher will of course inculcate his own sense of scripture. There is the same liberty of examination to those who are taught, so far as they are capable of examining. The first principles, such as are proper to be taught to children, are so obvious and practical, that there is no just room for controversy. Whenever the scriptures are consulted with meekness, these principles and maxims will always appear to be of the greatest use.

Such is the source of religious instruction. We remark,

Secondly, The great *influence* and *authority* of those whose duty it is to impart it.

Parents have the fullest opportunity to observe the genius and capacity of their children, the gradual opening of their faculties, what counsels and cautions are most adapted to their situation and disposition, or the employment and rank in life for which they may be fitted and designed. Parental authority has great weight at this early period. There is, therefore, the highest reason for a discreet, faithful use of the influence which the relation of parents gives them. This influence will sensibly lessen, should the opportunity of early instruction in the best things be neglected.—While their children should be advancing in wisdom and virtue, propensities to folly and vice will grow up with them.

Thirdly, Parents should *constantly* attend to the duty of imparting religious instruction.

Their children being constantly with them, useful hints may be dropped on every occasion and occurrence. No opportunity should be omitted, in a case of such moment, and where there are such advantages to form and improve the tender mind. *Thou shalt talk of them when thou liest down, and when thou risest up ; when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way.* In whatever ways or business you or your children may be employed, instructions in piety and sound morals may be pertinently and usefully given. The same instructions may be repeated, and others added, as circumstances may suggest. Thus will appear the weight which the instructions have with the parents. When they teach these things *diligently*, as commanded, they are instant in season and out of season, imparting some spiritual gift to their children. These are apt to forget the good things they have been taught ; and are, moreover, exposed to various snares and allurements. They need *precept upon precept*.—When the counsels given are supported by the parents

to be the counsel of God, with what care and seriousness should they be inculcated at all seasons? "Set your hearts unto them, and command your children to observe and do them."

Fourthly, the *parental* is the happiest way of imparting and impressing these things, and the best mean of transmitting a favour of religion.

By an affectionate manner of inculcating it, by carefully observing how the faculties of children expand, what directions they can receive, and what are called for, he who has the heart of a parent takes a sure course, if there is any, to have his instruction drop on the tender mind as the rain and dew on the thirsty earth. The blessed Jesus never *broke a bruised reed*, nor *quenched the smoking flax*. *Grace was poured into his lips*. His instructions, weighty in themselves, were imparted in the most persuasive manner. Of him let parents learn to teach the truths of God, to inculcate divine, social and personal virtues, as their children *are able to bear*.

Beside personal instruction, let parents, according to their ability, furnish their children with school education, and with books for their improvement. Let them accompany you to the house of God, to receive public instruction; and enquire of them how they remember and are affected with the truths they hear. The sacred scriptures should be read in your families. Advantage should be taken of providential events, of all means to awaken their attention to their duty and engage their hearts in it—whether the bible or other good books—of all instruments, whether parents, ministers or others. The meaning and intent of the two sacraments should be explained; that, having been devoted to God in their infancy, they may see their obligations to put off the old man, and put on the new; and, as they may become capable of that service, may recognize the vows made at their baptism, and come to the communion.

Upon the whole ; parents “ should labour gradually
 “ and pleasingly to infuse into their minds the clearest
 “ and most affecting views of God ; his universal pre-
 “ sence and Almighty power ; his goodness, truth and
 “ overruling providence ; his regard to pious men,
 “ and attention to their prayers”—and to “ imprint
 “ these things by striking examples.” They should
 “ take care that their children frequently hear conver-
 “ sation upon serious and heavenly subjects. Few
 “ people are sensible of the advantage derived to
 “ children from suitable and serious conversation.”
 They should have the amiableness of virtue and tur-
 pitude of vice held up to view ; “ the vanity of
 “ the world, the frailty of the body ; the corruption
 “ of our fallen nature ; the dignity and infinite worth
 “ of the soul, and what God hath done for it. The
 “ riches and mercy of redemption should be set before
 “ them.” They should be “ habituated from their in-
 “ fancy to sanctify the Lord’s day, to reverence the
 “ word and ordinances of God.” Parents should
 spare no endeavours to give them “ a deep sense of
 “ truth and integrity, and an abhorrence of all man-
 “ ner of falsehood, fraud, craft, subterfuges and dis-
 “ simulation, as base, dishonourable, and highly offen-
 “ sive to God.”

Parents may call to mind the affection, diligence and solicitude with which they were taught the principles and duties of religion in their childhood—how they were exhorted, charged and comforted—the prayers which were offered up with and for them. Have you shewn the same pious care to educate your children in the true fear of the Lord ? the same prudence ? the same regard to family devotion and order, and instruction in general ? the same discreet and grave deportment ? If you have dedicated your children to God in baptism, have you fulfilled the engagements made at their dedication, and exemplified the Christian profession before them ? You may then trust with God the issue of your pray-

ers and endeavours. He will not forsake them, though you may shortly. If you have not thus dedicated and taught them, the most important part of your duty has been neglected. The account you must give how you educate them; their temporal and eternal welfare; the debt you owe to your people, are considerations which should ever be present to your minds, and influence you to a faithful care in this matter.

Considering himself as answerable, in a degree, for the principles and conduct of his children and household, the wife parent and head of a family will embrace that scheme of religion and education in it, which he is convinced, upon due deliberation, best accords with the sacred oracles. These permit him not to adopt a mode of worship, which interferes with the order and peace of society, or with the religious liberty of other denominations. Do any members of his house, who discover a thoughtful, serious mind, differ from him? he will endeavour to shew them their error. For they err at least in his opinion. But he will be cautious how he interposeth a *command* in what may be a matter of conscience. He will not degrade, but honour, himself by condescension to serious scruples. If calm reasoning out of the scriptures doth not convince, he will indulge them in acting according to the persuasion of their own mind—always supposing that this will be no breach upon good family order. It is happy when the members of an house have one heart and one way—Happy also when different opinions and practice do not interrupt or impair domestic order and love.

We proceed to evince the great IMPORTANCE of the faithful discharge of the duty enjoined in the text.

The high motives to religion are taken from the life to come; but it is also profitable to the present life. Parents should inculcate it on their children from a regard to their *souls* and *bodies*, to this world and a *future*. He who neglects to “provide for his own house, is worse than an infidel. If a son shall ask bread of any

“ of you that is a father, will you give him a stone ?” Children ask of their parents what is more than food and raiment—direction in religion, that their souls may not famish for want of spiritual food—direction which inexperienced and uninformed years need. Left without such direction, what must be the consequence, considering their native depravity and the allurements of the world ? They may be plunged in lusts which will injure their health and reputation, prevent their usefulness, lay waste their conscience, sink them in infamy and distress in this world, and destroy them soul and body in the next.

Public and private schools of education, and the maintenance of public teachers of religion and morals, have evinced the sentiment of mankind on the necessity of good morals to the welfare of society. Families are the nurseries of piety and sound morals, or of impiety and vice. Children, transplanted from these private nurseries into schools, higher or lower ; or formed into distinct families, and entered on any employment in life, produce the fruits of their native soil.

Inattentive or indifferent to the moral and religious instruction of their children, what answer can parents make to them in time to come ? what answer to the community ? or to the great Judge at the last day ? They cannot, indeed, give grace to their children. But unremitting parental care of their religious education, together with fervent prayer, encourage them to hope that God will impart his grace. Should all their pains and prayers be unavailing, through the folly and obstinacy of their children, the reflection that parental duty has been faithfully attended will be comfortable. After the wisest and best care of their education, children may thrust daggers into the hearts of parents. It is enough to *see* or *hear* that they make themselves vile. But how insupportable the reflection, that all may be owing to the neglect of parental duty ? the neglect of counsel, restraint and warning in childhood and early

youth? that their temporal and eternal ruin may lie at the door of those who should have brought them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

“I will bring upon Abraham,” said God, “that which I have spoken of him: For I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” But Eli, for his remissness and neglect of the authority vested in him, received the awful denunciation, “I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth: Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. Therefore the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.”

“Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.” Religion is preserved, when parents apply their *own* hearts to it, and teach it to posterity. The most effectual way of teaching it is by example. A fine picture of virtue will be drawn to no purpose, if it is *never* exhibited in real life. Let parents resolve, “As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Let them be able to address their children in the language of humble confidence: “Know the God of your father. Let thy heart retain my words. Keep my commandments, and live. Wisdom is the principal thing: Therefore get wisdom. I have led thee in right paths. Incline thine heart unto my sayings: Let them not depart from thine eyes: Keep them in the midst of thy heart.” As an incentive cordially to embrace religion, and faithfully to instruct your children in the principles, duties and hopes of it, be assured, “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto

“ children’s children ; to such as keep his covenant,
 “ and to those that remember his commandments to
 “ do them.”

Parents, have compassion on your children, as Jesus had on those who fainted for his instruction in the paths of salvation. Teach them that every good gift comes from their Father in heaven, who expects a grateful return. They are but sojourners on earth. Their probationary state is short. They are bound to the eternal world, in which their state will be the consequence of their behaviour in this. Let your instructions, example and prayers unite to lead them in the path of life. “ Endeavour always to *understand* yourselves what you wish them to understand ; to *be* yourselves what you would have them be ; to *do* yourselves what you would have them practise.”

I will now turn your attention to *examples* of parents, who made it their care to educate their children in religion. The examples shall be taken from the sacred scriptures, where they are recorded for our learning.

The friend of God, the father of the faithful, inculcated on his household, with great care, the true religion. “ I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall “ keep the way of the Lord.” He spared no instructions and cautions, that they might escape the contagion of a world overrun with idolatry, and plunged in every pollution ; might know the only living and true God, and abide in the worship of him. Rescued from superstition himself, and honoured with special divine communications, he felt the importance of educating his family in the principles and practice of pure religion, as their highest duty and wisdom. His religious care of his household was the just expression of the same faith and piety as induced him to make the greatest worldly sacrifices, when called of God.

The example of Joshua may be next mentioned. He earnestly exhorted his people to put away their idol

gods, to fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth. Knowing, at the same time, their propensity to revolt upon every occasion, he assured them, that, however they might waver and apostatize, he was fixed in his own choice—fixed also in his resolution with respect to his house. “As for me and my house, we “will serve the Lord.” The religious care of his household was next to that of his own soul. How large soever his family, every soul occupied his attention. So far as was in his power, he resolved that they should all know and serve the Lord.

When the household of the chief magistrate of a nation make religion their care, it has the happiest aspect on public order and virtue. When the head of the small household of six or seven souls maintains a due care of religion, it is *as the precious ointment on the head of Aaron*. The young branches should regard him with honour, be thankful for such a ruler and guide, and receive his instructions with much deference.

The house of SAMUEL was as *the gate of heaven*. This chief magistrate and judge in Israel exhibited, in his public station, the highest concern for the advancement of righteousness, which exalteth a nation. “I “will shew you,” said he to his people, “the good “and right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve him “in truth with all your heart.” From being occupied in public affairs, he regularly returned to guide and *blest his house*: There *he built an altar to the Lord*. In his recess from the cares and labours of office, in his private and domestic character, he manifested the same integrity, the same respect to the honour of God and good of his household, as in his public station he expressed for the welfare of his people. The departure of his sons from the ways of so wise and godly a parent was an aggravation of their shame. The best counsel and example of parents may be lost upon their children. Perhaps Samuel’s degenerate sons shewed

some respect to his religious charges *at first*. For when we read of their defection, it is observable that he was *old*. When parents have done what in them lies to train up their children for God, the issue must be left with him.

DAVID, in his old age, could reflect in this manner :
 “ O Lord God, thou hast taught me, and hast been
 “ my trust, from my youth ; and hitherto have I de-
 “ clared thy wonderful works.” Well might such a
 parent charge his son, “ Know thou the God of thy
 “ father.” The son mentions the pious instructions of
 his father David. “ He taught me, and said unto me,
 “ Let thine heart retain my words :—Get wisdom, get
 “ derstanding ; forget it not.” What he meant by
 wisdom, he has explained. “ The fear of the Lord
 “ is the beginning of wisdom ; and the knowledge of
 “ the Holy is understanding. Wisdom is the princi-
 “ pal thing : Therefore get wisdom. Exalt her, and
 “ she shall promote thee. She shall give to thine head
 “ an ornament of grace ; a crown of glory shall she
 “ deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my
 “ sayings—I have taught thee in the way of wis-
 “ dom ; I have led thee in right paths.” Such instruc-
 tion Solomon had from his father. *The prophecy which*
his mother taught him is also mentioned, Proverbs xxxi.
 Whether the lessons which follow are considered as
 given *to* Solomon, or given *by* him, is immaterial.
 They remind us what the instruction is, which pious
 parents impart to the children of their hopes. “ My
 “ son, if thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and ap-
 “ ply thy heart to understanding ; yea, if thou criest
 “ after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for under-
 “ standing ; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest
 “ for her as for hid treasures ; then shalt thou un-
 “ derstand the fear of the Lord, and find the know-
 “ ledge of God. Trust in the Lord with all thine
 “ heart ; and lean not to thine own understanding.
 “ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall di-

“ rect thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes :
 “ Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. Wisdom is
 “ better than rubies. Her fruit is better than gold.
 “ She leads in the way of righteousness and life.”
 David *walked in his house wisely, in a perfect way—with*
a perfect heart. Solomon wrote his proverbs with an
 express view to instruct the young in the wisdom from
 above. God employs parents and others to imbue
 young minds with the wisdom which consists in the
 knowledge, fear and love of their Creator and Sav-
 iour.

It was the commendation of CORNELIUS, whose
 prayers and alms ascended to heaven with acceptance,
 that he feared God *with all his house.*

“ The unfeigned faith” of young Timothy was first
 conspicuous in his mother and grandmother. Nur-
 tured by them, he knew the holy scriptures from a
 child. An happy improvement of the advantages,
 under which he was early placed, prepared him for
 the perfect instructions of Paul, who styles him his
 own son in the faith, and commends him thus to the
 Philippian Christians : *I have no man like-minded.*

The distinguished characters we have mentioned,
 were eminent for instructing the rising members of
 their household in the great things of religion. Why
 is their example highly applauded, if not as a pattern
 to other parents and heads of families ? Religious edu-
 cation, which they esteemed a duty so important, to
 which they attended with steady and conscientious
 care, comes enforced by their example. No pious pa-
 rent can treat this matter with indifference.

Beside examples on sacred record, similar ones, liv-
 ing and dead, may be observed and recollected ; which
 concur to prove, that men of piety consider, and have
 ever considered, education in religion a matter of first
 moment. In this the wisest and best men, in all ages,
 among pagans, Jews and Christians, have united. It
 is a duty owing to God. *For children are the heritage*

of the Lord. A more essential service cannot be rendered to society, than the training up children to fear God, and honour their earthly superiors; to lead a peaceable life, in godliness and honesty. Children themselves claim it, as the best and most comfortable course of life. Ignorance and violation of religion and morality, in the first stage of life, lays the foundation of infamy and wretchedness. Furthermore, in the neglect of religious education, parents and heads of families cannot be supposed to take care of their own souls.

The example of the wisest and best of men is a most useful comment on the various instructions of scripture, relating to early education in religion. The testimonies God hath given of his approbation of parents who have carefully attended to this duty, and of his displeasure against the parents who have neglected or been remiss in it, abundantly evince its importance.

But, in opposition to the example of great and pious men, to the many express commands of God, and to the undeniable testimonies of his favour and anger, objections are made to religious education, that it fetters and shackles young minds, is hostile to all free enquiry, and upholds bigotry and superstition. Intending to appropriate a discourse to the distinct consideration of this objection, it will not be attended to at present.

Before I conclude, suffer me to turn your reflections upon the closing scene of a pious parent. How solicitous is he to impress a deep sense of religion upon his offspring? There was weight in his counsel, while he went in and out before them. He then appeared really to believe and to feel the good doctrine which he imparted. But his final charge has a peculiar energy. No charge of a parent to his posterity, when he is about to leave them behind in the world, can be more impressive than that of David to his son. Full of faith and hope as of days, his work finished, ripe for heav-

en, his time to die being come ; behold his parental concern for Solomon, then young and inexperienced, about to enter upon arduous duties, amidst many snares and allurements. Behold him, with every circumstance of solemnity, charge his son to adhere inviolably to the religion in which he had been educated ; which the father had cordially embraced, and held fast in all trials—which had proved a sure support in all the vicissitudes of life ; and in the hope of which he was prepared to die. “Thou, Solomon my son, know “thou the God of thy Father ; and serve him with a “perfect heart, and with a willing mind.” In making this choice, the son was assured that he would find his temporal and eternal account : But apostacy would bring fatal conviction of folly and presumption. On the confines of the grave, every worldly interest sinks to nothing. Swallowed up in contemplations on the scenes of eternity, the consequences of despising or deferring religion, or of duplicity in it, present themselves in full force—as also the wisdom of an early, decided choice of it. Look to David, who made and was fixed in this choice. See him expecting his exit, his flesh and heart failing, but fearing no evil, because God was the strength of his heart—improving the last moments of life, in imparting the best farewell counsel to a son endeared to him ; committing him to a covenant God ; and enjoining upon him, by the solemnities of death and eternity, to know and serve the God of his father.

Parents ; here is your pattern. Learn, what you will, on the verge of life, most earnestly desire for your children—what character you will then wish them to possess. Have you made choice of the only living and true God ? With unutterable groanings, you will pray, that they may also choose him for their God—that he would replenish them with his grace, guide them by his counsel, and make them blessings—friends to the Israel of God.

As contraries illustrate each other, let the character of David be contrasted to that of Chesterfield. The former, charging his son, *Know thou the God of thy father*, pointed out to him the way to heaven. The latter led his in the way to hell. For he taught him thus : “ Improve in all “ the refinements of deception and falsehood. Walk “ in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine “ eyes ; but take care to shun the coarseness of vulgar “ vice : Indulge thine appetites as becomes a person “ of rank and breeding. Deny thyself no fashionable “ gratification.” This, instead of the instruction which became a father, was giving him deadly poison. A son thus corrupted had reason to curse the father that begat him. It had been better to have been educated among the Hottentots, or to have been an idiot.

Parents ; in a little time you may leave your children in this world, and go to another, never to return. They call on you to guide them in right paths. Be instant in season and out of season, teaching them the fear of the Lord. This is wisdom. Serve him yourselves with all your heart. Spare no means or pains to imbue their minds with the best principles, that they may be wise to salvation. Committing yourselves and them to the divine direction and care, your labour in the Lord shall not be in vain. Warn and teach them in all wisdom. Watch for their souls, in the view of the account you must give of your charge. With exceeding joy will you appear in the presence of your great Judge, if you may be able to say, *Here am I, and the children which thou gavest me.* Happy the pious parents, whose children walk in their ways ! Happy the children who have pious parents ! With such parents every other care for their children is subservient to this, that the good part may be chosen, which shall never be taken away. “ My son, if thy heart be wise, “ my heart shall rejoice. The good man leaveth an “ inheritance to his children” better than riches and honour. They have reason to *rise up, and call him blessed.*

SERMON II.

ANSWER TO THE OBJECTION, THAT EDUCATION IN RELIGION SHACKLES THE MIND.

PROVERBS xxii. 6.

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO; AND WHEN HE IS OLD,
HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.

THE duty of parents to instruct their children in the principles of religion, and to incite them to the practice of it, is evident from many exprefs injunctions of the facred oracles ; from the testimonies of the favour of Almighty God to the faithful performance of this duty, and of his anger to the neglect of it. The example of the greatest and best of men, in all times, shews the sense they had of the high importance of this duty, and recommends it with a force irresistible, except by those whom neither precept nor example can persuade. They object, “that the religious education of children fetters and shackles their minds, is hostile to free enquiry, and upholds bigotry and superstition.” My present discourse will be devoted to the examination of this objection.

We shall not urge the authority of the text that has been read, or the many others of like import. Nor shall we urge the example of the excellent of the earth. Neither of these have the smallest weight with objectors of the present description.

Let such as are inclined, plead the cause of bigotry and superstition ; we have not so learned Christ. He

hath taught us to *judge even of ourselves what is right—to prove all things—to be fully persuaded in our own mind.* Christianity is a *reasonable service*, and requires that we *be ready always to give a reason of our faith and hope* : It never could have been received, had not men exercised their reason, and attended to the principles of evidence, in opposition to the authority of superstition and tradition—in opposition to the *wisdom* by which *the world knew not God.*

The primitive Christians had a veneration for the wisdom of God in the scriptures, and for his seal set to them, which nothing could abate. Their esteem of them rose, and their zeal to guard them was kindled, in proportion to what they suffered for the truth as it is in Jesus. Amidst the corruptions of judaism and popery, the sacred books were preserved with such care, that, the substance of divine truth being retained, the refutation of those corruptions might always be found in the inspired writings. The reformation, similar to that from paganism, opened men's eyes, and turned them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The bible only is the religion of Protestants. The zeal of the first Christians, and of the reformers, for the scriptures should provoke to emulation those who are parents, that their children may know these writings—may learn to *compare spiritual things with spiritual.* It argues a noble mind, to recur to the scriptures for the decision of every religious controversy, not *receiving for doctrines the commandments of men.*

However any may be educated in bigotry, it appears, from what we have now remarked, that true religion encourages free enquiry : It does not contract, it enlarges the mind. It is not grounded on education, but on the authority of the God of truth. He can teach man knowledge by revelation as well as by the light of nature. It behoves us to use all the means of knowledge which he affords—all helps to know his will—and all

our advantages to *make manifest the savour of his knowledge*. Nor may we confide in our choice of religion any further, than we have taken it up from cool reflection and examination, and are persuaded that it accords with the discoveries which God hath made of himself. In religion we may not consult *with flesh and blood*—with our prejudices, connections and worldly interests. We should take pains to separate *the chaff* from *the wheat*; and ask wisdom from the Father of lights.

Great allowances are to be made for those, who, having been educated in ignorance and superstition, know not what or why they worship, and are unable to extricate themselves. But these allowances are inapplicable to such as have been educated in a country visited by the beams of the sun of righteousness, and who are allowed full religious liberty: It is therefore the indispensable duty of parents to take all their instructions in religion ultimately from that uncorrupted source, *the oracles of God*.

These things being kept in mind, can it be said that religious instruction favours of bigotry, and is only adapted to superstition? Will the neglect of such instruction be a guard against bigotry? When has it proved so? When has it favoured freedom of enquiry, or liberality of sentiment? Licentiousness of thinking, scepticism, or an entire want of reflection have often been the issue.

Some training up of children all must allow to be necessary. What must this be, if religion and morals are wholly excluded? These preclude nothing ornamental or useful—no valuable improvement of any kind. What reason is there to presume that they will be educated in error? or that, if educated in the truth, they will never after examine fairly and impartially the things in which they have been instructed? that the force of education will of course lead them to believe precisely as they have been taught; and for no other reason

than that their teachers or ancestors thus believed? Would you have them enter on life with no principles? or with bad ones? Is the first possible? Can the latter be commended?

An intelligent creature can but have some principles and ends of action: These must be either virtuous or vicious. There is no middle character. The powers of reason and reflection render every creature accountable to him whose inspiration giveth understanding to man. Would you have children grow up without remembrance or knowledge of God? Or will they acquire this knowledge without a guide? If they need a guide, who so proper to take them by the hand, and lead them into the way of truth, as parents? These naturally care for them. From affection, if not from a sense of duty, they will be disposed to give them the best instruction they are able to impart. Placed under their care at the dawn of reason, and having every advantage to observe its progress, will you not allow them to impart such counsel as the tender mind can bear, and they may be capable of imparting. If they may not imbue the minds of their children with any principles of religion, lest it should give them a bias to such principles—if they may not give early cautions against the corruption in principle and practice, which every where abounds—if children must be left to themselves in this respect, what will they be when they reach years of majority? Would you have them, at that period, wholly unprincipled? wholly opposed to piety and sound morals? without any guard against the snares and enticements of the world? If such is your wish, you are an atheist, and we have nothing to say to you while we are on the present subject. If such is not your wish, how can the evil mentioned be prevented, but by early education in religion?—the thing which your objection states to be nothing but bigotry, the source of mental slavery, hostile to every liberal and generous sentiment?

What is your own *example* before your children? For this has more influence than precept. If virtuous, must it make them bigots? If vicious, will it do no injury to their principles and morals? Or would you, by your behaviour, cause them to err from the words knowledge? to live in the error of the wicked? Does it become you to object against a pious and virtuous deportment of parents before their children, which, more than any instructions, will influence young minds? Must it needs excite a partiality for pious paths? a prejudice unfavourable to liberal enquiry? Strange indeed must prejudices on the side of religion and virtue be in this age of dissipation and infidelity. The examples are so rare, that they need give but little concern to free thinkers.

Apply the objection before us to the concerns of this life; for it is as applicable to these as to the subject of religion. It will be admitted that parents may, without any hazard, instruct their children in the arts and business of life—in what concerns their health, usefulness and reputation—in the choice of an employment, having regard to their genius and rank—in what may contribute to the comfort, enjoyment and real convenience and ornament of life—that they may, according to their ability, furnish them with means for the cultivation of their minds; the means of a liberal and polite education. Yea, it may be granted that parental care, in such instances as these, is a duty owing to their children, and to the community. Education in these points may, however, give them a predilection for, and attachment to, particular arts, occupations, modes of life and pursuits in it—a fondness for industry, for the conveniences of life, for the acquisition of a good name, or of science, or of eminence in some useful art or profession. Now why should they not be self-taught in these things, rather than aided by education? Who ever talked in this manner on education as it respects the things of this

life? Who ever supposed that education in these matters is unnecessary, useless, and even prejudicial? that children would be better without it?

The things of the soul and another world are of far higher moment. What good reason can be given why they should not be as much the objects of education? At the opening of the capacity for moral action, and in the first stages of its progress, children as much need directions for their moral conduct, as they do in worldly pursuits. Shall parents take pains to form them to habits conducive to bodily health and vigour; habits of application to some laudable business; habits of discretion and frugality? Shall they guide and assist them in the attainment of human knowledge? in the course which may conciliate favour and esteem, and make them regarded, useful and comfortable in life? Shall they caution them against companions who would tempt them to waste their time and substance; to forfeit their honour and good name; to engage them in courses fruitful of sorrow and misery, perhaps fatal, as to this world? Is all this care of parents to be commended? Do the parents, who wholly neglect it, harden themselves against their offspring? And shall they yet be excused and justified in taking no care of the souls of their children? in withholding from them all instruction in religion—their chief and eternal concern? Shall all information be withheld as to the divine art of living to God, of doing his work, of cultivating the virtues, personal, social, divine and Christian, which *in the sight of God are of great price*? which, through his abundant grace and the Saviour's merits, are a foundation of the peace that passeth understanding?—of joy unspeakable, and the lively hope of an heavenly inheritance?

The strength of the parental affections is an instance of our heavenly Father's goodness, prompting parents to do and suffer those things for their offspring, which abstract considerations could not persuade them to do

and suffer. Religion co-operates with affection, and with every worldly motive, to enforce the same.—Diligence, temperance, frugality, justice, truth, fidelity, are virtues more firmly founded in religion, than in any consideration of worldly advantage. Their reasonableness in themselves, their being enjoined by the example as well as authority of the Christian Lawgiver, and the expectation of future recompence, are incentives which strengthen every other motive to them. The force of Christian motives will be felt, when all worldly ones are overbalanced by the temptations in the other scale. What objection can lie against education in this religion?

Religion is highly advantageous to society: It teaches subjection to natural and civil superiours. Neither of these is to be expected, where children and youth are not educated in the fear of God, to whom all other superiours are accountable, and from whom they derive all their authority. He who objects to religious education, would destroy the order and foundations of society. Would it be highly prejudicial, to the rising generation and to the world, to neglect their instruction in civil and secular concerns? much more to neglect it in religion, which alone secures a regular and uniform discharge of the duties of life. Good morals greatly depend on religious education. Very few will appear as advocates for bad morals. *Few*; for a few there are, who are so lost to a sense of virtue and good breeding as to plead for all excess in vice.

The objection we are considering does not expressly undertake to vindicate the cause of gross immorality, whatever its real design or tendency may be. Can profligate morals be prevented, but by instruction in religion? Any of my hearers may call to mind what has fallen under their own observation. Have those children, who have been brought up in families where little or no attention has been given to education in religion, where irreligious examples have been con-

stantly before them, been disposed, in after life, to regard the rules of morality? Have those, who have been thus taught to do evil, learnt to do well? Left to their own management in early life, the usages and establishments of any age or country, however favourable to virtue, have been disregarded. The laws have been insufficient to restrain them. The principles of ingenuoufness, gratitude, honour, shame, have been wanting. Grown up ignorant of religion, full of disgust to it, they continue to be *worse and worse*. In some instances, no care of pious parents is effectual to restrain and control the folly in the hearts of children. What then may be looked for where no care has been taken of them? where they lie open to those, who spare no means and endeavours to poison their minds with the worst principles?

The first stage of life looks up with reverence and confidence to parents and instructors. It is hopeful, that *wisdom* may then *enter into the heart*, and *knowledge* be *pleasant to the soul*. Evil propensities of *nature* may then be checked; but, if unchecked, may acquire strength, which no after pains can subdue. Many evil propensities are *acquired* from evil *customs* and *examples*, through the neglect of education. A prompt genius and amiable natural endowments have been ruined for want of culture; while some of but an ordinary genius have made good proficiency, and a forward disposition has been mended, by proper education.

Parents, whose instructions in religion come recommended by a correspondent example, restrain and awe by their presence such as are viciously inclined. They cherish the first openings of virtue. A contrary character, at the head of a family, may root out any sense of piety, which may have been excited in the young members of the household; or it may prevent any sense of it from being once awakened.

How far it belongs to the head of a family to direct the religion of it, we shall not here tarry to enquire. The enquiry will have a different answer according to the variation of circumstances. The head of a family is surety, in a measure, for the principles and conduct of his household. God ordinarily improves *means* and *instruments* in imparting knowledge and grace. It is incumbent on parents to guide their family alike in the things of life and godliness—to be, in both respects, *ministers of God for good*.

The importance of religion is especially manifest from the *immortality* of the soul, our relation to GOD as *moral Governour*, and our *intimate concern with* JESUS CHRIST, *the MEDIATOR between God and men*. Hath God condescended to speak to us from heaven, by his own Son? What he hath spoken must be of the highest moment. Shall we not then apply our hearts to it, and train up our children to an acquaintance with it? Doth it, in no measure, depend on parents, whether their children are acquainted with the doctrine of Christ? *the words of eternal life*? The greater part die while under age. Shall they die without instruction, when, through the instrumentality of parents and others, they might become wise to salvation? Those who have been instrumental to their existence, appear to be under the strongest bonds to lead them in the way everlasting. Early imbibed principles and early manners may extend beyond the bounds of time. The importance of that period cannot be too often and too seriously considered by those who have the education of children and youth.

Parents, doubtless, will inculcate their *own* ideas of religion. And though they presume that their ideas are taken from the scriptures, yet it is their own construction of them—except that a considerable part may be delivered in the language of the Holy Ghost. Is it probable, then, that, in a Protestant country, where the scriptures are recurred to as the only rule of faith

and practice, parents will give such instruction to their children as is materially wrong? Attached to the principles of civil and religious liberty, having no inclination to educate in error those who are so dear to them, it is very improbable that they should train them up in any errors which affect the *substance* of Christian doctrine. What profession of faith is there among the churches of the reformation, which does not, for substance, accord with holy writ? Though none be exempt from error, it may be difficult to fix the charge of *essential* error on any. All may *hold the head*. The things in which they differ from one another are of small moment compared with those wherein they are agreed. Notwithstanding the hold which superstition has of the mind, is there occasion, in this enlightened age, to be so very jealous of its sway? Does not the pretended jealousy proceed from an aversion to the *paths* in which our ancestors *found rest to their souls*? in which they trained up a godly seed? Is there not more occasion to fear *new* errors than *old*? Further, are the presumed errors of education in religion of such a description, and so riveted, that those, who may be educated in them, will not be able, with the improvements of this age of the world, to extricate themselves—to separate the chaff from the precious grain? Many just and important sentiments may be connected with erroneous ones. If some great and good men have held great errors, their practical sense of piety has been superiour to the influence of their abstract theories, and overbalanced the influence of them. When the spirit of vital piety shews that some wrong opinions do not corrupt their hearts, the bias to those opinions is not so dangerous, as, at first view, might be suspected: It shews that they do not view them in the manner, connection and consequences which others do. It should further be considered, whether the *errors* and *imperfections* of good men furnish objections, which bear any comparison with the

open *neglect* and *contempt* of religion—whether the former disserve the cause of truth and virtue as do the latter.

Candour must grant that the danger is not from religious education, but from its neglect. Those who are taught, are not precluded the right of private judgment: It is their privilege and duty to study the scriptures, and compare one part with another, so far as they are able, and in the use of the best means. Nothing can be more pleasing to a pious parent, than to observe a thoughtful, inquisitive mind in his children on the subject of religion. May he not take pains to sow *good seed*, while the enemy is busy to sow *tares*? To prevent prejudices of education, would you hazard the experiment of their early imbibing ruinous principles, and contracting unconquerable propensities to vice and impiety of every kind? To guard against bigotry in religion, would you make them bigots to infidelity?

You well know, and therefore need only to be reminded, that if you neglect to train up a child to some suitable *employment*, and to his *civil* duties; if you suffer him to waste his time, and are inattentive to the company he keeps, the consequences will be most injurious to him, and to mankind. Will the consequences of a neglect of *religious* education be less injurious? The *natural* soil, if not cultivated, will be overgrown with briars and thorns, which will prevent the growth of good seed. The *moral* soil, without culture, will yield a luxuriant growth of noxious fruit. The principles of religion not being sown in it, those of irreligion will naturally spring up. Growing up without information in religion, what should hinder children from following the bad examples which every where abound? from listening to the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge? The season to imbue their minds with honourable and virtuous sentiments, with wise and prudent counsel, has been

neglected ; and no such advantage will return. Conscience will be defiled and wasted. They will have little or no regard to character—will, with the unclean spirit, *walk through dry places* in pursuit of *rest*, but *find none*. Seeking whom they may devour, they will become intolerable to society, and be victims to its justice. A mere civil education may prevent many of these evils. Shall then *the children of this world be wiser in their generation than the children of light?*

Some, with much art and pains, would educate children and youth in the system of fatality—the system of human perfectibility—the system of *political justice*, which gives to all a common right to the possessions of individuals—“the savage philosophy, which teaches its disciples to look with perfect indifference on” all the tender relations of life ; “to forget and insult friends and benefactors, to divest themselves of all that is human, that they may be better prepared for the disinterested love of their species.” There are those who are assiduous thus to educate the rising generation. We hope there are but few of this description. We believe and know that there are parents, who, though openly immoral and impious themselves, wish their children a very different education. Though religious and moral instruction must come with an ill grace from such mouths, yet they choose to put their children under the care of those who will pay particular attention to good morals.

I need not ask any of my hearers, whether they would choose to have their children trained up in the sober habits of our ancestors ? or in the way of *Voltaire* and *Godwin* ? If the apostles of the vilest error compass sea and land to disseminate their poison, shall the friends of truth provide our children and youth with no antidote against the poison ? Should they, by means of early instruction, acquire a bias to the side of piety and sound morals, and an aversion to licentious principles and conduct, Satan and his servants

will regret it ; but not a single friend of truth, virtue and mankind. It is certainly happy for our children and the world, if the force of their education is turned to *the way in which they should go*, so that in manhood and age they *will not depart from it*.

The parent who educates his children, or suffers them to be educated, in irreligion, will have sad conviction, from their behaviour, either that he hath no rightful command over them, or that their education has been essentially wrong. For if they, as parents, are entitled to honour and reverence, whence is the title derived ? You reply, From the order of nature. But if there is not an author of nature, and one who presides over it, it has no law nor order. If there is an author of nature, whose kingdom is over all, then he is the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits. Now if he be a father, where is his honour ? Is HE, who is above all, and through all, and in us all, entitled to no honour ? and shall earthly superiors, notwithstanding, claim this from their inferiors ? Or if HE justly claims supreme reverence, will you not teach your children to pay it to him ? On what ground can you otherwise expect that they will honour you ?

The order of families and society therefore depends upon religious education. What account can those parents who neglect it give to God, to their children, or to the community ? Or what account can they give, if their example is a constant contradiction to any religious instruction they may impart ?

When children become capable, in a measure, to judge for themselves, their judgment may still be much assisted by the mature advice of parents and others. Would they guard against an hasty judgment and rash determinations, they must distrust their own opinions, when opposed to the judgment of those who have had more opportunity and superior means of information. We cannot esteem the child

or youth who appears to condemn his parents and teachers. Any improvements in knowledge, connected with modesty, a mind open to advice, is pleasing.

If family and civil order depend upon moral and religious education—if the neglect of it breaks the bonds of society—would level all property, and confound all the relations of life—would take away all security for our reputation and personal safety, let it not be said that liberality and freedom of mind forbid a virtuous and pious education. If free thinking consists in being set loose from all principle—in disowning all dependence on, and accountableness to, a Maker and Governour of the world—all connection with, and obligation to, the Mediator between God and men—in opening the flood-gates of vice—then indeed religion is opposed to free enquiry. But if such licentious talk can proceed only from an atheist, let not the objection be urged by any who are not atheists. Let not the slaves of lust and of Satan undertake to teach us what is liberty; nor the bigots of scepticism talk of liberality.

The subject will be profitably improved, if parents are put upon recollecting their omissions of family instruction in religion, and excited to greater circumspection and fidelity in this highly important duty. Have they taught and warned their children, as they should have done? Have they permitted no iniquity in them, which they might have restrained? Have they done what was in their power, that their children might be *an instructed seed to serve the Lord*? Or have they injured those whom they tenderly love, by withholding from them Christian instruction? Has the adorning of their bodies, rather than the ornaments of the mind, been the concern of parents? Have treasures which corrupt, canker, and flee away, been laid up with much care, while the true riches have been carelessly thought of for them, if indeed at all thought of? Have parents been very solicitous that

their children might be promoted in the world ; but been too unmindful of that sacred text, *Them that honour me, I will honour ? They who despise me, shall be lightly esteemed ?*

Do any of you who are parents complain, that your children neither fear God, nor honour you ? Examine what blame may lie at your own door. Did you begin early with instruction and government, and continue the same as their advancing capacity, disposition and years required ? If you have taken pains to have them furnished for their intended employment in life, have you also instructed them to acquaint themselves with God, and be at peace ? If fond affection has not indulged them too far—if you have not, by misjudged severity, discouraged them, and disaffected them to right paths—if you have fulfilled your duty, but not been successful ; pious parents have had the same affliction. But be sure to examine faithfully, whether, or how far, you may have been the blameable cause of the wickedness of your children, by your neglect, or any improper conduct.

The forest grief of parents is sometimes from children, who might be their greatest joy. Whatever can be done to prevent an affliction so great, should be done while there is hope. Let it be the constant care of parents so to guide and guard their children, that these may account it their honour and felicity to have descended from them ; and make it their ambition to be the joy and crown of their parents. Make it your unwearied endeavour to lay before them such arguments and motives in behalf of undissembled piety and sound morals, as may be adapted to fill them with a growing esteem of every good path ; that when you shall sleep with your fathers, they may take your place, and do more for God. Your encouragement to the cheerful performance of this parental duty is, that *a child trained up in the way he should go, will not depart from it when he is old.*—AMEN.

SERMON III.

REFLECTIONS OF THE AGED ON THE EARLY CHOICE OF RELIGION.

PSALM, lxxi. 16, 17, 18.

I WILL GO IN THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD GOD: I WILL MAKE MENTION OF THY RIGHTEOUSNESS, EVEN OF THINE ONLY. O GOD, THOU HAST TAUGHT ME FROM MY YOUTH; AND HITHERTO HAVE I DECLARED THY WONDROUS WORKS. NOW ALSO WHEN I AM OLD AND GRAY-HEADED, O GOD, FORSAKE ME NOT; UNTIL I HAVE SHEWED THY STRENGTH UNTO THIS GENERATION, AND THY POWER TO EVERY ONE THAT IS TO COME.



THIS sacred passage contains the reflection of an aged faint on his early choice of God, and the divine goodness to him from youth to old age—his resolutions resulting from this reflection—and his concern to transmit religion to after times.

FIRST, We have the reflection of an aged faint on his early choice of God, and the special providence over him from youth to old age. *Thou hast taught me from my youth. Hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.*

David begins the psalm with calling to mind his early trust in God and devotedness to him, the peculiar providential care which he had experienced from the beginning of life, and through all its succeeding stages and circumstances. His early choice laid the foundation of proficiency in the path of true wisdom. Hence he could charge his son, "Know thou the God of thy father."

Early habits of piety, strengthened in manhood, and matured in age, render hoary hairs both honourable and comfortable. David, when old and gray-

headed, felt an inward joy and support, in being able to appeal to the heart-searching God, "Thou art my trust from my youth." Thus good Hezekiah; "Remember how I have walked before thee in truth." What unspeakable consolation did Paul the aged find in this; "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith?" Old age can find no consolation in reflecting on the accumulation of wealth, or having come to great worldly honour, or on having subdued kingdoms. Riches flee away. Honour abideth not. The glory of man is a fading flower. But "righteousness is immortal. The good man shall be satisfied from himself." His joy and treasure no man can take from him: It is the testimony of a good conscience. "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely." When his flesh and heart fail, conscious integrity is his support; "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever."

David in his old age reflected also upon the great goodness of God to him through the past stages and circumstances of his life; mercies outward and spiritual. He called on his soul and all within him to pay the tribute which these mercies demanded. He called on pious friends to unite with him in paying this grateful tribute. God had strengthened him when weak and feeble, raised him from obscurity to the summit of honour, extricated him in great temptation and danger, and made precious promises to his house. In his prosperity and elevation he did not forget his benefactor and deliverer, as is often the case; but ascribed to him all the praise. "In God is all my salvation and glory, my refuge is in God." Taught by experience, he declared, "I will hope continually, and yet praise him more and more." Whatever dangers might surround him, whoever were his enemies, this was his language, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear."

The wondrous works of God, which he had hitherto declared, were more especially the providences by which he himself had been preserved and exalted. By resolving to go in the strength of the Lord God, he professeth that God had been his strength and trust. His prayer, that God would not forsake him in old age, proceeded upon the recollection that God had been his help and shield, had guided and influenced him by his unerring counsel and good Spirit—that Spirit whose departure David so much apprehended, when he had infamously fallen; for the wonted help and comfort of which he interceded with unutterable groanings. “Uphold me with thy free Spirit: Restore to me the joy of thy salvation. Create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence. Take not thy holy Spirit from me.”

In some verses following the text, he makes mention of the fore troubles through which he had passed, that he might praise his Almighty helper and Redeemer. He had been restored from sickness, which had brought him to the gates of death. The God whom he served from his youth, had been present to comfort him, when bereaved of the tenderest earthly connections, and strengthened him with strength in his soul. His familiar friends betrayed and reproached him. A dangerous conspiracy was formed in his own house. But neither open enemies, nor unfaithful friends, nor domestic treason could shake his trust in God. He had many a severe conflict with distrust. “Hath God forgotten to be gracious? and will he be favourable no more?” Troubles without, and wasting sickness, together with the mystery of providence in the prosperity of the wicked and affliction of the righteous, made him utter the language of despondence. Never, perhaps, was his gloom greater, than when he was cut off from the privileges of the sanctuary. But his desponding thoughts were always composed by recol-

lecting *the years of the right hand of the* MOST HIGH. Long and great experience of God's covenant love and faithfulness taught him to check any misgivings which sometimes arose. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! Wait on God, hope in his word. All my expectation is from him." Most feelingly and affectionately does he describe the benefits of religious trust. Psalm xl. at the beginning. "I waited patiently for the Lord, and HE inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my foot upon a rock. And HE hath put a new song into my mouth. Many shall see it, and fear, and turn to the Lord. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him from all his fears." His experience from youth to age taught him to say, "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God; therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." From his own example and experience he recommends, "Commit thy way unto the Lord: Trust also in him, and HE shall bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Fret not thyself, because of him that prospereth in his way. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: For the Lord upholdeth him with his hand."

You see that those who have most attentively observed the divine footsteps, who have had the longest and largest experience of the care and faithfulness of God, recollect past providences with pious joy—the providence which has been over their infancy, childhood and youth, manhood and decay;—amidst innumerable hazards, temptations and afflictions; protecting and providing for them, delivering them from

evil, or upholding them in fix troubles and in seven ; keeping them from, or succouring them in, dangerous temptations, or restoring them from their declensions. They especially call to mind, with lively praise, the grace of redemption, the privileges of the gospel, a good work hopefully begun and carrying on in them ; the honour God hath done them, in making them any way useful in the world. They give him the praise, if their counsel, prayers, endeavours or example have guarded or reclaimed any from sin ; or guided, encouraged or confirmed any in virtue and piety. They give him the glory of any experience of the comforts of religion, and go on their way rejoicing. Reflections on a life devoted to God are a source of strong consolation at all times ; but peculiarly in the evil days of nature in decline, in which is no pleasure. What source of disquiet, at that period, to review neglected opportunities ? a price once enjoyed, but misimproved ? abused mercies, incorrigibleness under correction ; health, reason, strength, means, acceptable seasons, divine influences, slighted and wasted ? The only and wretched refuge, in such case, is, to fly, if possible, from one's own reflections. The just, whose path has shined more and more, from the morning to the evening of life, have a peaceful review of the past, and hope for the future. For such *some might dare to die.*

SECONDLY, David, reflecting on his early choice of religion, and his improvement of life, reflecting also on great experience of God's providential care, resolved to persevere in the course of piety to the end of his days. *I will go in the strength of the Lord God : I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.* Such are the resolutions arising from a review of a long life conducted by the principles and hopes of religion.

Those who have walked with God from their childhood and youth up, calling to mind his past mercies,

can apply to him with humble confidence to sustain and comfort their declining years. “By thee I have been holden up from the womb. Thou art my trust from my youth. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.”

The aged sit alone in the world. The associates of their youth are generally dead. Of the few that are left some are at a distance. They have no intercourse with them, and but seldom hear from them. They cannot have the wonted aid from contemporaries labouring under the same languour and decay. The aged are not company for younger life, nor these for them. They consider themselves, and are often regarded, as a burden. The earth is peopled with a new and unknown sett of inhabitants, by whom the former are forgotten. Decay of body and mind advanceth.—There is no pleasure in the things which refreshed and delighted their youth and manhood. Desire and fortitude fail. Fears are in the way. Every care is burdensome. The world is willing to part with them.—the grave calls for them.

What occasion hath age for the consolations of God? How sweet the recollection of his *loving-kindnesses, which have been ever of old?* Such recollection is an incentive to go in his strength, and make mention of his righteousness, even his only. They have experienced the mighty power of divine grace, in being created anew in Christ Jesus. All their strength against inward corruption and temptation from without is still of God. He is faithful. He never forsaketh his own work. Though their outward man decayeth, their inward man is renewed day by day.

The righteousness of the saints is that which is by faith in the Mediator. Ascribing to him their justification and calling of God, they constantly look to him for righteousness and strength. A sense of their own

weakness through sin dwelling in them, gratitude for what has been done, and is doing, for their souls, constrain them to glory in the Lord alone. They have been sustained in spiritual conflicts. They have overcome through the blood of the Lamb. They wait on the Lord and renew their strength. The example and experience of the godly, in all ages, declare that their trust in his power, love and faithfulness has not been in vain. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, " O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear " not : For I have redeemed thee, I have called thee " by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest " through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through " the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : When thou " walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt ; " neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Even to " old age I am HE, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. The righteous shall flourish as the palm-tree ; he shall grow like the cedar in Lebanon. They " shall bring forth fruit in old age—to shew that the " Lord is good." To persons of fourscore, the world appears, in some measure, as it did to Noah after the flood. They survey the ruins of time ; their joys gone ; desolation spread here and there, where once were their most pleasing prospects.

David, on the verge of life, expresseth as *all his salvation and desire*, that God had "made with him an " everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." He could say, " Though I walk through the valley " and shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; thy rod " and staff comfort me. As for me, I shall behold thy " face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I " awake with thy likeness."

Resignation to the MOST HIGH, owning him to be God, is the path of duty and peace : It lays the foundation of the hope which maketh not ashamed. Since their course will soon be finished, the aged should retire from the noise and cares of the world, to com-

mune with their heart and their God, before their spirit returns to him. Absence from earth and familiarity with eternal scenes will prepare them to associate with the spirits of the just and the angels of God. When they look back, can they wish to return to youth and childhood, and pass through life a second time? When they look round them, or before, or behind, or within themselves, what is there to warrant a warm attachment to earth, or a vigorous pursuit of its gifts, at *their* period? But if they walk in the light of God's countenance—if they rejoice in his name all the day, and are exalted in his righteousness, why should they fear when death is about to introduce them to his presence?

“ To forget death is folly in the young ; but in the
 “ old it is madness. Much intimacy with the world
 “ at their” stage of life “ is contemptible. Never is
 “ one so strongly struck with the weakness and de-
 “ pravity of human nature, as when he beholds gray
 “ hairs doting on the world,” and forgetful of “ eter-
 “ nity.” Let days speak, and gray hairs teach wisdom. Happy is it when the longest experience of the world, of its emptiness and vanity, the longest opportunity to lay up a good foundation for eternity, has been well improved. For this purpose came we into the world. When those who have lived longest, can review life with the testimony of a good conscience, they appeal as in the text, O God, thou hast taught me from my youth ; and hitherto have I declared thy wonderful works. They firmly resolve to hold fast their integrity till death ; to go in the strength of the Lord God, and make mention of his righteousness, even of his only.

THIRDLY, The text expresseth David's concern to transmit and extend a favour of religion. *Now also when I am old and gray-headed, forsake me not ; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.*

What lay nearest his heart before he left the world was to impress on his people, and particularly on the youth of the nation, a conviction of the advantages of religion. This had guided his youth : It was the support and comfort of his old age. Setting the highest value on his own interest in the everlasting covenant, it was his ardent wish and endeavour, that he might see true religion honoured as the foundation of public and private happiness. The result of his observation from youth to old age, was, that he *had not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*. Friends and benefactors are raised up, to relieve them in any straits.

Admonished by age and decay that his opportunity to serve the will of God in his generation was almost terminated, how could David close life more honourably and usefully, than by his best attempts to kindle the flame of vital piety in the breasts of the rising generation ?

A long life thus finished resembles the setting sun, whose orb and rays then appear larger and brighter.

The aged observe, that those who began life with them, have, with a few exceptions, closed the scene—a memento that they themselves must soon. Others have come forward, and no part of the drama remains for them to act who have been so long on the stage. Their highest commendation will be to excite survivors to act their parts well—to enter on life with the most laudable views of usefulness to the world, and hereby of honouring God.

Parents, to whom God hath given length of days, incite your posterity to stand up for God and his truth. Charity hopeth that you have improved long life by an intimate acquaintance with religion. In this case, fear not. God will not cast you off in old age. He will uphold you by his arm, and guide you by his counsel. How consoling is this reflection, under the labour and sorrow which are assigned to declining years ! Be it

your endeavour that God's glory may shine on your children.

After the deadness of winter, the face of nature puts on a new glory as the spring advances. This resembles the restitution of all things, when the hoary head will renew its youth;—not to languish again, but to flourish in immortal vigour. No summer's heat, nor autumn's decay, nor winter's frost, nor night, nor the kingdom of death, is there. One perpetual spring, one eternal day, will open. The glory of God is the light of that world. A pure river of water of life, issuing from his throne, waters that divine abode. The tree of life, always in its verdure, yields her fruit every month, and gives life to all that taste it. There is in heaven no succession of seasons, as on earth. There is in eternity no account of time, the angel of God's presence having pronounced, *There shall be time no longer*. Therefore the hoary head is young as the infant. In this world, the stages of life, like the seasons, quickly succeed each other. Those who are now in their winter, look back, and remember that a little while ago it was spring with them. The space they have lived is much longer than that which is left. Every year seems shorter. Their example and experience in religion should inculcate it on those who are to come after them; as David, when on the verge of life, with great solemnity charged Solomon, then young and tender, “Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him “with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind.” Parents, who have made choice of God, will earnestly pray and endeavour, that their children, to all generations, may make the same choice. The word on which they hope is this; “The mercy of the Lord is from “everlasting to everlasting, and his righteousness to “children's children; to such as keep his covenant.” With what pleasure did Paul call to mind the unfeigned faith of young Timothy? the pious spirit which seemed to descend to him from his ancestors? In the

near view of his own death, the aged apostle was comforted, that his own son in the faith would rise up the ornament of the church, a signal instrument in the defence and spread of the gospel. Next to the approbation of his own conscience and the hope of immortality, an aged saint can have no greater satisfaction than to observe the traces of undissembled piety and Christian zeal in such as are coming forward in life. St. Peter, in his old age, knowing that shortly he must put off his tabernacle, used his utmost endeavour in inculcating again and again the things of the gospel, that they might be recollected and have effect after his decease.

May the aged, having made timely choice of religion, spare no pains to extend its influence, that they may bless posterity and unborn generations with better blessings than any worldly ones. They are but a single remove from their eternal home. Of the multitudes, who have gone down to the grave, none have returned. If you wait or live a little longer, the grave is your house. You have had much opportunity to make a just estimate of life. For what would you still desire it at so late a period? If the long day of life has been well spent, you may rather have a desire to depart. What is wanting cannot be numbered; but the presence of God can abundantly supply it: It can sustain, under every grief and burden: It increaseth strength to them that have no might. In what other strength can those go on, whose powers are impaired and impairing? With your loins girt, and your lamps trimmed, wait the coming of your Lord. Be neither impatient of life, nor subject to bondage through fear of death; but go in the strength of the Lord, making mention of his righteousness, declaring his strength and power to those who may survive you. Though you have from youth to age been devoted to God, still your work is not done, nor will be, while life and reason last. You must work till the night of death, when

no man can work. You must labour, and not faint. So in due season you shall reap a glorious harvest, which will reward your labour in the Lord beyond all you can conceive. As a flock of corn cometh in his season, so cometh the good man to his grave in a full age, ripe for heaven.

Have any put off to old age the one thing needful? What shall we say? Certainly every remaining day and hour is precious. There is all possible occasion for the redemption of time—for all diligence that you may be found of your Judge in peace.

Let the early good profession, the exemplary peaceful life, and happy death of aged saints, stimulate those in youth to *enquire for the old paths, the good way, and to walk therein*. Our subject exhibits a most worthy pattern for those who are beginning life: It exhibits the force, immutability and progress of religion. Such characters are *the excellent of the earth*. They review past days with comfort, and look forward with hope.

Happy are they who have been trained up in the way they should go, and depart not therefrom when they are old. Youth is the period to lay a foundation for a comfortable and honourable old age. May none of our youth waste this period in vain pursuits. Those who would reap in harvest must observe the proper seed-time. If there is no bloom in the spring, there will be no fruit the following season. How pitiful the excuses which the young make for postponing the remembrance of their Creator! How painful will it be, in the lapse of life, to look back on the neglects of its early and best period? to review health, strength, talents, means and influences of grace abused? to look into the grave, ready to receive them, in which is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom? Or should they die in youth, amidst no other than projections and pursuits of vanity, where are they? Rather lay up in store a sure foundation of support and hope against the time when you shall most stand in need. This

is no other than to make early choice of God. If taught of him from your youth, your peace will be great. Should you live to be old, you will go in his strength. He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

To despise wisdom and instruction is the character of a fool. But “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good ; let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers ; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”

The two following sermons are added, to complete the number of pages proposed for the volume.

SERMON I.

CONTEMPLATIONS ON CHRIST.

MATTHEW, xxii. 42,

—WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?



ONE of the Pharisees asked our Lord, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” The answer was, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The evangelists Mark* and Luke† inform us, that the answer was perfectly satisfactory to the enquirer, and to others of the sect, who were then present. Our Lord embraced so favourable an opportunity to ask them, “*What think ye of CHRIST, or MESSIAH? whose son is he?*” They were the acknowledged interpreters of the Jewish scriptures, which foretold and described that JUST ONE. It was therefore very proper to ask them the present question. Their reply was, “The son of David.” This prepared the way to a further question. “How then doth David in Spirit call him LORD? If David call him LORD, how is he his son?” This point they could not solve.

* Mark, xii. 32.

† Luke, xx. 39.

The enquiry now before us is, What have the holy scriptures taught us respecting the person and character of Christ?

When the Pharisees said, that the Messiah was the son of David, Jesus referred them to the words which David, by inspiration spake concerning him, Psal. cx. i. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool." The Pharisees never thought he was the *root* as well as *offspring* of David. Viewing him merely as a man, proceeding from David's loins, they might well be perplexed to understand how a son of David could be his Lord, and sit down on the right hand of God in heaven. He must have descended from David, according to the flesh, or he could not have been his *son*: He must have had an higher original, or could not have been his *Lord*—could not *set down on the right-hand of the Majesty on high*.

What then have the scriptures said respecting the transcendent dignity of his nature? They appear plainly to teach his existence *prior* to his incarnation. This is a point of much moment, and claims particular attention.

In his prayer not long before his death, he mentions the glory which he had with the Father *before the world was*. He declares that he *proceeded forth and came from God*—that he testified none other things than he *had seen with his Father*—that *he came down from heaven*. (John, iii. 13. v. 13; 31, 32. vi. 33; 61. viii. 23; 38. xiv. 10. xvi. 27, 28; 30. xvii. 8.) He who is ascended far above all heavens, *first descended* from thence. (Eph. iv. 9, 10.) He is ascended up *where he was before*. The bread of life is he *who cometh down from heaven*. The word was made flesh.

This word was a real *person*, not a mere *quality*. How could a mere quality, reason, for instance, be made flesh? It is added, that the word "dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We beheld his glory, the

“glory as of the only begotten of the Father. His name is called, THE WORD OF GOD. (Rev. xix. 13.) “In him was life.” If the WORD was a real person, then this person existed before he was made flesh. If in him the glory of the only begotten of the Father was beheld, then he was not a mere man. Before he was found in fashion as a man, he was *in the form of God, the brightness of his glory, and express image of his person.* His being made flesh was a signal instance of *humiliation.* “He humbled himself—made himself of no reputation,” when he laid aside his divine form, took on him an human one, and “became obedient unto death.” For this instance of humility he is now “highly exalted.” Is it not clear, that our Lord had an existence, a superior existence, before his incarnation.

This point being settled, an enquiry arises, Have the scriptures informed us that there ever was a time when he *was not*? We have the prediction of his birth by the prophet Micah in these words: “But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah—out of thee shall he go forth that is to be ruler in Israel; *whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*” The author of the epistle to the Hebrews saith, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever”—and applies to him the words of Psalm cii. 25, 26, 27.—“Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth: And the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure.—They shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.”

He whose name is the Word of God, St. John saith, “was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him.” St. Paul saith, “By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.” In the revelation he sent by his angel to John, it is written, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end-

“ing, faith the Lord, who is, and who was, and who “is to come, the Almighty.” This is repeated five times in the same book.* Before Abraham was I AM.

There is good reason to suppose that MESSIAH was the person who appeared to the patriarchs, to Moses and Joshua, and to the Jewish church. When God was about to conduct Israel to their promised rest, he said, “Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee “in the way, and bring thee into the place which I “have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice, “provoke him not : For he will not *pardon your transgression ; for my name is in him.*” The above words seem to be equivalent to the declaration of the voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son ; hear him.”

The SHECHINAH, or visible symbol of the divine majesty, was no other than MESSIAH in the form of God. When this radiance appeared, it called for religious homage. Paul tells us, that HE who followed Israel in the wilderness was Christ. They marched or encamped as directed by the pillar of cloud and of fire. This was light to them, but darkness and confusion to their enemies. St. John assures us, that “Isaiah saw the glory” of the Messiah, when he “saw “the LORD sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, “and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the “seraphims,” with veiled faces, expressive of humility ; and with wings, expressive of alacrity and zeal in doing his commandments. “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of “hosts : The whole earth is full of his glory.” (John, xii. 41. Isaiah, vi. 1, 2, 3.) The same prophet describes his person, and the joy of the church in his birth and kingdom, in the following language : “For “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given : And “the government shall be upon his shoulders : And “his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,

* Rev. i. 4 ; 8. iv. 8. xi. 17. xvi. 5.

“The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.”*

Isaiah further foretold, “A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name IMMANUEL,” or God with us. Any comment upon the nature of the event predicted would be improper. It is and must remain a great mystery. But it must have been a *fact*; otherwise Christianity is a fiction. An event may be foretold in explicit language, and take place as foretold, while its nature and cause are unsearchable. In him, says St. Paul, “God was manifest in the flesh.” (1. Tim. iii. 16.)

The incarnation of the Messiah is to be believed upon divine testimony, as is the doctrine of the trinity: Neither can be explained to our understanding. We cannot comprehend God; but we may *receive his testimony, and set to our seal that HE is true*. The incarnation is attested by a double trinity of witnesses; three in heaven, and three on earth. “We receive the witness of men: the witness of God is greater.”

Upon the whole: What must we think of Christ, to whom the attributes of eternity and omniscience are ascribed? “I am the first and the last. Lord, thou knowest all things. I am HE who searcheth the reins and the hearts.” What shall we think of Christ, if all things were made and are upheld by him? What shall we think of Christ, if he could claim the peculiar appellation, by which God revealed himself to Moses and the Jewish church; I AM THAT I AM? What must we think of Christ, if this is his name, EMMANUEL? And this, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

In describing his *office* as Mediator, the scriptures particularly reveal him as the *prophet* of the highest,

* Isaiah, ix. 6, 7.

who came immediately from God. "Never man spake like this man." Friends and foes, the wise and unwise, were astonished at his wisdom. The Jewish rulers expressed their surprise thus: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" His answer solved the difficulty, and is the only solution of it. "My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me." It could not otherwise be, that a person of his obscure birth and education should excel, beyond comparison, every teacher who had gone before him—"confound the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." The acutest foes used every art to entangle him; but were always entangled themselves. If they took counsel against him ever so privately, or even conceived a thought against him, he shewed that he perfectly knew their most secret counsel, and the thought of their heart. The doctrine brought from heaven by him gave light to nations who sat in darkness, without God, and without hope—uncertain whether repentance would be accepted, and ignorant what true repentance means. He taught the worship of the Father in spirit and truth—came to call sinners to repentance, and proclaim remission of sins through the blood of his cross. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by him. Whatsoever we ask in his name, the Father will give. To whom shall we go for the words of eternal life," but to him who came from the bosom of the Father, to teach the way of God in truth, to open before us the gates of immortality?

Would we see a perfect system of *morality*, where shall we find it, but in the sermon he preached on the mount, which filled the multitudes who heard it with astonishment? The maxims themselves—the principles upon which they are founded—the motives to the observance of them, all concur to prove him a teacher infinitely superior to any that hath appeared in the world before or since. That distinguished sermon contains every precept of purity, temperance and moderation;

of contentment, self-denial and meekness; of humility, charity and forgiveness; of resignation, heavenly-mindedness and devotion. Every well-wisher to mankind will wish that these things may prevail.

The *example* of this great teacher was a transcript of his precepts. His vigilant and implacable enemies could not convict him of a fault. He fought not his own glory, or his own will, but the will and glory of him who sent him.

The works which he did in his Father's name witnessed that he was the Christ, that prophet of whom Moses and succeeding prophets spake. A voice from heaven, on one occasion and another, witnessed the same thing. Add to these proofs, the accomplishment, in him, and in him only, of a succession of prophecies, from the beginning of the world until he appeared; together with the fulfilment of his own prophecies—particularly respecting his passion and resurrection, the desolation of Jerusalem and state of the Jews. The evidence arising from his doctrine, precepts, example and works form a body of evidence which completely evinces that Jesus was the Christ.

It was foretold that the Messiah should make *atonement* for sin. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him. The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He poured out his soul unto death," that he might make "reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness." "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my FEL-LOW, saith the Lord of hosts: Smite the Shepherd." The evangelical prophet has given a lively description of his passion, exactly corresponding with the history contained in the gospel; and connects his intercession in heaven with his sacrifice. "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." David, speaking of him, saith, "Thou art a priest for ever. The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many. God sent his Son to be a propitiation for the

“ sin of the world, and in him is reconciling the world
“ to himself, not imputing their trespasses.”

Having offered one perfect sacrifice, our high priest sat down for ever on the right hand of God, where he maketh continual intercession for us. All our services must be performed in the name of the Mediator, that God may be glorified. “ He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession.” His resurrection proved him to be the Son of God with power. The decree was then pronounced, “ This day have I begotten thee. I have set my *King* upon my holy hill of Zion. I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” The dispensation of the Holy Ghost, after he ascended, in the view of the astonished disciples, assures us, that he is exalted to be a *Prince* and a Saviour. Miraculous gifts were doubtless continued in the church through the apostolic age ; though, in all probability, gradually withdrawn, after the martyrdom of Paul. Angels, authorities and powers above are made subject to our exalted Redeemer. He “ hath on his vesture and on his thigh this name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.” His kingdom is not of this world. His laws are enforced by spiritual and eternal sanctions. His people shall be willing in the day of his power. He is head over all things to the church—able to defend it from all its foes. “ Righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord rested on him.” Defended by him, the gates of hell have not prevailed against his church. “ He shall have dominion from sea to sea. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and the meek inherit the earth. He must reign until all things are put under him. Thus the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.”

Lastly, Authority is given him to *judge* the world ; because he is the Son of man. For this purpose he will descend from heaven, in like manner as he was seen to ascend, attended by hosts of angels. They shall gather all nations before him ; and, under his direction, sever the wicked from among the just. At that day, impenitents of mankind and infernals will unite in confessing, “ Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus.” Holy angels and glorified saints will then unite in the acclamation, “ Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our Lord, and the power of his Christ.”

May “ all men know assuredly that God hath made the crucified Jesus both Lord and Christ. He shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that obey not the gospel. He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” We persuade men by the mercies of the Lord. We persuade them also by the glory and the terror of the judgment-seat of Christ.

“ Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. For when it is said, All things are put under him, it is manifest that *HE* is excepted who did put all things under him. For the suffering of death, we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour.” Faithful to him who appointed him, God also will be faithful to his covenant with the Redeemer, and “ build up his throne to all generations. All that the Father hath given me, shall come to me, and I will raise them up at the last day, and give to them eternal life. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures and the elders : And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And

“ every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth,
 “ and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and
 “ all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, and
 “ honour, and glory, and power, be unto him who sit-
 “ teth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever
 “ and ever.”

I have endeavoured to remind you, my hearers, of some of the most plain and important truths, taught in revelation, respecting the person, character and office of Christ. Much might have been said under the various particulars which we have touched.

Does not the question before us appear to be an interesting one? Can our hearts be indifferent to a character so exalted? Were Gabriel sent from the presence of God upon an embassy to men, it would become them to treat him with great reverence. What regard then is due to him who is so much higher than the angels? to him, by whom the worlds were made, and by whom all things consist? who, notwithstanding, tabernacled in flesh, and gave himself a sacrifice to expiate human guilt? who, for the suffering of death, hath all power given him in heaven and earth? *They will reverence my Son*, is the just expectation of HIM who sent him.

Cristianity was first confirmed by eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, whose ministry was sanctioned by signs and wonders, divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. It hath been confirmed by its extensive promulgation and continuance, against every kind of opposition. In the hands of the weakest instruments, endowed with power from on high, its light spread, like the orb of day, through the world. It hath collected additional evidence from age to age, as appears from the history of the church and world. It is transmitted to us, that we might believe, and, believing, might have life through the Redeemer. Does it consist with any respect to the cause of virtue, that men are offended in him? Do gospel mysteries warrant the rejection of it? What shall we substitute in its

room, if we reject it? what rule of faith? what guide in our duty to God and man, or for the government of our appetites and passions?

Those who are ready to make every objection to the gospel, which a vain imagination can suggest, should first answer the weighty arguments in defence of it. Among these arguments, that taken from its unquestionable historical facts is entitled to first consideration. He who should undertake to dispute the authenticity of these facts, would have a much harder task than would be requisite to refute the superficial and unfounded cavils which are reiterated in books on infidelity.

Were the infidel to pronounce on the moral character and life of Jesus, he must either deny that there ever was such a person; or that he taught the doctrine, and wrought the works, and exhibited the example ascribed to him—or he must say, that a deceiver might possess a character which has no part dark—might fill up life with doing good—might live in heaven while on earth—and, in attestation to the truth, lay down a life filled with labour and sorrow.

Just thoughts of Christ are intimately connected with the love of God and our neighbour—meaning by the term neighbour every man to whom we can shew mercy, without respect of nation, profession or character. Pretenders to patriotism and philanthropy cast contempt on him who gave himself a ransom for all—who proclaimed peace on earth, and good will to men, in connection with glory to God on high. The imitation of his love, which many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown, is the characteristic of his disciples. Charity is the greatest grace, and never faileth. It embraces the household of faith with complacency: It does good to all, as there is opportunity. “Love your enemies, “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you,

“ and persecute you. Let this mind be in you which
“ was in Christ Jesus.”

Gospel faith is a principle of all holy conversation. While the rejecters of atonement frustrate grace and the death of Christ, the solidian makes void the law. As fallen creatures, our only hope is in his cross, which reconciles all things in heaven and earth ; and in receiving of his fulness grace for grace. But God forbid that we should think of him as *the minister of sin*. If we are duly impressed with his all-sufficiency and our own necessities, his terms have the entire consent of our hearts. “ Whosoever will come after me, let
“ him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow
“ me. This is to make every sacrifice which his cause may require. It is to esteem and honour his friends as such. The faith of a real Christian *worketh by love*. He embraceth, with brotherly love, all who appear to love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, to whatever communion they belong. Uniformity of religious persuasion there cannot be, amidst a diversity of education, advantages and talents. But there may be the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To advance this Christian union should be the mutual care of all denominations. In proportion as this is their common concern, the gospel hath free course. *As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God.*

SERMON II.

MOTIVES TO A CONVERSATION BECOMING THE GOSPEL.

PHILIPPIANS, i. 27.

ONLY LET YOUR CONVERSATION BE AS IT BECOMETH THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

ST. PAUL gave this exhortation to the Philippians, at a time when his and their situation concurred peculiarly to enforce it. He makes mention of his bonds and other sufferings. He was in a strait betwixt a desire to depart, and the prospect of the fruit of his apostolic labours, should he be continued in the flesh. In either event Christ would be magnified in his body. He was persuaded that future sufferings, as the past, would serve the important purpose of extending the gospel—that his being offered a sacrifice to it would eminently do so. To the honour of the Philippian Christians he testifies, that both in his “bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, they were all partakers of his grace.” He prayed for them, that in all trials they might be firm to their profession. “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” In such circumstances, he encourages them to expect a visit from him, for their furtherance and joy of faith. In the mean time he exhorts, “*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent,*

“ I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

This was the best advice which Paul could give them, whether he expected his departure very soon, or still to abide in the flesh ; whether he should be present with them, or absent from them ; whether he were enlarged, or a prisoner. It was the best advice, whatever their circumstances were, or might be. They had not hitherto been intimidated by the foes of their faith, or any conflicts for it. They “ stood fast in one spirit with one mind.” Their conversation therefore had hitherto been correspondent to their profession : It would still be so, if they continued to “ be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus, with one mind and one mouth glorifying God.”

Adapted as the counsel in the text was to the peculiar state of the Philippian converts, it is alike necessary and useful to professors of all times and circumstances. Their profession alike enforces on them all such a conversation as becomes the gospel. Their care thus to adorn it will be of the highest advantage.

The use I would at present make of the apostolic counsel before us, is, to apply it to various cases and circumstances of professors.

Every one may understand what is meant by a conversation becoming the gospel. The difficulty lies in exemplifying the excellent character. In opposition to those *who mind earthly things*, the *conversation* of Christians is in heaven. *This mind is in them, which was in Christ Jesus.* They *look not on their own things.* They are “ blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they shine as lights in the world ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” The *good work* begun in them is *going on to perfection.* The Philippians had *always obeyed, not only in the apos-*

tle's *presence*, but much more in his *absence*. They had been effectually taught to "deny ungodliness and "worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and "godly in the world."

Such is the "conversation, the simplicity and godly "sincerity," which becometh the gospel of Christ. His own example was a perfect pattern of it. His disciples follow him whithersoever HE goeth.

In the sequel of the present discourse, your attention to this apostolic injunction will be recommended from the occasion you will have for it, and the benefits you will derive from it, in all circumstances of trial. For instance,

First, the trial arising from the *prevalence of evil in the world*.

The enquiry respecting the origin of evil is involved in mystery, if pursued any further than the short account given of it in scripture.* Such also is the mystery of providence in permitting oppression, vice and confusion to prevail so long, and so extensively, as they have prevailed. In the contemplation of these things, good men have said, "My feet were almost gone; my "steps had well nigh slipped. When I thought to know "this, it was too painful for me." This notwithstanding, "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a "clean heart." Why then should we endanger our own virtue, by painful and fruitless enquiries into *things exceeding deep*? Rather let our conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ. For then we shall be sensible of our own ignorance. Content to know what it concerns us to know, we shall not exercise ourselves in researches into the causes and reasons of the *unsearchable* ways of providence.

Secondly, Things in *scripture*, which are hard to be understood, sometimes afford much exercise.

Instead of being perplexed and stumbled that there

* Rom. v. 12.

are mysteries in the gospel, a better course is that which the apostle recommends, Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel. In vain shall we attempt to remove the veil. By hearkening to the apostle we shall shew our meekness and humility. We shall receive the mysterious doctrines of the gospel, as they are delivered in the plain language of the Holy Ghost, not as modified by philosophy and art. Faith consists in receiving the testimony of God. We may much more safely trust his word, sealed with his seal, than the deductions of human reason. Often do these exalt against the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Let your faith stand in the power of God, and your conversation be as becometh the gospel of his Son.

Thirdly, Amidst religious *controversy* and the *divisions* of the church, the mind of a true Christian is relieved by observing the excellent advice in the text.

Christendom is divided into numerous denominations. Various and discordant sentiments are entertained by those of the same denomination. They have warm debates to defend their respective constructions of scripture. They are zealous to make proselytes, each saying, *Lo, here is Christ*. But *Christ is not divided*. He is with all who have his spirit, whose conversation is as becomes the gospel. This may be the character of those who put different constructions upon various parts of scripture. Having the spirit of the gospel, they do not judge one another; nor cast a stumbling-block, or occasion to fall, in each other's way. By meekness, humility and condescension, they "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." They consider that *faith worketh by love*—that believers are *careful to maintain good works*. What are fine speculations? Instead of *godly edifying*, they rather *minister strife*. The contention for them is a *carnal* contention. Professors strive for the faith of the gospel, when they stand fast with one spirit, with one mind, for the advancement of "the kingdom of God," which "is not meat and

“ drink ; but righteoufnefs, and peace, and joy in the “ Holy Ghoft.” Then their converfation is as becomes the gospel. Then the world will believe that God is with them, or at leaft that they are fincere. “ Do all “ things without difputings. Let nothing be done “ through ftrife.” Amidft the difputes and divifions of the church, while the Chriftian may be perplexed to know on which fide truth lies, there is one thing he fhould always obferve, and the obfervation of it will always fatisfy his mind. It is this : Only let your converfation be as it becometh the gospel of Chrift. Walking according to this rule, he will contend for the faith in that manner which the pacific, benevolent fpirit of the gospel dictates. He will be engaged in no unchristian contention. Confcious of his care to walk worthy of the Chriftian vocation, he does not doubt but he fhall know of the doctrine, fo far as is needful. Integrity is the beft guide to truth, and guard againft error. A converfation becoming the gospel is the beft proof of integrity.

Again, Does *iniquity abound, and the love of many grow cold?* Have you fears for the ftate of religion? Only let your converfation be as it becometh the gospel of Chrift.

Thus you will do what in you lies to uphold, defend and revive religion. You will “ give a reafon of the “ hope that is in you with meeknefs and fear.” You will “ put to filence the ignorance of foolifh men.” They will have no other evil to fay of you than this, that you are Chriftians. Your good converfation in Chrift and ftadfaftnefs in the faith will, moreover, kindle the languifhing flame of piety in remifs and wavering profeflors, reduce the devious, and refolve the doubting. At leaft it will beft conduce to thefe ends. While you mourn for Zion, and fervently pray for the revival of religion, your fecret mourning and your prayers may have power with God. He may remember Zion with a feafon of refreshment from his pre-

fence ; because your conversation becoming the gospel shews how much you have her interest at heart. The good man, however obscure his station, or inferior his talents, or small his influence, serves the cause of Christianity more by his Christian temper and life, than any elevation of station, talents, or other advantages can, separate from a gospel conversation. Such a conversation gives the greatest advantage to all means and opportunities for the glory of God and good of men.

Place one of this character in a post of dignity. His bright Christian pattern, including the whole assemblage of virtues personal, social and divine, “is as the precious ointment on the head of Aaron, which ran down to the skirts of his garment.” Suppose him distinguished for abilities. The same Christian pattern, like the pillar of fire, casts light on his talents : But the want of it, like the pillar of cloud, casts darkness on the genius and talents of the infidel and profligate. Great talents without virtue are like the wide spreading pestilence.

Further, are we in circumstances of *affliction* and *danger* that we *know not what to do* ? The counsel before us is the best.

For why should we be afraid, if our conversation is as becomes the gospel ? This may not secure us from sharing in a common calamity. The Christian as well as others is liable to any of the accidents of life, and may fall a victim to any public judgment. But the accidents of life, the judgments which are abroad, can neither take his hope from him, nor touch his main interest. His heart is established. He has indeed hope and fear in common with other men—the same natural apprehensions and sensibility, when evil is impending or inflicted. He may have the same desire of escape or recovery from evil. Amidst the rage of war, pestilence or famine, he has the common feelings of humanity. But he has a refuge and support which others have not. Be the gloom what it may, or whatever share he

or his dearest connections may have in it, still he can *rejoice in the Lord*. Human skill and power may entirely fail. But amidst all outward perplexity and distress, he can look into the gospel. There he learns his duty; and thence he derives his comfort.

But suppose his own *mind is full of darkness*—that, exercised by Satan's temptation, he is ready to say, *My hope is lost*. Amidst such apprehensions, what shall he do? The answer is that in the text.

For light and joy can arise from no other quarter than a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. Though his evidences may be obscured, yet the precepts of the gospel may be as plain as ever; and his way must be directed to keep them, would he find comfort. He must wait for the joy of God's salvation in the exercise of Christian graces. He must "give all diligence, and add to faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and charity." He must take pains that these things be in him, and abound.

Eminent Christians have walked in darkness. The direction of scripture in this case is, "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God." We do not trust in God, nor stay ourselves upon him, if we neglect our duty. Only let your conversation then be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. If God hideth his face, it is for wise reasons. Could Christians, with their imperfections, corruption and passions, expect to be always full of joy with God's countenance? Would this be no other than pious men in general have enjoyed? Would it consist with the conflict between flesh and spirit in this world? Is it strange that the remains of depravity in men of faith and piety, their remissness, spots and declensions, darken their evidences? Doth not God permit this for the greater mortification of indwelling sin, and brighter manifestation of grace? For whatever reason it may be, that they sometimes suffer extremely from men-

tal darkness, this case, as much as any, enforces the apostle's exhortation in the text. They have occasion to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and to make straight paths for their feet." How shall they do this, but by a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ?

Would the disciples of Jesus *hold fast their profession* when it is *reviled*? How shall they do this, but by a conversation becoming the gospel?

In a time of temptation, superficial believers fall away. They are ashamed of their faith, when it is fashionable to treat Christianity with derision. Suppose they have felt occasionally some warmth of affection to it. This will not secure them, when their love is put to the proof. No other than such as are established, strengthened and settled in religion, exemplify what the apostle mentions to the commendation of the Philippians, in the verse of the text and the next following: "Ye stand fast in one Spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel; in nothing terrified by your adversaries." "Another apostle exhorts, "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake—be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled: But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give a reason of your hope with meekness and fear; having a good conscience—a good conversation in Christ." The apostle instructs us, that a Christian character is the best defence of the gospel, the best security against the attacks of its foes, and a sure ground of hope in all trials. While dissipation and infidelity, two intimate friends, are so prevalent—while many sit in the seat of the scorner—while the morality of the gospel is pronounced rigid, and its doctrines are declared to be absurd and contradictory; only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. Then you will not be offended in him, and HE will not be ashamed of you. While professors are but half persuaded—while they indulge objections

to some precepts of the gospel—while they are inclined to rest in externals, or to confer with flesh and blood, they are in danger of apostacy. If it concerns us to stand fast in the Lord, then an unreserved obedience to the gospel should be our aim and character : We may account none of its commandments grievous. In this case, we shall go on our way rejoicing, and endure to the end. Whatever trials of our faith and patience may be appointed, instead of separating us from the love of Christ, they will confirm us and refine our graces as the furnace does gold.

Again, The best counsel to *mourners* is, Only let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ.

The gospel, and this only, teaches you how your sorrow may be turned into joy, and your loss prove your gain. The more valuable those were whom you bewail, the more would they recommend to you a careful attention to the gospel precept, “ Let your moderation be known unto all men : The Lord is “ at hand.” By a conversation becoming the gospel, you will be fitted to go to your deceased pious friends, who *rest from their labours, and sleep in Jesus*. Calling to mind their Christian conversation, you will rejoice in the persuasion that they have received *the end of their faith*. Following them wherein they followed Christ, your own hope of salvation will be well-founded. Having the hope of the gospel, you will *possess all things*. The Christian supports the sorrow of the world better than others ; because he has superior principles, maxims and ends of life—superior prospects. He “ looks “ not at things seen and temporal ; but at things un- “ seen and eternal. The fashion of the world passeth “ away.” Sorrow succeeds to joy, and joy to sorrow. Neither is of long continuance, and neither unmingled. Joys wither, like Jonah’s gourd. We are glad for them, and ought to be, while they flourish : But when they fade, we are troubled. Such is the state of our dearest earthly delights. Our wisdom therefore

is to "set our affections on things above, where Christ "is at the right hand of God." There is fulness of unmingled, unceasing, and ever improving joy—*Ever improving*, because the faculties of the soul will be ever enlarging. To those, whose conversation is as it becometh the gospel of Christ, *all things work together for good*. Sorrow is turned into joy. Qualified for the joys above, and rejoicing in hope, the sorrows of this life are supportable. Considering their outward condition, they may be "afflicted, tossed with tempest, "and not comforted." But the gladness of their hearts, from the light of God's reconciled face, cannot be taken from them by the men or things of the world: It is subject to no accident. How great the privilege, how superior the happiness, of all whose conversation is as becomes the gospel?

The same word of exhortation, which speaketh to mourners, speaketh also to those on a bed of *pain* and *sickness*, or whose health is *impaired* and *impairing*.

Having no soundness in their flesh or rest in their bones, wasting away by the divine rebuke, they could but poorly sustain their infirmity, had they not the consolations of God. Wretched is the case of such as have no refuge or hope in God, when their pain is excruciating, their flesh consuming, and death advancing. The everlasting arms only strengthen on the bed of languishment. "Thou hast strengthened me "with strength in my soul. My flesh and my heart "faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and "my portion for ever." Such is the consolation and hope of Christians, whose conversation is as becomes the gospel. Their faith overcomes the world. Their hope of eternal life is "as an anchor to the soul, sure "and stedfast." But how dismal the prospect of the sick, languishing and dying, where no care has been taken to lay a good foundation for eternity? How unavailing the prayer, *Let me die the death of the righteous*, in the mouth of one who has not been like him in

his life? To those who have not lived by the maxims and principles of the gospel, the prospect of death must be sufficiently gloomy, were death an utter extinction of being. But conscience presageth a future reckoning. The word of God, who cannot lie, assures us of it. They *then* (i. e. in the apprehension of death and judgment) upbraid themselves severely and justly, that they had not fled for refuge in the accepted time. They *then* commend all whose care has been to obtain a well grounded hope of immortality, by having their conversation in simplicity and godly sincerity; in other words, as it becometh the gospel of Christ. Such a conversation fortifies against the ills of life, and prepares for death. All must grant that it is wise to make provision for these events before they come. Therefore *remember the days of darkness* beforehand, and let your conversation be according to the gospel. Let it be still the same when these days shall have overtaken you. Many of the virtues, which enter into such a conversation, are peculiarly displayed, and appear to special advantage, in the evil days.—“Tribulation worketh patience.” When “the winds blow, the rain descends, and the floods come,” love is most fervent. Faith is tried in the fire. Resignation faith, “The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?”

Might we have our own wish, we should be exempt from pain, sickness and sorrow. “No affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous.” But affliction is needful to cure our corrupt affections, and make us partakers of God’s holiness. He hath the kindest design in sending it. The example of the author of our faith is the best pattern for our behaviour under it. He “committed himself to him who judgeth righteously, learning obedience by the things which he suffered, leaving us an example.” When confined to a sick chamber, when apprehensive that we are drawing near to the grave, we are permitted to pray,

“ Spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.” But this prayer will be made with submission, if our conversation is as becometh the gospel. Our supreme concern will be, that our will may bow to the divine.

In whatsoever state the Christian is, he learns therewith to be content. When prospered in the world, he trusteth in God, who giveth him all things richly to enjoy. He is rich in good works. When adversity succeeds to prosperity, he is excited to consideration, and in subjection to the Father of spirits. According to the variation of his state, he exhibits different graces. Whether high or low, rich or poor, joyful or sorrowful, healthy or sick, he displays the virtues suited to his station and circumstances. Thus is his conversation as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

But what can relieve the apprehensions naturally rising in the mind of every person of reflection, while contemplating the *perilous times* which have *now* come?

One quarter of the globe at least is shaken to the foundations. The revolutionary war appears to have no limitation. When hath such a day of inroad on the rights of nations, and desolation of property, been known? when such indiscriminate carnage? when such mock tribunals of justice, violation of the sacred prerogatives of conscience, subversion of religious and social order? such rage and blasphemy against the throne of Almighty God? When has there been a conspiracy so long pre-concerted, so extensive and influential? a conspiracy of atheistical philosophers to crush Christianity, and destroy the belief of a providence and of a God? Who can see to the end of the wonders of the present day? Who may undertake to say how long this rage of war and irreligion may continue, or how far it may extend? At such a juncture, the good man has many thoughts of heart. And what words can we take for his counsel or comfort, if not those

which I have had occasion so often to repeat, and which stand at the head of my discourse? For his conversation being as becometh the gospel of Christ, he joineth in the general voice of all holy beings; "Alleluia; the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. There is no wisdom, understanding, or counsel against the Lord." It is his prerogative to bring light out of darkness, and good out of evil. "The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved. The God of Jacob is our refuge, a very present help in trouble. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted in the earth."

Upon the whole; are we exercised with the mysteries of providence or of revealed religion? with the controversies of the Christian church, or the languor and defections of professors? with mental darkness, or with the reproaches of scoffers? Or are we in heaviness by the removal of dear kindred and friends? Or have we been cast on a bed of sickness and distress? Has our life drawn near to the grave? Or are we pained for the judgments of God which are now abroad, and the cause of them? In each and all of these cases, the most proper direction is, Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. As many as observe this direction, have peace in Christ, whatever the state of the world, or their own state in it, may be. Their souls are in health and prosper, if their body is afflicted. They need fear none of the things they may suffer. They can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" And with respect to the great concerns of the nations, and the wonderful events of the present day, they rest assured that infinite power and wisdom, rectitude and goodness, govern.

Plain and excellent as is the apostle's exhortation, to which I have now called your attention, how frequent and various are the deviations from it, of which real Christians must accuse themselves? These deviations are a great source of their unhappiness on earth.

They afford much cause of self-abasement. The nearer any are conformed to the gospel and its divine Author, the more dignified is their character, the greater blessing are they to the world. To forsake the gospel is to forsake our own mercies.

That we are weak through sin, is no objection to our taking Christ's yoke on us. We may be strong in his grace. Here our strength lies. In his name we may come boldly to the divine throne, and obtain mercy and grace. Amidst all the obstacles to a Christian course, amidst all afflictions, dangers and temptations, doubts and misgivings, the Christian can comfort himself with these words, "My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." With such an helper, why should he fear, or be discouraged? He has reason to fear for himself, lest he should receive the grace of God in vain—lest he should neglect his watch—lest he should be slothful, when it behoves him to be fervent in spirit. But he has no reason to question whether grace is offered equal to the duty required of him. Nor should he fear whether he shall be enabled to surmount future difficulties—or whether he shall be supported under evils to come. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." What concerns the Christian is this: Fulfil present duty: Withstand present temptation: "Be patient in tribulation, instant in prayer, and in every thing give thanks."

The friends of the gospel are "like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus," whose example they keep in view. It is thus that they "with one mind and one mouth glorify God, and build up one another on their most holy faith." Their endeavours and prayers are united, that *the gospel may have free course*.

The God of all grace write on the hearts of all who are here present the counsel of St Paul; *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.*

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