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THE
WORKS
OF
JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D.

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CONTAINING
ESSAYS, SERMONS, &c.

ON
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE AND ESTABLISH THE DOCTRINE OF
SALVATION BY GRACE, AND TO POINT OUT ITS
INFLUENCE ON HOLINESS OF LIFE.

TOGETHER WITH HIS
**LECTURES ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY,
ELOQUENCE AND DIVINITY;**
HIS SPEECHES IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS;
AND MANY OTHER VALUABLE PIECES, NEVER BEFORE
PUBLISHED IN THIS COUNTRY.

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S E R M O N S
ON
INTERESTING SUBJECTS.

S E R M O N I.
MAN IN HIS NATURAL STATE.

REV. iii. 17.

Because 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.

IN order to preach the gospel with success, it is necessary that we should begin, by establishing the great and fundamental truths, on which all the rest are built, and to which they constantly refer. Nay, it is necessary that we should often look back to these, and see that we be not off the foundation, or that it be not weakly or imperfectly laid. Of this sort, I take the guilt, misery, and weakness, of our

nature to be; and therefore have chosen the words now read, as the subject of discourse, in which the Spirit of God reproves the self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness of the church of Laodicea.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, &c. I suppose you will all easily understand, that the words are figurative, and are spoken entirely with a view to the spiritual state of that church. In this light, let us consider what is precisely their meaning.

We may either suppose, that this charge is brought against the church of Laodicea, because there were many there, under the profession of the gospel, who were, notwithstanding, still in a natural and unrenewed state—strangers to the power of religion, of which their being thus unhumbled, and insensible of their guilt and misery, was the evidence; and for which the remedy is prescribed in the following words: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.”

Or we may suppose, that this reproof was in a great measure applicable to them all, in general, believers and unbelievers; the best of them being exceedingly prone to trust in themselves that they were righteous; instead of that humble dependence on the merit and grace of their Redeemer, which ought not only to be the refuge of the sinner, but the confidence of the saint. And there is no question that this is a proper caution to professing

Christians in every age, to beware of splitting on the rock of self-sufficiency.

But as this disposition reigns in the heart of every one that is yet at a distance from God—is the foundation of their security and impenitence—and is what they must be brought off from, before they can be reconciled to God; it is for their benefit that I chiefly design this discourse, though it may also be useful, and shall be in part, applied to the children of God. It is an affecting thought, when pursued to its consequences; yet, alas! it is unquestionably true, that in every assembly, such as this, of professing Christians, there are not a few, who are in “the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,” under the wrath of God, and liable to the condemning sentence of his law; and at the same time, that the far greatest part of them are ignorant of it, and know not that they are *wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked*.

In discoursing farther upon this subject, therefore, I shall,

I. Endeavour to prove and illustrate this truth, That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God.

II. I shall briefly shew you, that being brought to a lively sense, and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step, to the saving knowledge of God, in Christ.—And in the *last* place, shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. IN the *first* place, then, I am to prove and illustrate this truth, That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God. What is said in this passage of the Laodiceans, is universally true of the posterity of Adam. Unless an inward and essential change has been wrought upon them by the grace of God, they are *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. It is also true of them, as well as of the Laodiceans, that they know it not; but vainly presume themselves to be rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing. If these two things are jointly true of many of you my hearers, there is nothing in which you can have so great a concern: therefore, let me earnestly beseech your most serious attention to what shall be said; as the success of this conviction is necessary to your understanding or profiting by any other part of divine truth, as I shall afterwards shew you.

The proof of the truth here asserted, can be only of two kinds. 1. From scripture, which is the testimony of God declaring it. 2. From the visible state of the world, and our own experience finding it to be so.

1. That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, appears from the express and repeated testimony of the word of God. And this testimony we have, not only in particular passages, carrying the truth, but in the strain and spirit of the whole, and the several dispensations of divine providence there recorded, which are all

of them built upon this supposition, and intended to remedy this universal evil.

See what God declares, Gen. vi. 5. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And again, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." We may take the psalmist David's testimony of himself, as a sample of the rest of mankind; and indeed he plainly intimates, that it is a common calamity. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

We may take also the testimony of the apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, which is the more full to our present purpose, that as he had never been at Rome, he is there laying the foundation of religion in general, and the Christian dispensation in particular, by a clear and explicit proof of the need the world had of a Saviour, from its universal corruption and depravity. See, then, what he says: "What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one." And again, "Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

You may also see that the apostle traces this disorder to its very source: "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

I shall add but one express scripture-testimony more: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

But besides the particular passages of scripture, positively declaring this truth, the whole frame and contexture of the scriptures, and all the dispensations of divine providence recorded in them, are a proof of the same thing. Man is every where considered as in a fallen and sinful state. Every thing that is prescribed to him, and every thing that is done for him, goes upon that supposition. It is not one man, or a few men, that are in scripture called to repentance, but all without exception. Now, repentance is only the duty of a sinner. An innocent person cannot repent; he has nothing to grieve for in his heart, or to forsake in his life. It is also proper to observe, that one of the scripture-characters of God is, "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." Now, he could not be to us a forgiving God, and there would be no need that he should be revealed under that character, unless we were sinners that stood in need of pardon. Mercy, indeed, is the distinguishing attribute of God, and this can only have respect to offenders. All the other perfections of God might be exercised towards pure and holy creatures; but mercy only towards sinners. He might be a good, holy, just, wise, powerful God, to persons in a

state of innocence; but he can shew mercy only to the guilty.

Do not the dispensations of God's providence shew the same thing? He sent the flood, as a testimony of the wickedness of the world, and for the punishment of a guilty race. Remember also the sacrifices, which were appointed, and accepted by God, from the beginning of the world. Sacrifices are for atonement and expiation. They are plainly a substitution in the room of a forfeited life. It is doing violence to common sense to make them any thing else. The whole Jewish œconomy, which had in it so many sacrifices, so many offerings, so many washings, and purifications, does plainly suppose the person using them to be infected with sin, or moral pollution. Had not this been the case, they had been extremely absurd and improper.

But the strongest testimony of all that God hath given to the guilt and corruption of mankind, is his sending his own Son into the world to redeem them, by the sacrifice of himself. To what purpose redeem them, if they were not in bondage? Why so costly an expiation, if our lives had not been forfeited to divine justice? But that it was for this purpose that Christ came into the world, is so plain, from the whole of the scriptures, that I shall select but one passage out of many, to prove it: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

What is said already on this head, is a full proof from scripture, that man is now, by nature, in a

state of sin; that he is also, in consequence of that, in a state of misery, and liable to the wrath of God, is proved by many of the same passages, and by many others: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. For the wages of sin is death," &c. But I need not multiply passages to this purpose; for in all God's dispensations, the deserved punishment of sinners is as evident as their sinfulness itself. It is indeed fully proved, from the essential perfections of God, particularly his holiness and justice. He is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity. "Evil cannot dwell with him, nor fools," that is, sinners, "stand in his sight."

Is not all this then, my brethren, a sufficient proof, from the testimony of God, that man, in a natural state, is sinful and miserable? Shall we affirm ourselves to be whole, if he saith we are unbound? Do we know more than God? Will we not give credit to the fountain of truth? Nor is it any objection to this, that we ourselves know it not, or are but little sensible of it. One considerable part of the disease, is blindness of understanding: so that we may, and must till our eyes are opened, be ignorant of our danger. We may think and say, that we are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, while we are *wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked.*

2. The same thing appears from the visible state of the world, and our own experience. Unbelievers are apt to hear with indifference, and neglect what they are told from scripture-testimony, unless

otherwise confirmed to them; and it is with the unbeliever we have now to do. Besides, the establishment of this truth, upon other evidence than that of scripture, ought to have a powerful influence in inducing men to believe the other truths in scripture, that are connected with and founded upon it. I think it, therefore, highly proper to lay before you what evidence we have of our lost state, from the observation of the world, though the scriptures had been silent. I would likewise recommend to all, what shall be said on this subject, to preserve your faith unshaken, and keep you from blasphemous, unbelieving thoughts, if at any time you should be tempted to them, since even unenlightened reason confirms the foundation of divine truth, and nature and providence conspire in preaching the doctrine of divine grace.

Now, doth not our experience, as well as the observation of others, shew us that we are born in sin, and conceived in iniquity? May we not say from our own knowledge, that the imaginations of the heart of man, are only evil from his youth, and that continually? is there not a proneness and tendency to evil, universally to be observed in mankind? and a backwardness and aversion to that which is good? Is not this apparent even in children, upon the first dawn of reason in their minds, and the first sight of choice or inclination in their hearts? Surely it must be owned, that in that early period, they are at least *comparatively* innocent. If any among us is without sin, it must be the youngest; *yet folly is bound in the heart of a child.* How hard is it to guard them from evil, and to in-

pire them with good dispositions, even by the wisest and earliest care, in their instruction? and even after the most successful pains, are there not still many remaining blemishes, through the prevalence of corrupt nature, which shew, that the ground-work itself was faulty? But, on the contrary, how easily do men learn that which is evil? Do they need to be taught? Is it not enough to give them licence? How just is that description in Jeremiah! "They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." I am far from denying, that men are improved and forwarded in sin by instruction and example, as well as in that which is good: but it is plain, they are far apter scholars in the first than in the last; which plainly shews they are more powerfully disposed to it by nature. Nay, is it not evident, from the universal experience and testimony of those who act from a principle of religion, that it is extremely difficult, with all the care they can take, to resist the propensity of nature to the contrary? and that in the best it often gets the superiority, when they are off their guard? Is not this an evidence of the depravity and corruption of human nature, and its tendency to evil? Are those who hate sin often overcome by it, and shall those who love it presume to say, they are free from it?

If any should ask, How I prove that that course of action to which human nature is inclined is evil, without the assistance of scripture? I answer, from reason; and that many ways: from its pernicious effects on societies, and private persons; from the testimony of the world in general, when others than

themselves are concerned; and from the testimony of every man's conscience in his own case. Who is there that does not often feel in himself a powerful tendency to what he cannot but in his heart condemn? Is not his conscience God's vicegerent? and doth not natural religion, as well as the religion of Christ, declare him corrupt? So that I may say with the apostle Paul, not citing the passage as a proof, but as an illustration and description of the character and state of natural men, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the mean while, accusing or else excusing one another."

Thus there is as much light remaining with us since the fall, as to shew, that we are out of the way, but not to bring us back to it again.

As a serious consideration of the state of the wicked may shew us our natural impurity, so it hath been long ago discovered, and confessed by many of the ancient heathens, who never heard of the name of Christ, nor knew of the remedy. These, discerning by nature the perfectly pure and holy nature of God, and comparing it with the dispositions prevalent in man, could not reconcile them together; but concluded, that a creature so corrupt could not come in that condition out of the hands of its Creator. This difficulty some of them endeavoured to solve by a state of pre-existence; which bears some resemblance to the true

solution given of it in the holy scripture, viz. the apostacy of our first parents; which entailed a corrupted nature upon their posterity, in which the light of nature and revealed truth seem almost wholly to coincide.

It is to the same thing that I cannot help attributing the practice, that so universally prevailed over the heathen world before the coming of Christ, *of offering sacrifices*, to appease the wrath of the Deity, supposed to be offended. That the custom of sacrificing prevailed very generally, perhaps universally among the heathen nations, at the greatest distance from, and having no correspondence with each other, is a certain and unquestionable fact. Neither do I see to what cause we can ascribe it, unless to one of these two; either an ancient tradition from the beginning of the world, and spread with the inhabitants through the several parts of it, as they separated and peopled it; or to the common condition of human nature, which dictated the same thing to persons in such distant places.

If the first of these suppositions is embraced, which indeed I suppose to be the truth, it appears that sacrifices were appointed by God to man in his fallen state, for the pardon of sin, and that they had reference to the great propitiatory sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

If we prefer the last supposition, it would seem as if the consciousness of guilt had uniformly prompted men in all ages and nations to offer up some atonement for their offences. In both cases, it equally serves to prove the corruption and sinfulness of human nature.

Now, as what hath been said plainly proves the impurity of man in his natural state, so his misery and liableness to punishment may also be proved, both as a natural consequence of his sinfulness, and even more plainly by itself. There is not only a considerable degree of actual misery in the world, but plain presages of more to follow it in the world to come. Need I take up much time, in enumerating the several miseries and calamities incident to human life? Are not oppression and injury from one another, poverty, sickness, pain and death, the plain fruits of sin, and visible tokens of God's displeasure? Man, with some marks of superiority and excellence of nature, is even, by means of his superiority, his knowledge, and foresight of his own sufferings, more miserable, than any other of the creatures, that is equally subject to the stroke of death.

To the whole I shall only subjoin one consideration more, which is applicable to both parts of the argument.—I have often thought, that the natural terror and fear, with which men are possessed of the presence of God, or any remarkable token of his power, is nothing else but an indication of guilt, or an apprehension of wrath.

You may see some incidents in scripture, from which it is natural to conclude, that when God makes any visible manifestation of his glory, or sends any of his angels or ministers from heaven to earth, those who are present are filled with the utmost dread and terror.

Thus, in the relation given of God's appearance upon mount Sinai, it is said, "And so terrible was

the fight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." See another example, in Isaiah: "Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." And in the New Testament, in the apostle John, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."

And is not this always the case, in all ages, that upon any remarkable appearance of an inhabitant of the other world, or even when any such thing is falsely apprehended, the inhabitants of this world are filled with extraordinary terror? What is this, do you imagine, but consciousness of guilt, and apprehension of vengeance?

Innocence has no enemy, and it has nothing to fear. We are all in much the same case with Adam, immediately after his first transgression; when he heard God's voice in the garden, he was afraid, and fled, and hid himself. We read of no such fear possessing him, while he retained his innocence; but as soon as he had sinned, he began to dread an avenging God.

From all this, then, I would conclude, that reason accords with scripture in saying, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God:" that man, in a natural state, is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

S E R M O N II.

AN INDUCEMENT TO COME TO CHRIST.

REV. iii. 17.

Because 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.

HAVING, in a former discourse, proved and illustrated this truth, That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God, —I proceed now to the *second* thing proposed, which was, to shew you, that being brought to a lively sense and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step to the saving knowledge of God in Christ.

On this I shall not need to spend much time, as it is so exceedingly plain, both in itself and from what hath been already said. It is, however, necessary to set it clearly before you, in order to lay a foundation for the improvement of the subject.

If the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified,

proceeds upon the supposition of our sinful and miserable condition by nature; then, surely, it can neither be valued, embraced, nor improved, and indeed I think hardly understood, by those who know not this their natural state. What Christ hath done, and promises to do in our behalf, is designed as a remedy for our distressed condition; and therefore, till the distress is known, the remedy will be set at nought. If a physician should offer his care and skill for the recovery of a man, who esteemed himself in perfect health, would he not deride the proposal, so long as he continued in that opinion? If any man should offer a charitable supply of clothes and food, to one who imagined himself immensely rich, and gloried in his riches, would he not look upon it as the grossest insult?

Just so is the gospel treated by all such as see not their misery. What is the substance of the gospel? 'To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Behold, I preach to you Christ crucified, a Saviour suited to your necessities, able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him. He is well fitted to be a Mediator between you and your offended Maker. He hath offered himself up, a sacrifice to the justice of God for your sins, by the merit of which you may be saved from deserved and impending ruin. He offers himself as a guide, to direct your feet in the way of peace; to stand by you in the difficulties and dangers to which you are exposed, and to give you, by his communicated strength, a complete victory over all your enemies.'

What reply doth the unconvinced sinner make to all this? Why, he saith, ‘ I know nothing of this misery you suppose, wherefore then a Saviour? I see no sin, what necessity, then, for an atonement? I fear no wrath, therefore will seek for no intercessor. My eyes are open, therefore I will have no guide. I know of no enemies, and therefore will not enter into contention with a shadow, or flee when no man pursueth.’

These, my brethren, are, either directly or implicitly, the thoughts of men in a secure and unconvinced state; and while they are so, they can see no form nor comeliness in the Saviour, nor any beauty, that they should desire him.

It is otherwise with the broken in spirit. He sees his own vileness and unworthiness, and therefore cannot lift his eyes to God, but through the atoning blood of Christ. He fears the *avenger of blood*, and therefore flees to the *city of refuge*. The message of the gospel is to him indeed glad tidings of great joy, and he counts it a faithful saying, and *worthy of all acceptance*.

The justice of this representation you may see from what our Saviour himself says of the end of his coming: “ They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

See also the terms of his invitation: “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Appetite, and knowledge of necessity, is first

required, or supposed, to the bestowing of gospel-blessings: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

I shall only add, that we find, by the instances recorded in scripture of such as were converted by the preaching of the gospel, that their conversion took its rise from conviction of sin: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" See also the instance of the jailor: "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Repentance unto life, and the return of the sinner to God, proceeds from the same cause, in every age. Who are the persons who believingly apply to Christ for the pardon of their sins, but those who see they are undone without him? Who are the persons in whose eyes he is most precious, and who maintain the most habitual dependence upon him? Are they not those who have been most effectually humbled, and see their own insufficiency for any thing that is good?

From all this I conclude, that none can come to Christ by faith, but those who see themselves to be *wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked.*

LET us now make some improvement of what hath been said upon this subject, for your instruction and direction.

1. I would improve what has been said on this subject, for discovering the danger of many among

us, who have never yet been brought to a just sense of their character and state. Even the general belief that such often have in the scriptures, may shew them what they have to fear. I might, no doubt, first of all observe, how very guilty and miserable those are, who are most notorious for sins of the grossest and most shameful kind. But my subject leads me more directly to consider, who are, in general, *unrenewed*, than to mark the several degrees of guilt in particular sinners. From the text, therefore, and the illustration of it, I am authorized to declare to you, and *I beseech you to bear it with application*, That all such as were never brought to a real discovery and inward sense of their miserable condition by nature, are still in a state of wrath, and strangers to the power of religion, whatever may be their profession, and whatever may be their present peace. O! how easy is it to lay asleep a natural conscience, and to keep a deceitful corrupt heart in a state of ease and security? Some formality in outward duty, some moderation in sin, so to speak, the natural decay and weakness of human passions, or youthful lusts, in a character formed by human prudence, and regulated by health, credit, or gain, is often made to supply the place of a heart renewed by the Spirit and grace of God. But consider, I beseech you, that though some may be tenfold more the children of the devil than others, yet all by nature are the servants of sin; and “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” It is not only such as are profane or unclean, such as riot in brutish sensuality, such as

are the plagues of human society, who live in brawls and contention, but all in whom an essential change has never been wrought, that are thus *concluded* under condemnation.

It is usual for men to take encouragement from seeing others worse than themselves, and to consider all the threatenings in scripture as levelled against the chief and capital offenders; but my text is chiefly directed to such as say they are "rich, and increased with goods." Can you say, then, my brethren, that you have been brought under genuine convictions of sin? Have you been obliged to fall down prostrate before God, when sitting upon the throne of his holiness? Have you found the sentence of death in yourselves, and discovered no remedy but in Christ? If this has never been your case, you have reason to fear, that you are yet "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

But I must tell you also, that this is matter of feeling more than of profession. It is not enough to speak honourably of Christ, or of his works. Many do so, who never felt their necessity, or seriously and in good earnest applied to him. It were a happy thing, if all among our hearers, who call for evangelical preaching, who quarrel with us when they think we do not preach the Saviour's cross, the lost state of man, and the doctrine of free grace, were experimentally acquainted with these truths. Many such have only been accustomed to hear the Redeemer spoken of with reverence. They may be able to imitate the language of some

of his servants, though they know very little of that brokenness of spirit which accompanies true repentance.

But lest this should be in any measure mistaken, I must make these two observations: the *first* is, that a lively sense and deep conviction of sin is, properly speaking, but a negative mark of true religion; giving us to know, that the unhumiliated are yet impenitent. For it is certain, that many have been under very strong convictions, nay, have been driven to the very borders of despair with terror, who yet never were effectually changed, but stifled their convictions, and returned to their former security of heart, and carelessness of life.

Secondly, There may be some, on the other hand, who are truly *born of God*, in whom the terrors of conviction have not been very remarkable. This happens most frequently in the case of those who are called in their infancy, or early years, and who have had the advantage of a careful and pious education. It would be destructive of the comforts of God's children to lay down one method, in which he always proceeds. He is free and sovereign in the manner of his dealing with sinners; and softens some hearts by kindness, as well as others by correction. So that if the end be brought about, we need be less solicitous about the steps of his procedure. Yet I think humility of spirit is inseparable from real religion; and if it be less visible in the anguish of repentance, it will be still manifest in the temper of the penitent.

2. Let me now, for the improvement of this

subject, lay down a few of the best and most solid evidences of genuine conviction of sin. And,

(1.) It is a good sign that conviction is genuine, when there is a clear and deep apprehension of the *evil* of sin, as well as the *danger* of it; when the mind dwells not only on the atrocity of particular crimes, but on the aggravation of all sin as such; when the sinner is truly offended with himself, for departing from his Maker's service, breaking his holy laws, forgetting or despising his innumerable mercies. There may be, and there is often, an apprehension of suffering when there is little sense of the evil of sin: but the conviction is then genuine, when it makes the sinner not only remember what he has done, but confess what he has deserved.

(2.) It is a good evidence, when the sense of the evil of sin abides and grows, even though the fear of wrath may in a great measure have abated.

It is observable, that conviction of sin usually takes its rise from some gross or heinous acts, which first alarm the conscience, and in such a situation the attention of the penitent is fixed on nothing else but the enormities of his life. If this view continues, and produces its effects, he is soon brought to see and confess the inherent vanity of his heart, the worldliness of his affections, and the unprofitableness of his conversation. It is a very common thing, for persons who seem to have some sense of the commission of crimes, to have little or no sense at all of the neglect of duty, and of living daily to themselves. It was a heavy charge, however, brought by the prophet against Belshazzar: "And

the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Wherever there is true repentance, though there may be the greatest peace of mind, there will be also a deep and growing sense of the evil of sin, and the obligation of being habitually devoted to God.

(3.) It is a good evidence, when there is a continued and growing esteem of the necessity and value of the mediation of Christ. It was to save sinners that he came. A sense of sin is necessary to our receiving him; and in proportion to its strength will certainly be our attachment to him. This, indeed, is the great and vital principle of the spiritual life: "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 to die for me."

(4.) The best and surest mark of real conviction of sin, is, if it leaves you possessed of a deep hatred and abhorrence of it, and a daily solicitude to fly from it. Some may counterfeit a sense of the evil of sin to their own hearts; may have a real fear of its bitter consequences, and even a presumptuous reliance on Christ for pardon; and yet may, in some instances, adhere to the practice of it.

Floods of tears from such a person avail nothing: but he hath certainly truly sorrowed for sin, who in his practice forsakes it; that is to say, he is not willingly subject to any known sin; but says with Elishu, "That which I see not, teach thou me: If I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

3. Let me beseech all serious persons, to improve this subject for the trial of their state. Examine, by the principles above laid down, the reality and the progress of religion in your souls. Have you a growing sense of the evil of sin, and of your own unworthiness? This is at once an evidence, and a mean of growth in grace. He that thinks least of himself is highest in God's account; and the more a believer increases in holiness and real worth, the more he increases in humility. As it is an evidence, it is also a mean of further improvement; for he that hath the deepest sense of his unworthiness and weakness, will certainly live most by faith on the merit and grace of his Redeemer.

Therefore, Christians, try yourselves by this important sign. Whether do you, by religious duties, build yourselves up on self-righteousness, or do you only learn by them, how far you fall short of what is incumbent on you? What innumerable evils compass you about! and therefore how much you have need of mercy instead of reward! Do you look upon the works of righteousness which you have done, as something by which you merit at the hand of God? or do you look upon them as the evidence of his own work in you, and for you, and give him the glory to whom it is due?

4. I shall now conclude the whole, with a few directions for producing and preserving this profitable sense and conviction of sin. And,

(1.) Let me beg of every hearer, the serious consideration of himself and his ways. Many have

no sense of their sinfulness, because they have no knowledge of themselves at all; but go through the world in uninterrupted thoughtlessness and unconcern. Is there any thing of greater moment than the state of your minds, and your hope towards God? Inattention is perhaps a more universal cause of impiety, than high-handed and obstinate profanity. Would you but seriously consider your ways, and lay to heart the things that belong to your peace, I would count it a hopeful circumstance, and expect you would speedily feel your danger, and God in his mercy would lead you to the cure.

2. Give yourselves much to reading, and hearing the word of God. The entrance of his word giveth light. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, and correction: but it is particularly necessary for *conviction*; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. What wonder, if those who never open a Bible, and seldom enter into the house of God, should be ignorant of their guilt and misery? The word of God shews his right in you, pleads his cause, and challenges your apostacy. It is exceedingly rare that those who have fairly turned their backs upon God's instituted worship, are disturbed in their security; but are suffered to sleep on till they sleep the sleep of death. But it frequently happens, that those who attend ordinances, even from no higher principle than curiosity, custom, or form, find that the word of God is *a fire and hammer*, that breaketh the rock in pieces: "that it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing, even to the dividing asunder of

soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

3. In the *last* place, Let me beseech you often to seat yourselves in the immediate presence of God, or rather, frequently to recollect, that you can no where go from his spirit, or fly from his presence. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God, that discerns and discloses the works of darkness. We may often excuse or palliate our conduct to men, and even hide its deformity from our own view, when we could not justify it to ourselves, if we reflect, that “it is open and manifest in the sight of God.” If, therefore, there is any thing in your practice, which you are inclined to palliate, and apt to excuse—suppose you were standing at the judgement-seat of Christ, where all of us shall shortly be, and think, whether your excuses will then stand the test of his impartial search.

“If our hearts condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.” It is therefore the duty and interest of every sinner, to take shame and confusion of face to himself, and apply to the “blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.”

SERMON V.

TRUST IN GOD.

ISAIAH, I. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

IT is said of every real believer, that he walks by faith, and not by sight. If this is true, it will follow, that his faith must be exposed to a variety of trials, while he continues in a world of sense. These trials arise from the state of his own mind, from his outward condition, from the state of the world with which he stands connected, and from the mutual influence of all these one upon another. From this situation it is easy to see, that there are few duties, for the exercise of which a good man will have greater or more frequent occasion than that of trust and reliance upon God. Trust is the duty and the refuge of the needy, of the dependant, of the weak, of the timorous, and the distressed. How many are included under one or more of these

characters ! or rather, who is it that can say he is altogether excluded ?

Agreeably to this, we need but open the sacred volume, to perceive how frequent the exhortations are to trust in God, and how many views are given us of his power, wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness, to encourage us to an unshaken reliance. At the same time, I am sorry to say, that there are few duties which are more imperfectly understood by many professing Christians. Even pious persons often sin both on the right hand and on the left, that is to say, both by diffidence and presumption. I have, therefore, laid hold of this opportunity, and made choice of this passage of scripture, in order to open and illustrate a little this important duty of a servant of God. How seasonable it is, you will easily perceive ; for in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we have set before us Christ Jesus, the unspeakable gift of God, the great pledge of his love, and the great foundation of our reliance upon him, not only for his saving mercy in general, but for every necessary blessing in our way to eternal rest.

This passage of scripture is also well suited to the subject. It was spoken to the Jews in a lax and dissolute age, when many had turned their backs upon the service of God, had deserted his ordinances and despised his servants, which is always an occasion both of affliction and temptation to his own children. This appears from the first words of the chapter : " For thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away ? and which of my

creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away." As also from the 3d and 4th verses: "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

In discoursing further on this subject, it is proposed, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To open a little the character and state of those who are called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

II. To explain the duty of trust, and point out the foundation of it.

III. To apply the subject for your instruction and comfort.

I. IN the *first* place, then, I am to open a little the character and state of those who are here called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

Their description is as follows: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God." It will help us to enter into the spirit and meaning of the prophet's words, if we keep in view the state of the Jewish church, hinted at a little while ago. "Who is among you;" that is, if there is one or more, if there is a small select number in the midst of gene-

ral corruption and depravity, who have kept their garments unpolluted, though iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold;—"that feareth the Lord?" You know it is common in scripture to describe religion in general by some particular leading branch of it. The fear of God is often made use of for this purpose, as in that passage, "There shall be no want to them that *fear him.*" It may, therefore, signify those who have a sincere and unfeigned regard to the commandments of God, and have chosen him as their portion and hope; those who desire and deserve to be distinguished from the profane despiser, the secure formalist, or the disguised hypocrite; those, in a word, who are, and who desire to appear, to use the strong language of scripture, upon the Lord's side in every struggle, and who resolve, with Joshua, that whatever others do, for their part they will serve the Lord.

But I cannot help thinking, we may also, with great safety, explain the words in a closer and stricter sense, and suppose, that by fearing the Lord is to be understood a due reverence for his infinite majesty, a humble veneration for his sacred authority. This is a most excellent fence or guard to the conscience in an evil time, and a noble preservative from the spreading infection and insinuating poison of prevailing or fashionable sins. It is also the usual character of a dissolute age, to have cast off fear, to treat the most sacred things with scorn, and to look upon that holy solicitude to avoid sin, which appears in the carriage and language of a child of God, as a mark of meanness or weakness of mind. In such an age, one who fears God is well described

by the prophet Isaiah : “ But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

The next part of the character is, “ and obeyeth the voice of his servant ;” that is to say, is willing to hearken to the message of God, by the mouth of his servants. The words of the text, no doubt, may be considered as primarily referring to the inspired prophets, who bore an immediate commission, miraculously attested, from God. Many, even of these, were set at nought, their message derided, and their persons insulted, when they attempted to stem the tide of prevailing vice, or boldly denounced the divine vengeance against high-handed sinners. But the sincerely pious obeyed their voice. I shall make no scruple to apply this to ourselves, and the present age. Our blessed Redeemer hath established in his church a standing ministry, and the regular administration of ordinances. And though we have this treasure in earthen vessels, yet in no other way doth he now communicate his will, and vouchsafe his presence to his people, but by the reading and hearing of his word, and attendance upon his instituted worship. It will, no doubt, therefore, be a part of the character of a good man, that he will love the ordinances, and obey the voice of the servants of God ; that he will consider him who hath sent them, and receive instruction, not as the word of man, but, as it is in deed and in truth, the word of God.

On the other hand, when iniquity prevails, when irreligion and profaneness lift up their heads, one of the most usual concomitants, and one of the

surest proofs of it, is a neglect of ordinances, and contempt of those who are concerned in their administration: how far this is at present the case, I leave to yourselves to judge. While I speak this, my brethren, I do by no means desire to see an ignorant people, distracted by the gloomy terrors of superstition, or led blindfold by the enchanted cord of implicit faith. But sure I am, there is an extreme on either hand, and those who truly fear the Lord, will honour the persons, and obey the voice, of such as plead his cause and speak in his name. You may rest assured, that though they neither deserve nor claim any authority on their account, yet so long as they stand in the divine counsels, and speak the divine word, their message will be attended with this awful sanction, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

The last part of the character here drawn, which lays the foundation for the subsequent direction, is, "that walketh in darkness and hath no light." Darkness and light, besides their literal, have often a metaphorical sense in scripture. They are, indeed, used with a good deal of latitude and variety. But I think their metaphorical signification may be reduced to these two general heads.

1. Sometimes light signifies knowledge, and darkness signifies ignorance; as in Eph. v. 8. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Acts, xxvi. 18. "To turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Job, xxxvii. 19.

“Teach us what we shall say unto him, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darknes.”

2. Sometimes darknes signifies distress or trouble, and the correspondent signification of light is deliverance and joy; as, 2 Sam. xxii. 28. 29. “And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down. For thou art my lamp, O Lord; and the Lord will lighten my darknes.” Job, xix. 8. “He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass; he hath put darknes in my paths.” Psalm xcvi. 11. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” Esther, viii. 16. “And the Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.”

None of these senses is to be excluded in the passage before us. Believers may walk in darknes, when ignorant or uncertain as to what nearly concerns them, as well as under distress and trouble. They have also a mutual influence upon, produce, and are produced by, one another. For illustrating this a little more particularly, observe, that a good man may walk in darknes, 1. When he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the divine favour. 2. When he is under the pressure of outward calamity. 3. When the state of the church is such, that he cannot understand or explain, in a satisfying manner, the course of divine providence. These particulars I have it not in view to enlarge much upon, but only to explain them so far as is necessary to lay a foundation for what shall be afterwards offered on the duty to trust in God.

1. then, A good man may walk in darknes

when he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the divine favour. I apprehend that some measure of hope in God's mercy is essential to true piety, and not only the right, but the possession of every child of God. Faith and despair are beyond all question inconsistent. Faith and hope are inseparable. Yet certainly the excellent ones of the earth may be sometimes involved in great perplexity and doubt. This is plain from scripture-examples, from daily experience, and from the nature and reason of the thing. How violent a struggle do we often find the psalmist David in, between hope and fear! "O my God, my soul is cast down in me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." How many do we see every day under a spirit of bondage, who, though they still cleave to God as their portion, yet are often full of fears, and seldom dare confidently affirm their interest in, or relation to him. And indeed how can it be otherwise? While we are here, our sanctification is but imperfect; and, alas! with regard to many, it is often hard to determine, whether we should not write upon it, *Mcne tekel*, as essentially defective.

Sin separates between God and his people, and causes him to hide his face from them. Nay, sometimes, though there be no particular or provoking crime, as the cause of his controversy with them, he may withdraw from them the light of his countenance, to exercise their vigilance, or to try their patience. I know, my brethren, that the distress of serious souls, when mourning after an

absent or an angry God, crying to him in secret, and following hard after him in his ordinances, is by many treated with the highest degree of contempt. But surely, if peace of mind, from a well-founded hope of the divine favour, is the greatest of all present blessings; and if this, from the variableness of our own conduct, is sometimes more, sometimes less strong, and sometimes wholly suspended: when this last is the case, it must occasion inexpressible concern; and there can be no greater evidence of irreligion and impiety, than to call it in question.

2. A good man may walk in darkness, when under the pressure of outward calamity. This, in a real believer, is never wholly separated from the former. Even in itself, indeed, no affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous. The disorders of this feeble frame, poverty and straitness of provision, unjust slander and reproach, must be deeply and sensibly felt by every good man, even as he is a man. To this may be added, the loss of relations, and concerns for the sufferings of others of every kind, which is always most distressing to the best and tenderest spirits. But outward calamities by those that fear God, are felt most sensibly when they are considered as the rod of his anger, and bring sin to remembrance.

When he visits his own children with any of his fore judgements; when he follows them with breach upon breach, they are ready to say, "Surely he is setting me up as a mark for his arrows, he is counting me his enemy." They are often at a loss to understand the cause of his controversy with

them; and they also find it often extremely difficult to bring their minds to a patient and submissive resignation to his holy will. To those who know their duty, and desire through divine grace to comply with it, it is no small difficulty to be obliged to struggle with a rising and rebellious heart within, as well as suffering from without, and to be alternately calling in question the certainty either of the love of God to them, or of their love to him.

3. A good man may sometimes walk in darkness, from the aspect of providence, and the state of the Redeemer's kingdom. The works of God are sought out of them who have pleasure in them. But when they are not able to penetrate the depths of the divine counsels, this becomes often a source both of distress and temptation. When wicked men are suffered to prosper at their will; when the good are oppressed by the power and tyranny, or persecuted by the malice, of their enemies; when the most generous attempts for the revival of truth and righteousness are rendered abortive; when the professing servants of God are divided into parties, or marshalled under names, and their zeal made to spend itself in unnecessary, sinful, and hurtful contentions; when offences come, and those of the highest profession or attainments are suffered to fall into gross crimes, by which the mouths of enemies are opened to blasphemy; then may, and must we adopt the words of the psalmist: Psal. lxxiii. 10.—14. "Therefore, his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them: And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?"

Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

I PROCEED now to the *second* and chief thing proposed from this passage, which was, to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation.

Trust, in the most general view we can take of it, may be thus explained. It is a reliance or confidence in God, that however discouraging appearances may be for the present time, yet, by his power and wisdom, our desires and expectations shall take place, whether as to deliverance from trouble, or the obtaining of future blessings. When we can attain this happy frame of spirit, it is an inconceivable relief and ease to the mind under suffering, and is excellently expressed by the psalmist: Psal. lv. 22. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Let us then endeavour to explain the grounds of this as distinctly as possible; and God grant that it may be done, not only in a clear, but in a solid and satisfying manner, so as to assist you in the practice of real and vital religion.

I have already said, that our expectation is from the power and wisdom of God. May we then reasonably expect, and is it our duty to believe, that we shall receive all that we desire, and that is

within the reach of divine power and wisdom? These have no bounds at all. We know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. This suggests to us, that there is something more necessary, in order to lay a proper foundation for trust, viz. his goodness, to make our expectation probable; and his promise, to make it certain. Even created beings can often do what they will not. This holds particularly with regard to God, whose power is directed in its exercise by his goodness, and limited by his wisdom. His goodness, in general, encourages us to go to him with a peradventure, or, who can tell whether he may not be gracious? But in order to make our trust both distinct and strong, we must go to his promise; "for he is faithful, and keepeth covenant and truth for ever." Trust, then, my brethren, rests ultimately on the promise. It must be precisely commensurate, or of the same extent with the promises. Whoever doubts or calls in question the certainty of what God hath promised, is chargeable with distrust; and whoever expects to receive, in kind or degree, more than he has promised, is so far guilty of presumption. This is the general rule, and I think it carries such evidence with it, that every one must be sensible it is just, who hath heard it with any measure of attention.

But the great difficulty yet remains, which is, to apply this rule to the various cases that occur in the spiritual life, and to tell any particular person

what it is his duty firmly to believe, and hope he shall receive from God, and what it would be presumptuous and sinful in him to fix his expectation on. This is plainly of the greater importance, that the more particular our trust is, as to the object of desire, it is the more powerful a support to the mind. At the same time it frequently happens, that the more particularly our desires are formed, the foundation of our hope appears the more uncertain and questionable. On this account, you may observe, that it is of the greatest moment to understand the nature and tenor of the promises, or rather, indeed, to explain the foundation of truth; and to explain the nature and tenor of the promises, is one and the same thing.

For this end, it may be proper to distinguish the promises of God, as to futurity, into two heads, absolute, and conditional. By absolute promises, in this place, I understand only those that are so in the most unlimited sense, that is to say, revealed as part of the fixed plan of providence, suspended on no terms but what all, of every character, may expect will certainly come to pass. Such are the promises after the flood, that summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, should not fail; the coming of Christ in the flesh, at the fulness of time, to the ancient patriarchs, and to us; the downfall of Antichrist; the preservation of a church on earth, let its enemies be or do what they will; the calling of God's ancient people the Jews; and the coming of Christ to judge the world at the last day. These are all called promises in scripture; and so far

as they can be of any use to the people of God, either for direction in duty, or restraint from sin, or consolation under trial, they are to be depended on in the most absolute manner ; for they rest upon the certainty of the holy scriptures, and the truth of the unchangeable God, who “ is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.”

S E R M O N I V.

TRUST IN GOD.

ISAIAH, l. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

HAVING, in a former discourse, opened the character and state of those who are called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord, and entered upon the second thing proposed, which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation; and having in this view considered the nature of absolute promises, I proceed,

II. To consider the nature and use of conditional promises. These I am obliged, for greater distinctness, to divide into three different heads. 1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. 2. There are promises, the performance of which is suspended on our compliance with something previously required, as the condition of obtaining them. 3.

There are promises, not only suspended on both the preceding terms, but upon the supposition of some circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unknown. Let us consider each of these with care and attention.

1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state, which are therefore to be applied, and rested on, according to the evidence of our being of this character, or in this state, is clear or obscure. In this I have particularly in view, the blessings of salvation, the pardon of sin, peace with God, the spirit of sanctification, and a right to everlasting life. These all lie in an unbroken chain and inseparable connection, and might have been more briefly expressed by an interest in Christ the Saviour, who is the author, source, and sum of these blessings; "for all the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us." Let no judicious attentive hearer be surprised or dissatisfied, that I have ranked these among conditional promises; for you may observe, that I have expressed myself thus, they are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. In this, they certainly differ from the promises, properly absolute, mentioned above. It is far from my intention to do injury to that fundamental truth, That salvation is by grace. I esteem that doctrine which proceeds upon a self-righteous system, to be contrary to the word of God, and most pernicious to the souls of men. There is nothing at all required in scripture to be performed by us, as a purchasing or meriting condition. Every gracious act of the

divine government in our favour, is the fruit of the Redeemer's purchase; and every holy disposition wrought in us, is the effect of his almighty grace. But it is certain, at the same time, that in order to our accepting those blessings, we must be truly and deeply humbled, and see ourselves to be incapable and helpless. We must be unfeignedly willing to renounce all claim of merit, and accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; that is, in its full extent, and in the free and sovereign manner of its communication. So far, surely, we must say, the promises of the gospel are conditional, or wholly pervert the word of God. I know of no promises, then, to the unbelieving and impenitent, unless you call that a promise, that they shall have "their portion in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

Hear it, my dear brethren, it is the needy, thirsty, sensible soul, that is invited to come and find rest: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If any shall think fit further to say, that the very destination of the vessels of mercy is of God's sovereign pleasure, that conviction itself is by a day of his power, and that faith which interests us in Christ's righteousness is his gift; I agree to the whole, but observe, that it is improperly introduced here. No use can possibly be made of the divine decree in the application of the promises.

It is inverting the order of things. Can any man say, 'I trust in the mercy of God, because I have been ordained to everlasting life?' No man can derive comfort from this, till by his effectual calling it is published, and begins to be accomplished; and then he may look back with wonder and gratitude to that everlasting love, by which he was chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Can you judge of the fruit of a tree by looking upon the root? No, but you judge of the strength and deepness of the root, by the fulness of the fruit, and the vigour and verdure of the branches. From an improper mixture of what belongs to the secret will of God, and what belongs to us as our duty, much error and confusion arises.

Now, my brethren, as to the application of these promises of pardon and peace, the humbled sinner, the man among us who walketh in darkness and hath no light, who is burdened with a sense of guilt, and discouraged by the threatenings of the law, the accusations of conscience, and the pure and holy nature of God, who perhaps has all this aggravated by distress and trouble, is called to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. He is invited to consider and rest upon the extent of the call, the immutability of the promise, and the riches of divine grace. If he is so far from pleading any merit in himself, or being dissatisfied with the plan of salvation laid down in the gospel, that he is making every thing an argument against himself, and dare not lay hold of, or appropriate such mercy; this is just the effect of distrust, and he is called, in the strongest manner, in the text,

to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." With how many gracious assurances for this purpose is the scripture filled. John, vi. 37. "All that the Father hath given me shall come to me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Heb. vii. 25. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Rev. xxii. 17. "And 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 take of the water of life freely." All things, Christ excepted, are to be renounced, and the all-sufficiency of a Redeemer is to be the foundation of our hope. The penitent will say with the apostle, Phil. iii. 8. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith."

2. There is a second class of promises, the performance of which is suspended on our previous compliance with something required as the condition of obtaining them. In these we are not only called to accept of the divine mercy, but commanded to obey the divine will. The order in which I have placed these, will, I hope, prevent you from misunderstanding or misapplying what may be said on them. This class includes all the pro-

mises in scripture regarding the daily progress of a believer in his sanctification and conformity to God, as well as the increase of his comfort and peace. I am sensible that as the reconciliation of a sinner to God, and his right to what is called in scripture *the promise* of eternal life, is of free and unmerited mercy, so, no doubt, all the inferior or subordinate promises flow from the same source; nay, in a certain measure, they are entirely upon the same footing with those formerly mentioned; that is to say, final perseverance, real growth in the spiritual life, and necessary comfort, are the sure and purchased portion of every one that is born of God. Rom. viii. 29. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." But in the distribution of those gifts, particularly in their measure, there is not only an unknown regard to the good pleasure of God, but a known and established regard to our conduct in duty. Thus, the abundant supply of the Spirit is the fruit and return of diligence in prayer. Matth. vii. 7. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." See also Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25. compared with the 37th, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you," &c. "Thus saith the Lord, Yet for all this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Thus also inward consolation, as well as outward security, is expressly promised as the effect and reward of uniformity and diligence in

duty. Isaiah, xxxii. 17. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." As the counterpart and illustration of this, you see, that a departure from the path of duty brings on the threatened, or perhaps I ought to call it the promised, rod of correction. Psal. lxxxix. 30.—33. "But if his children shall forsake my law, and not walk in my judgements; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." In the same manner, Is. xl. 30. 31. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Agreeably to all this, you know, our blessed Lord prescribed watchfulness and prayer as the great preservatives against temptation, and whoever expects either spiritual strength or comfort, while he relaxes his diligence in the way of duty, is guilty of that sin which is called in scripture tempting God; and shall assuredly meet with a dreadful disappointment.

My brethren, as much of the daily exercise of real believers regards their progress in sanctification, and their peace and comfort, it is proper that you should carefully attend to the tenor of these promises, and to what ought to be your reliance upon

them. I shall sum up, in a few particulars, what I apprehend to be of most importance.

1. Trust in these promises implies self-denial, and a deep sense of your weakness. These promises would be unnecessary and superfluous, were we not insufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good. Trust in God stands directly opposed to all self-dependence. Proverbs, iii. 5. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding." How jealous God is, if I may speak so, of the honour that is due to him in this respect, may be seen from the many foul and shameful crimes into which he permitted some of his best saints to fall, when they were off their guard by sloth, or, still more, provoked him by pride and presumption. Noah's drunkenness, Moses's passion, David's adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of his Master. 1 Cor. x. 11. 12. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." For this reason the apostle Paul says with great propriety, and with great force, which is equally applicable to himself and other believers, a seeming paradox, 1 Cor. xii. 10. "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2. As we are to put no trust in ourselves, so we are to exercise the most unshaken confidence of our being able to discharge any duty, or undergo any trial, by the help of the Almighty. O! how ready are we to sin on both hands! How often do we presume upon our own strength, and forget the necessity

of applying for divine aid? And on the other hand, how prone are we to timidity or despondence in difficult cases? When corruptions have long kept their ground, we are ready to dread their influence, and to make but little out of the promises in scripture, that we shall be made “more than conquerors through him that loved us.” We have learned, by sad experience, that in us dwelleth no good thing; and yet it is long before we will attend to the lesson that follows hard upon it, “My grace is sufficient for thee, and strength shall be made perfect in weakness.”

3. As these promises are expressly made to the diligent, you must still remember that your own attention and application to duty is essentially necessary, and that the assistance promised from on high, is always represented in scripture as an argument and encouragement to diligence, and not a warrant or excuse for sloth. Philip. ii. 12. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” It is also well worthy of notice, that the same prophet, Ezekiel, who says, chap. xxxvi. 26. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you,” changes the form of his expression; and in another place, chap. xviii. 31. 32. speaks in the following terms: “Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed; and make ye a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God;

wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." In consequence of this,

4. In the *last* place, trust in God will make us ready to acknowledge, that when we fail in duty, when we forget or break our resolutions, the fault is certainly in ourselves. It is impossible to excuse or justify ourselves in any degree, without laying the blame, in the same proportion, upon God, and calling in question his faithfulness and truth. But whatever our treacherous hearts may sinfully suggest, we are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels. We find him pleading his own cause, in this respect, in many passages of scripture. Isa. lix. 1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Upon the whole, trust in these promises is no other than an humble and diligent application to duty, under a deep sense of weakness; and dependence on promised strength, accompanied with a firm persuasion, that "in the name of the Lord we shall tread down our enemies," and go on from strength to strength, "till we appear before God in Zion."

3. Another class of promises are those that are suspended, not only on the same conditions with the two former, but upon some other circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unseen. These are temporal mercies, or rather temporal prosperity, deliverance from present distress, and abundance or affluence of outward enjoyments. Perhaps we may

also add, spiritual consolation, and sensible joy in God. I find no temporal promise precisely fixed to the servant of God but this, "Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure;" and it is certainly his duty, in the most straitening circumstances, to maintain a confident dependence on the power and wisdom of Providence for necessary supply. I do not condemn those, who, when reduced to extremity, have actually pleaded this divine promise, and against hope have believed in hope: and I am persuaded instances have not been wanting, of relief furnished in a manner next to miraculous. But as to every other degree of temporal prosperity, God hath reserved it in his own hand to give or withhold it at his pleasure, that is, as he sees it will be most for his glory, and the benefit of his people. It is lawful, then, my brethren, for you to endeavour to procure, by honest industry, the increase of your substance, to look well to the state of your flocks and your herds, and to ask by prayer the blessing of God upon your labours. It is lawful, and it is your duty, by regularity and care, to preserve life and health, as well as to ask of the Father of your spirits recovery from sickness, or deliverance from any other kind of distress. But you are not warranted to believe that these petitions shall be granted in hand, or in your own time and measure, even though you ask them in sincerity with the prayer of faith. There may be reasons for withholding them, and yet you may be accepted in your prayers. An infinitely wise God knows best what is for your good, and he only hath a right to determine in what part of his own service, where,

and how long, he shall employ you. Trust in God, therefore, in this respect, implies a careful attention to the tenor of the promises with regard to temporal mercies, and not to look for, or, even if possible, desire what he hath not promised to bestow.

If I am not mistaken, we shall find it of moment, upon this subject, to observe, both what he hath not, and what he hath certainly promised. He has nowhere promised that his people shall be the richest or the greatest on earth; but he hath certainly promised to bless their provision, and assured them that a little that a just man hath shall be better than the riches of many wicked. He has not promised that they shall be free from sufferings; but he hath certainly promised to support them by his own presence under their distresses. Isa. xliii. 2. "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 burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The truth is, he hath promised that "all things shall work together for their good." In one word, they have indeed all mercies promised, only they themselves are not in a condition at present to judge what they may use with safety, and what not. As the heir of an opulent estate, though he is proprietor of all, yet is laid under restraint while in infancy and non-age, because he would soon ruin himself if it were committed to his own management; so the believer, though an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ, yet till he is meet for the inheritance, he must be at his Maker's and Redeemer's disposal. Take in,

therefore, only this limitation, and then see his extensive charter: 1 Cor. iii. 21. "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; are all yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." What, then, is the duty of a child of God? It is to breathe after more and more submission to the divine will, and to annex this reservation to every petition of a temporal nature, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." And O! my brethren, how happy the person who hath seen the weakness of human judgement; who waits the intimation of God's will, before he will suffer his desires to fasten with eagerness on any earthly comfort, and who endeavours to keep himself free from perplexity, by an humble and submissive reliance on the all-sufficiency of God.

I observed, in entering on this part of the subject, that spiritual consolation, or sensible joy in God, is to be considered as a promise of the same class, which must, therefore, be asked with submission, and is dispensed according to the good pleasure of a gracious but sovereign God. I am sensible, as has been formerly observed with another view, that some degree of comfort necessarily follows from a believer's relation to God; but many pious persons seem to desire and to expect sensible comfort in a higher measure than God sees it meet to give them, or than is proper for them in the present state. It is with spiritual prosperity as with temporal, every one cannot bear it. Therefore, it is our duty still to be sensible that we have much more comfort and peace than we deserve; and as we de-

fire and strive for greater degrees of it, to accompany these desires with much humility and resignation to the will of God.

I PROCEED now to the *last* thing proposed, which was, to make a practical application of this subject for your instruction and direction.

1. From what has been said, you may see what judgement you ought to form of inward suggestions, and strong or particular impressions upon your minds. There are some extremely prone to interpret a text of scripture suddenly suggested to their minds, or any strong impression made on them, as an immediate message from God, to be directly applied to themselves: Others, in opposition to this, as enthusiastical and visionary, seem to give up every expectation of being able to say with the psalmist, "I bless the Lord who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night-season." I beg, therefore, that you may observe, that the suggestion of a passage of scripture of itself gives no title to the immediate application of it, because the great deceiver may undoubtedly suggest scripture, as we find he could reason from it in our Saviour's temptation. We are, in every such case, to consider the tenor of it, if it be a promise or encouragement, that is, how and in what manner it may be safely applied. If any thing happens to be suggested that expressly suits our present condition, either by setting home the obligation of duty, with particular evidence upon the conscience, or pointing out the grounds of comfort, it ought to be thankfully acknowledged as from the Spirit of God. For example, if a person under the power

of a spirit of bondage, and fear of divine wrath, hath suggested to him any of the extensive gracious assurances of mercy to the chief of finners, it is his duty to lay hold of it. It is directly suited to his condition, and would be the very thing that a wise and judicious pastor would recommend to him for his relief. He may, therefore, without hesitation, bless God for it, if it is brought with power and efficacy upon his heart. In the same manner, if a person under trouble had suggested to him any of the promises of support under it, surely he ought, in the discharge of his duty, firmly to rely on the accomplishment of that part of the word of God. But in the reflex examination of a person's character or state, to apply the sudden suggestion of a promise or privilege, perhaps of a conditional nature, is certainly both sinful and dangerous: Sinful, because without warrant; and dangerous, because leading to delusion.

2. From what hath been said, you may see what it is that we ought to seek for with the greatest earnestness, and may hope to obtain with the greatest confidence. Recollect, I beseech you, the order in which I have mentioned the promises of God as the objects of trust and reliance. First of all, the promises of salvation, deliverance from the guilt of sin, and a right to everlasting life; next, whatever is necessary to the preservation and improvement of the spiritual life; and then, in the third place, proper accommodation and suitable provision in our passage through the present world. They are ranked according to their value in themselves, and the value which we should put upon them. Let us, therefore, take care that we never violate this order,

which is necessary, not only because of their comparative value, but because of their mutual influence one upon another. It is in vain for us to expect to attain to the habit or practice of holiness, till we are united to God by faith in Jesus Christ. All the promises of the gospel are ratified in him. All the divine fulness is treasured up in him. Every divine gift is dispensed by him. Therefore, he says, John, xv. 4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." And the apostle Paul, Gal. ii. 20. "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."

In the same manner, nothing can be more preposterous, than to fix our affections upon temporal mercies, or our attention upon the promises that relate to them, so as to lose view of our interest in God's favour, and the progress of our sanctification. All the temporal promises in scripture are made to the children of God as such, and for carrying on the purposes of his grace in them. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. There is no promise in the whole volume of inspiration to the wicked and impenitent. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." He will either rebuke them in his wrath, and chasten them in his hot displeasure, or give them up to a cursed, hardening, stupifying prosperity, than which no state on earth is more to be dreaded. Christian! never suffer an anxiety about your outward state to supplant, or go before, or even to be separated from.

a concern that you may not be found wanting when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. Let me beseech you to adore the wisdom, justice, and mercy of God, in the order he hath established, according to the different nature of the promises. That which is of most, nay, properly speaking, of unspeakable value, and radically contains all the rest, is placed first in order, and offered in the most free and gracious manner, without money and without price. Salvation is preached to the chief of sinners, and a Saviour held forth as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. Many uses might be made of this; but the single use I intend to make of it at present, as connected with the duty of trust, is to silence the complaints of envy and impatience. How prone are many to look with an evil eye upon the more extensive possessions, and greater apparent outward comfort, which others enjoy? Does it not astonish you to think how much unbelief and ingratitude there is in those repining thoughts? Meanness of rank, and poverty of state, are no hinderance at all to an interest in Christ, and a right to everlasting life. Nay, the gospel is preached to the poor. Many a Lazarus has been carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich and luxurious have lifted up their eyes in torments. Will you, can you, dare you complain? Will you envy the man of the world his stately palace, his elegant furniture, and his sumptuous fare? What is the amplest portion in the present life, compared with the sure mercies of David? What child of God

would exchange with any wicked man, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne?

I beseech you to add to all this, that, even with regard to present peace or comfort, there is no comparison between a good man and a bad. "A man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses." This is a truth, not only often repeated in the sacred oracles, but written in the clearest and most legible characters in the history of providence. Nay, even independently of virtue or religion itself, every human calamity, whether arising from sickness, reproach, contention, fear, or ungratified desire, rages with greater violence in the higher, than in the lower stations of life. A vain and conceited monarch once sent to ask at an heathen oracle, Who was the happiest man on earth? and met with a deserved disappointment in the reply. If you should put a question much more profitable, as well as much more easily resolved, In what rank of life the most exquisite human misery has been found? I have no doubt but it ought to be answered, Upon a throne. Experience will always ratify the wise man's observation: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." A sanctified lot is an inestimable treasure. The blessing of God on a cruise of oil, and a pot of meal, is better than inexhaustible mines of gold and silver. What cause of contentment and patience to the child of God!

In the *last* place, you may learn from what has been said on the subject, what is the plainest, the shortest, and indeed the only sure way to deliverance from distress or calamity, of whatever kind.

It is to fly to the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, to renew the exercises of faith in him; and, in proportion as it pleases God to fill you with all joy and peace in believing, you will perceive every other covenant-blessing flow clear and unmixed from this inexhausted source. It will lead to repentance, humiliation, and submission. The sanctified use of the affliction will be obtained, and this brings deliverance of itself; for no rod will be continued longer than it has answered its end. At any rate, when suffering is necessary, grace, to suffer with patience, shall not be withheld. Would you have any more? and is not this remedy always at hand? Can the poorest man say it is not within reach of his purse? It is, at once, effectual and universal. It was once said in contempt of a worthy and pious minister, that he made so much of the blood of Christ, that he would apply it even to a broken bone. But bating what may be thought indecent in the expression, chosen on purpose to bring a good man into ridicule, the thing itself, I make bold to affirm, is a great and a precious truth. Faith in the blood of Christ makes a man superior to all sufferings. It softens their aspect, it abates their severity, nay, it changes their nature. When a man is under distress or calamity of any kind, and considers it only in itself, and independently of his relation to God, it retains its old nature, and tastes with all the bitterness of the original curse; but when it is considered as limited in its nature, in its measure and its continuance, by a kind Saviour, the believer submits to it with patience, as a part of his Creator's will; bears it with pa-

tience in his Redeemer's strength, and sometimes is enabled to embrace it with pleasure, as serving to carry him to his Father's presence. Is this going too far? No, my dear brethren; these are great realities, to which the word of God, and the experience of his faints, bear united evidence. Many here present, I doubt not, have been witnesses of this truth in the carriage of their relations now with God; and not a few, I trust, will repeat the testimony to succeeding ages. I conclude all with that animated passage of the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. iv. 16. 17. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

S E R M O N V.

ON THE PURITY OF THE HEART.

PROVERBS, XXX. 7. 8. 9.

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

MY BRETHREN,

OUR dependent condition as creatures, and much more our dangerous condition as sinners, exposed to daily temptation, renders prayer a duty of the most absolute necessity. You must all be sensible, how frequent and pressing the exhortations to it are in the holy scriptures. And indeed there cannot be a better evidence of a right temper of mind, than an habitual disposition to the exercise of this duty.

But as prayer is a necessary duty, we ought to give the greater attention to the manner in which it is performed. We ought to ask only for such things

as are truly safe and useful. We ought also to offer up our prayers with importunity, or reserve, according to the nature and comparative importance of those blessings we desire to obtain. All our wants are perfectly known to God; he is also the best judge of what is fit for us; and therefore our petitions should be well weighed, and expressed in such terms, as, at the same time that they intimate our desires, leave much to himself, as to the measure and manner of satisfying them.

We have an excellent example of this pious and prudent conduct, in the prayer of the prophet Agur, just read in your hearing. All his requests are summed up in two general heads. These he seems to insist upon, as absolutely necessary to ask, with that humble, holy confidence which is founded on the divine promise, that if we ask any thing agreeable to his will, he heareth us. He seems also to ask them as what would fully satisfy him, and be sufficient for the comfort of the present life, and the happiness of the life to come. "Two things," says he, "have I required of thee; deny me them not before," or, as it ought rather to be translated, "until I die."

These two requests are conceived in the following terms: "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches." The first, viz. "Remove far from me vanity and lies," evidently relates to the temper of his mind, and the state of his soul. The second, viz. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," relates to his outward condition or circumstances in the present life. There are two things in the general structure of this compre-

hensive prayer, that merit your particular attention. *First*, The order of his request,—beginning with what is of most importance, the temper of his mind, and his hope towards God; and then adding, as but deserving the second place, what related to his present accommodation.

Secondly, The connection of his requests. The choice he makes as to his temporal condition, is in immediate and direct subserviency to his sanctification. This is plain from the arguments with which he presses, or the reasons which he assigns, for his second petition? “Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

My brethren, I am persuaded, that this subject can hardly be, at any time, unseasonable to a Christian assembly, as our misplaced, excessive, and unreasonable desires are the greatest enemies to our progress in holiness, as well as to our comfort and peace. Perhaps, however, there are some circumstances that render it peculiarly proper for this auditory. Young persons are very apt to cherish vast and boundless desires as to outward things; and, having not yet experienced the deceitfulness of the world, are apt to entertain excessive and extravagant hopes. The truth is, rich and poor, young and old, may here receive a lesson of the utmost moment.

Let me therefore intreat your attention, while I endeavour to open and improve this passage of the holy scriptures, beginning, at this time, with

the first request: "Remove far from me vanity and lies."

In discoursing on which, I will endeavour,

I. To explain the import of it, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend.

II. Apply the subject for your instruction and direction.

I. I AM to explain the import of the prophet's prayer, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend, in the petition, "Remove far from me vanity and lies." The word *vanity*, especially when it is joined, as it is frequently in scripture, with *lying*, or *lies*, is of a very large and comprehensive signification. The word in the original, translated *vanity*, properly signifies *lightness* or *emptiness*; and *lies* signify *falsehood*, in opposition to *truth*.

I imagine we shall have a clear conception, both of the meaning and force of this phrase, if we make the following remark: God himself is the great fountain of life and existence; the great I AM, as he emphatically styles himself to Moses; the *original* and the *only reality*, if I may so speak. All other beings have only a dependent and precarious existence; so that the creation itself, though his own work, compared to him, is vanity: "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Therefore, in a particular manner, the word is often used to denote the folly of all idolatrous worship, or the giving the respect and honour to any thing else which is due to God.

alone: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art thou not he, O Lord our God?"

Sometimes it is used to denote the *folly* or *unprofitableness* of any vice, and particularly of an ill-founded conceit of ourselves, as well as of all fraud and dissimulation, in word or action. So that this prayer for our souls, short as it appears to be, when considered in its full extent, will be found to contain a great variety of important matter. This I shall endeavour to give you a brief account of, under the following particulars,

I. We are hereby taught to pray, that we may be preserved by divine grace from all false and erroneous principles in religion, so as we may neither be deceived by them ourselves, nor any way instrumental in deceiving others. This, by what has been said of the use of the words in scripture, appears to be implied in the request; and it is of more moment than some are willing to allow. The understanding being the leading faculty, an error *there* spreads its unhappy influence through the whole temper and life. Whereas, on the contrary, light in the mind produces fidelity and security in the conscience, and tenderness in the conversation. You may observe, that through the whole history of the Old and New Testament, idolatry, or a departure from the knowledge and worship of the true God, is the leading sin, and the fruitful source of every other vicious practice. We

Sometimes, indeed, seem to stand astonished at the excessive proneness of the ancient Jews to this sin. But we need only a little reflection to discover, that an evil heart of unbelief continues the same at bottom, and daily produces the like dangerous effects. How prone have men been in all ages, to depart from the simplicity of the truth! In how many different shapes have they perverted it! One age, or one country, has been polluted by one error, and another by an opposite, impelled by the unstable and irregular fancies of men of corrupt minds. In the last age, the great theme of the carnal reasoner was, to attempt to expose the scripture-doctrine of God's certain knowledge, and precise ordination of all events; and in this, fate and necessity have become the strong-hold of infidelity, and are embraced, or seem to be embraced, by every enemy of true religion without exception. Error, shifting its ground, indeed, is but natural; for lying vanities are innumerable; but the true God is the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

At this very time, how abounding and prevalent is infidelity, calling in question the most important and fundamental principles, both of natural and revealed religion! And how properly is this described by the expression in the text, *vanity and lies*; for it always takes its rise from the pride and vanity of the human heart! Sometimes from a pride of understanding, which aspires to pass judgement on things far above its reach, and condemn things long before they are examined and understood; sometimes, also, from a pride of heart, or self-

insufficiency, that is unable to endure the humbling and mortifying view, given us in scripture, of our character and state. O how readily do men turn aside from the truth! With what greediness do they drink in the flattering but destructive poison! Need I point out to you the fatal effects of such principles taking place? It loosens the obligations to obedience, takes off the edge of the reproofs of conscience; and thus removing restraints, leaves men, in the emphatical language of the holy scripture, "to walk in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes."

But in this request, "remove far from me vanity and lies," I would not have you confine your views to the most gross infidelity and avowed opposition to God. Pray also, that you may be preserved from error, or mistake of any kind; but especially such as have the greatest influence on the substance of religion.

A clear apprehension of the holy nature and righteous government of God, the infinite evil of sin, the foundation of our peace in the blood of the atonement, and the renewing of our natures by the Holy Ghost, seem to me absolutely necessary to true and undefiled religion; and they are the truths which particularly serve to exalt the Creator, and lay the creature in the dust. When, therefore, we consider how grateful to corrupt nature every thing is that tends to foster pride, to create security, and set the mind at ease in the indulgence of sin; we must be sensible of how great importance it is, to pray for divine direction, and divine preservation. Nothing is more dangerous to men than confidence

and presumption; nothing more useful in faith and practice, than humility and self-denial.

2. This prayer implies a desire, that we may be preserved from setting our affections on such objects as are but vain and unsatisfying, and will, in the end, disappoint our expectation. I take this to be not only a part, but a very important part of the prophet's meaning. The world is the great source of temptation; the powerful and unhappy influence of which we may daily see, or rather, all of us daily and sensibly feel. What it possesses the fancy, misleads the judgement, inflames the affections, consumes the time, and ruins the soul, but these present enjoyments, of which the wisest of men, after a full trial of them, hath left us their character, *vanity of vanities*?

I am sensible, that I have now entered upon a subject which is far from being difficult to enlarge upon, and yet, perhaps, very difficult to treat with propriety, or in such a manner as to have the intended effect. There is nothing more easy than, in a bold declamatory way, to draw pictures of the vanity of human life. It hath been done by thousands, when, after all their broken schemes, and disappointed views, they have just suffered shipwreck upon the coast of the enchanted land of hope. But from such men we may expect to hear the language of despair, rather than of experience; and as it is too late for the instruction of the sufferers, so it very rarely has any effect in warning others to avoid the danger. What I would, therefore, willingly attempt, is, to consider this matter in a sober scriptural light, if so be that it may please

God to carry conviction to our hearts, and make it truly useful, both to speaker and hearers.

Let me, therefore, my brethren, point out to you, precisely, wherein the vanity of the world lieth. The world, in itself, is the workmanship of God, and every thing that is done in it is by the ordination or permission of God. As such, it is good, and may be used in subservience to his honour, and our own peace. But through the corruption of our nature, the creature becomes the rival and competitor of the Creator for our hearts. When we place our supreme happiness upon it, instead of making it a mean of leading us to God, then its inherent vanity immediately appears. When men allow themselves in the indulgence of vicious pleasures, how justly may they be called *vanity and lies* ! They are smiling and inviting to appearance ; but how dreadful and destructive in their effects ! “ Whoredom and wine, and new wine, take away the heart.” Those who refuse to be confined by the laws of piety and sobriety, *vainly* think they are walking at liberty, when they are bringing themselves into subjection to the severest and most inflexible of all masters. Read the just and striking description, by Solomon, of the effects of whoredom ; and reflect on the innumerable calamities brought, in every age, on persons and families by unbridled lust. See also the effects of intemperance and excess : “ Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging ; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” And again, “ The drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it

giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Think on the unhappy consequences of dishonesty and fraud. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."—You may also see, in innumerable passages of scripture, that oppression of others, as it is a sin of the deepest dye, so it is often remarkably overtaken, and punished in the course of providence, even in the present life. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the forward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blebseth the habitation of the just."

But there is something more in this request, than being preserved from practices directly vicious; for the setting of our hearts upon worldly things, and making them our chief portion and delight, is certainly seeking after vanity and lies. They are far from affording that happiness and peace which we demand of them, and expect from them. "A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked." Can there be any thing more comfortable to experience, than that strong expression—"Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." You may also find in the word of God, many warnings of the folly of those who travel in the path of ambition, and put their trust in man. "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in

whom there is no help. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." But the most comprehensive remark of all upon this subject is, that human life itself is so exceedingly precarious, that it must write 'vanity and emptiness' on every thing, the possession and use of which is confined to the present state. "Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth." What a striking picture does our Lord draw of the vanity of human happiness, in that parable of the ground of the rich man, which brought forth plentifully! "And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?"—And while this man is sedulously employed in making provision for a long and happy life, "God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The whole of the preceding representation may be summed up in this excellent sentence of the wise man: "The wicked worketh a deceitful work; but to him that soweth righteously shall be a sure reward."

Now, my brethren, need I add, how prone we are to be led astray, in a greater or less degree, by such "vanity and lies?"—I do not insist upon the many victims which, in every age, have been seen to fall by the destructive hand of vice. How many have been ruined by lust, slain by intemperance, or beggared by dishonesty! But I entreat you particularly to observe, that when we set our affections immoderately upon any earthly object or enjoyment,

or when they are not truly sanctified, how much they disappoint our expectation in possession, and what scenes of distress we prepare for ourselves by their removal.

3. This request, "remove far from me vanity and lies," implies, that God would graciously preserve us from deceiving ourselves, and thinking our character better, and our state safer, than it really is. When we take a view of the state of the world, and the conduct of those who have not yet cast off all belief of eternity and a judgement to come, it is impossible to account for their security, but by a great degree of self-deceit. We may say of them with the prophet Isaiah, "He feedeth of ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And from the representation given by our Saviour, it is plain, that many shall continue in their mistake, and only be undeceived at the last day: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." How awful a reflection this! How dreadful a disappointment, to discover our misery, only when there is no more hope of escaping it! Is there not a possibility of this being the case with many of you, my brethren; and do you not tremble at the thought? I would not wish any, in general, to give way to a spirit of bondage, or slavish fear; but the best of the children of God have often discovered this holy jealousy of themselves: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion

over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." And again, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

This leads me naturally to add upon this subject, that we ought to pray for preservation from self-deceit, as to particular branches of our character and conduct, as well as our general state. Many, even upon the whole good men, are occasionally and insensibly brought, for a season, under the direction of sinful passions. They may be indulging themselves, without suspicion, in what is notwithstanding really provoking to God, injurious or offensive to others, and, in the issue, hurtful to their own peace. They may be making an enjoyment a talent, a relation an idol, when they think they are keeping within the bounds of duty. They may be indulging a sinful resentment, when they think they are promoting the glory of God. Many an excuse for neglecting commanded duty, from prudence or difficulty, satisfies ourselves, which will not stand in the day of trial. What reason for the prophet's prayer in the sense just now assigned, "Remove far from me vanity and lies."

4. In the *next* place, this request implies, a desire to be preserved from pride and self-conceit upon any subject. There is not any thing that affords a stronger evidence of our being unacquainted with ourselves, and our own state, than that propensity to pride and vanity, which is so common to us all. It is thought by many, that pride was the sin of the

angels, that cast them down to hell. It is plain, that pride was the main ingredient in the first sin of man. And perhaps it is a just and proper description of all sin as such, that it is a dethroning of God, and setting up self to be loved, honoured, and served, in his room. This sin is by no means confined to the worst of men, in whom it hath an absolute dominion; but retains and discovers an unhappy influence in the very best. Every thing may be the fuel of pride: our persons, our performances, our relations, our possessions; nay, so pliable, and at the same time so preposterous is this disposition, that men are found sometimes proud of their very vices and defects. But how ill do pride and vanity suit such poor mortals as we are, who seem born but to die! who, after passing through a longer or shorter series of weaknesses, disappointments, and troubles, must at last be laid in the silent grave, to moulder in the dust. We are dependent creatures, who have nothing, and can have nothing, but what we receive from the unmerited favour of God. We are unwise and ignorant creatures, who know nothing to the bottom, and therefore are liable to continual mistakes in our conduct. Those among us who have the greatest comprehension of mind, and know most, as it serves to shew the comparative ignorance of the bulk of mankind, so it serves to convince themselves how little they do know, and how little they can know after all, compared with what is to them unsearchable.

But, above all, we are sinful creatures, who have rendered ourselves, by our guilt, the just objects of divine displeasure. Is there any who dares to plead

exemption from this character? And do pride and vanity become those to whom they manifestly belong? Can any thing be more foolish, than indulging such dispositions? There is a very just expression of one of the apocryphal writers: "Pride was not made for man, nor a high look for him that is born of a woman." Indeed they are so evidently unfruitful to our state and circumstances, that one would think we should need no higher principle than our own reason and observation to keep us free from them. We do, however, need the most earnest and assiduous addresses to the throne of grace, to have all pride and vanity removed from us. How hateful is pride to God! We are told, "he resisteth the proud." On the contrary, no disposition is more amiable in his sight than humility. "He giveth grace to the humble." And again: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." "For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

It must, therefore, be the duty and interest of every good man, not only to resist pride and vanity, but to make it a part of his daily supplication to God, that he may effectually be delivered from both.

5. In the *last* place, this request implies a desire to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation of every kind. It is one of the glorious attributes of

God, that he is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He also requires of all his servants, and is delighted with, truth in the inward parts. But there seems to be some difficulty in this part of the subject, more than in the others. Some will say, 'Why pray to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation?' This might be an exhortation to the sinner, but cannot be the prayer of the penitent. If they are sincere in their prayer, it seems impossible there can be any danger of fraud. Fraud implies deliberation and design; and though it may be concealed from others upon whom it is exercised, it can never be concealed from the person in whom it dwells, and by whom it is contrived.' This is the very language of some reasoners, who infer from it, that though there are many other sins to which a man may be liable without knowing it, yet this can never be the case with dissimulation.

But, my brethren, if we consider how apt men are, upon a sudden temptation of fear or shame, or the prospect of some advantage to themselves, to depart from strict veracity, and even to justify to their own minds some kinds and degrees of deceptions, we shall see the absolute necessity of making this a part of our prayer to God. Nay, perhaps I may go further and say, that we are as ready to deceive ourselves in this point as in any other.

Upon this important subject there is one consideration to which I earnestly intreat your attention. Thorough sincerity, simplicity, and truth, upon every subject, have, in the world, so much the appearance of weakness; and, on the contrary, being able to manage and over-reach others, has so much

the appearance of superior wisdom, that men are very liable to temptation from this quarter. It is to be lamented that our language itself, if I may so speak, has received a criminal taint; for in common discourse the expression, *a plain well-meaning man*, is always apprehended to imply, together with sincerity, some degree of weakness; although, indeed, it is a character of all others the most noble. In recommendation of this character, let me observe, that in this, as in all the particulars mentioned above, “the wicked worketh a deceitful work; but he that walketh uprightly walketh surely.” Supposing a man to have the prudence and discretion not to speak without necessity, I affirm there is no end which a good man ought to aim at, which may not be more certainly, safely, and speedily obtained by the strictest and most inviolable sincerity, than by any act of dissimulation whatever.

But, after all, what signify any ends of present conveniency, which dissimulation may pretend to answer, compared to the favour of God, which is forfeited by it? Hear what the psalmist says: “Who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.” Let us, therefore, add this to the other views of the prophet’s comprehensive prayer, “Remove far from me vanity and lies.”

For the improvement of this part of the subject, observe,

1. You may learn from it, how to attain, not only a justness and propriety, but a readiness and firmness in the duty of prayer.

Nothing is a greater hindrance, either to the fervency of our affections, or the force of our expressions in prayer, than when the object of our desires is confused and general. But when we perceive clearly what it is that is needful to us, and how much we do need it, this gives us indeed the spirit of supplication. Perhaps it is more necessary to attend to this circumstance, in what we ask for our souls than for our bodies. When we want any thing that relates to present conveniency, it is clearly understood, because it is sensibly felt. There is no difficulty in crying for deliverance from poverty, sickness, reproach, or any other earthly suffering; nay, the difficulty here is not in exciting our desires, but in moderating them; not in producing fervour, but in promoting submission: But in what relates to our souls, because many or most temptations are agreeable to the flesh, we foresee danger less perfectly, and even feel it less sensibly; therefore, a close and deliberate attention to our situation and trials, as opened in the preceding discourse, is of the utmost moment, "both to carry us to the throne of grace, and to direct our spirit when we are there."

2. What hath been said will serve to excite us to habitual watchfulness, and to direct our daily conversation. The same things that are the subjects of prayer, are also the objects of diligence. Prayer and diligence are joined by our Saviour, and ought never to be separated by his people. Prayer without watchfulness is not sincere, and watchfulness without prayer will not be successful. The same views of sin and duty, of the strength and frequency

of temptation, and the weakness of the tempted, lead equally to both. Let me beseech you, then, to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Maintain an habitual diffidence of yourselves. Attend to the various dangers to which you are exposed. Watchfulness of itself will save you from many temptations, and will give you an inward warrant, and humble confidence, to ask of God support under, and deliverance from such as it is impossible to avoid.

3. In the *last* place, since every thing comprehended in the petition in the text, is viewed in the light of falsehood and deceit, suffer me, in the most earnest manner, to recommend to my hearers, and particularly to all the young persons under my care, “an invariable adherence to truth, and the most undisguised simplicity and sincerity in the whole of their conversation and carriage.” I do not know where to begin or end in speaking of the excellency and beauty of sincerity, or the baseness of falsehood. Sincerity is amiable, honourable, and profitable. It is the most shining part of a commendable character, and the most winning apology for any miscarriage or unadvised action. There is scarcely any action in itself so bad, as what is implied in the hardened front of him who covers the truth with a lie: Besides, it is always a sign of long practice in wickedness. Any man may be seduced or surpris'd into a fault; but none but the habitual villain can deny it with steady calmness and obstinacy. In this respect we unhappily find some who are young offenders, but old sinners.

It is not in religion only, but even among worldly men, that lying is counted the utmost pitch of baseness; and to be called a liar, *the most insupportable reproach*. No wonder, indeed, for it is the very essence of cowardice to dare to do a thing which you have not courage to avow. The very worst of sinners are sensible of it themselves, for they deeply resent the imputation of it; and, if I do not mistake, have never yet arrived at the absurdity of defending it. There is scarcely any other crime but some are profligate enough to boast of it; but I do not remember ever to have heard of any who made his boast, *that he was a liar*. To crown all, lying is the most wretched folly. Justly does Solomon say, "A lying tongue is but for a moment." It is easily discovered. Truth is a firm consistent thing, every part of which agrees with, and strongly supports another. But lies are not only repugnant to truth, but repugnant to each other; and commonly the means, like a treacherous thief, of the detection of the whole. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to every one of you, the noble character of sincerity. Endeavour to establish your credit in this respect so entirely, that every word you speak may be beyond the imputation of deceit; so that enemies may themselves be sensible, that though you should abuse them, you will never deceive them.

S E R M O N VI.

SEEKING A COMPETENCY IN THE WISDOM OF PROVIDENCE.

PROVERBS, xxx. 8.

*Give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food
convenient for me.*

I PROCEED now to consider the second branch of the prophet's prayer, which regards his outward condition or circumstances in the present world. On this subject he expresses himself thus : " Give me neither poverty nor riches."

Do not think, my brethren, that this is a subject of little importance, or that it is unconnected with the spiritual life. On the contrary, there are few things of more moment, than to have our desires of temporal blessings limited and directed in a proper manner. Not only is worldly-mindedness the everlasting ruin of those who are entirely under its dominion ; but even good men are liable to many temptations from the same quarter. They may hurt their own peace, give offence to others, or lessen their usefulness, by a sinful attachment to the world, or by

a criminal negligence in not giving a prudent and proper attention to it. Be not surpris'd that I have mentioned the last of these as well as the first, for the prophet prays for deliverance from the temptation arising from both extremes. Idleness and sloth are as contrary to true religion, as either avarice or ambition; and the habit, when once taken, is perhaps more difficult to remove.

In order to treat this subject with the greater distinctness, I shall, *first*, shew you what we may learn in general from this prayer; *secondly*, explain the particular object of the prophet's desire; and, in the *last* place, make application of what may be said by recommending it to your choice.

I. IN the *first* place, then, we may learn in general from this request, that it is lawful to pray for temporal blessings. It is not unworthy of a Christian, whose conversation is in heaven, to ask of God what is necessary to his support and preservation in the present life. If I were to mention all the examples of this in scripture, I should transcribe a great part of the Bible. Though inferior in their nature and value to spiritual blessings, they are necessary in their place; and it is upon this footing they are expressly put by our Saviour: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." They are needful to the prolonging of our natural life till we finish our work, and are fitted for our reward. Therefore, though miracles are a kind of suspension of the laws of nature, and the ordinary course of providence, yet we find God sometimes working a miracle to supply the wants

of his servants. It had been no more difficult for God to have kept Elijah from hungering, than to have made the ravens fetch him provision; or to have made, as in another case, a barrel of meal, or a cruise of oil, the lasting and sufficient support of a whole family. But he chooses rather to supply the wants of his people, than cause them to cease, that he may keep their dependence constantly in their view, and that a sense of their necessities may oblige them to have continual recourse to him for relief.

Again, we may here learn, that God is the real and proper giver of every temporal, as well as of every spiritual blessing: a sentiment this of the utmost consequence, to be engraven upon the heart. We have here an instance, out of many, in which truths known and confessed by all have notwithstanding little hold upon the mind. How few are truly sensible of their continual obligations to the God of life! Consider, I beseech you, that whatever you possess of any kind, it is the gift of God. He holdeth your soul in life, and guards you by his providence in your going out and in your coming in. He covereth your table and filleth your cup. Have you riches? It is by the blessing of the God of heaven: "The blessing of the Lord," saith Solomon, "it maketh rich. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." Have you credit and reputation? It is God that hideth you from the strife of tongues: "Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue; neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh." Have you friends? It

is he that giveth you favour in their fight. Have you talents and parts? It is the *inspiration of the Almighty* that giveth thee understanding.

II. LET us now explain the particular tenor of this petition, and point out the object of the prophet's desire: "Give me neither poverty nor riches." It is plain we are not to suppose the prophet, in any degree, refusing submission to the will of God, by his thus making choice of a particular state of life. Doubtless he resolved to be at God's disposal, and believed that he was able to sanctify to him, a state of the highest prosperity, or of the deepest adversity. It was no distrust of God, but self-denial and diffidence of his own strength, that suggested this prayer. Therefore, in adjusting his desires and expectations, he pitches upon that state that appeared to him liable to the fewest snares. Thus our blessed Saviour, though it is his will that we should fear no enemy when going out in divine strength, yet teaches us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

Poverty and riches are here mentioned as the two extremes; in neither of which we should wish to be placed, but in a safer middle between the two; so as, if it please God, we may neither be urged by pressing necessity, nor over-loaded with such abundance, as we may be in danger of abusing.

But perhaps some will say, 'Where is the middle? how shall we be able to determine what we ought to desire, since there is so immense a distance, and so many intermediate degrees between the extremity of want, and the countless treasures of the wealthy?'

But, my brethren, if we do not hearken to the illusive calls of ambition, avarice, and lust, it is by no means difficult to apprehend the meaning of the prophet, and apply it to persons of every rank. Regard, no doubt, is to be had to the various stations in which God hath thought fit to place us. This difference of station requires supplies of the conveniencies of life, suited to the part we are bound to act. That manner of life which would be decent and liberal in one station, would be reckoned mean and fordid in another. Therefore, what would be plenty and fulness to persons in inferior stations, would be extreme poverty to persons placed, and called to act, in higher and more exalted spheres. But after we have taken in the consideration of every difference that may happen on this score, there is something in the prayer that belongs in common to *persons of all stations*, namely, that we should be modest in our desires after temporal good things, and take care not to ask only to gratify a sensual inclination, but for what is really necessary or useful to us. The last is reasonable and allowable; the other is unreasonable, and justly condemned by the apostle James: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

But the first part of this request is explained by the last, contained in the words, "Feed me with food convenient for me." That we may be able to enter into the true spirit of this petition, I shall just compare it with some other scriptural forms of prayer on the same subject, and then endeavour to

point out what I take to be the chief instruction intended to be conveyed to us by it.

As to the scripture-forms of prayer for temporal provision, the precedence is undoubtedly due to that excellent form left us by our Saviour, in which we find this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." You may next attend to the prayer put up by Jacob in ancient times: "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." It is more than probable that the apostle Paul alludes to Jacob's expression, in his excellent advice to all Christians: "But godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But 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; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

It is obvious to remark, that all these prayers and this apostolic counsel run in the same strain. They all begin and are founded upon a regard to God, and a mind rightly disposed towards him: "If the Lord," says Jacob, "will be with me." "Remove," says Agur in my text, "far from me vanity and lies." Our Saviour begins his prayer with petitions for the glory of God, with which

the happiness of our souls is inseparably connected ; and the apostle maintains *godliness* as the great source of contentment with our portion in this life.

We may further observe, that there is the same method observed in all these prayers. The expressions vary a little, but the request is the same. Jacob wishes for the divine protection, with food to eat, and raiment to put on ; Agur, for food convenient for him ; and in the Lord's prayer, we ask for our daily bread. There is no specifying of any particulars, no mention made of this or the other quantity of provision. Their desires are summed up in this general request, and the quantity and quality wholly referred to the good pleasure of God. It is certain that God hath sometimes granted to his own people, riches in great abundance ; and, at the same time, has given his blessing to enjoy them, and honoured the possessors, by enabling them to glorify him in the use and application of them. But the direct desire of riches I do not think hath any warrant from precept or example in his word ; and when they are bestowed as a blessing, and not a curse, it is commonly on those who, by their superior concern about the better part, shew that they will put them to their proper use, as in the case of Solomon, recorded in the first book of Kings : " In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night ; and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And he said, Give thy servant an understanding heart. And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life,

neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding, to discern judgement: Behold, I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wife and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour.”

Now, this I take to be the main instruction intended to be given us with respect to our prayers for temporal mercies, that we should not pretend to set bounds to God, but leave the measure of them to his determination.

For further explaining this truth, and at the same time recommending it to your regard, be pleased to attend to the following observations.

1. Consider, that God, infinitely wise, as well as gracious, is certainly the best judge of what is most fit and convenient for us. We know so little of ourselves, that we really know not how we should behave, if placed in particular circumstances, until we are tried. The world has actually seen many examples of those, who were loud in their accusations of others, behaving worse when placed in the same stations. And indeed I should naturally expect, that an impatient, envious, disobedient subject, would, if raised to power, be a cruel, insolent, unjust oppressor; that a petulant, peevish, obstinate servant, would make a capricious, severe, unreasonable master.

If we were to carve out our own lot, and to have all our own desires gratified, there is great reason

to presume, we would throw ourselves into the most disagreeable circumstances with regard to our souls, and probably consult but ill for our peace and comfort in this world.

Let me put a few questions to every one that secretly murmurs at his state. Are you sure, that if you were advanced to a place of power and trust, you would be able to carry with prudence, resolution, and integrity? Are you sure, that if you were supplied with riches in great abundance, you would not allow yourselves to wallow in pleasure, or to swell in pride? Are you sure, that if you were raised to high rank, surrounded by flatterers, and worshipped by servants, you would, in that standing, behave with humility and condescension: or that pressed on all hands by business, company, or amusements, you would still religiously save your time for converse with God?

A life of piety in an exalted station is a continual conflict with the strongest opposition. What says experience upon this subject? Solomon did not wholly, and to the end, resist the temptation of riches and dominion. In the whole compass of history, sacred and profane, I do not remember any example of a man's behaving better in point of morals, in a prosperous, than in an afflicted state, excepting one that hath this appearance, viz. Cicero, the Roman orator. His conduct in prosperity was full of dignity, and seemed wholly directed to the public good; whereas in adversity, it was to the last degree mean and abject. But probably the reason of this was, that pride, or rather vanity, was his ruling passion, and the great motive to his

illustrious actions ; and when he fell into adversity, this disposition had no scope for its exercise.

Christians, the Lord knoweth our frame, and is well acquainted with what we are able to bear, and consequently what state of life will be upon the whole most convenient for us. It is, therefore, our interest, as well as duty, to refer ourselves entirely to him, and leave him to choose for us. This is not only the doctrine of scripture, but so agreeable to reason and good sense, that it has been acknowledged by several of the heathen philosophers, who have expressed themselves in terms perfectly similar to those of the inspired writings. The prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades, is very remarkable :—That he should beseech the Supreme God to give him what was good for him, though he should not ask it ; and to withhold from him whatever would be hurtful, though he should be so foolish as to pray for it.

2. As God is certainly the best judge of what is good for us, so resignation to him is a most acceptable expression both of our worship and obedience. Single duties are particular acts ; resignation is the very *habit* of obedience. The wisdom and goodness of God are acknowledged in the most authentic manner, when his holy and sovereign providence is humbly submitted to, and cordially approved. Every impatient complaint is an impeachment of Providence ; every irregular desire is an act of rebellion against God. Therefore, a submissive temper must be highly pleasing to God, and is the way to glorify him in the most unexceptionable manner. The rather indeed, as it is im-

possible to attain this temper, but by sincerely laying hold of the covenant of peace, which is ordered in all things and sure. This teaches us the grounds of submission: This procures for us the grace of submission: This stains the pride of all human glory: This changes the nature of our possessions to us, and us to them: This spiritualizes a worldly mind, and makes us know, in our own experience, that all the paths of the Lord, to his own people, are mercy and peace.

3. Such a temper of mind will greatly contribute to our own inward peace. It will be an effectual preservative from all unrighteous courses, and unlawful, or even dishonourable means of increasing our worldly substance, and consequently save us from the troubles or dangers to which men expose themselves by such practices. It will preserve us from perplexing anxiety, and many uneasy fears for futurity. It will bring us the near and sure way to the greatest of all earthly blessings, a contented mind.

Such will be the sweet and delightful effects of depending upon God, and leaving it to him to furnish our supplies as he sees most convenient for us. Whoever can pray with the prophet, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me," may be fully assured, that his desire shall be gratified, as it is perfectly agreeable to the will of God.

I conclude with reading to you our Saviour's exhortation on this subject: "Therefore, I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your

body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

S E R M O N VII.

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY.

PROVERBS, xxx. 9.

Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

I PROCEED now to consider the arguments by which the prophet enforces his wise and well-conceived prayer. These, in connection with the two branches of the prayer, stand thus: "Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? And give me not poverty, lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." If Agur's prayer is conceived in the most modest and humble terms, the reasons with which he supports it are every way becoming a truly wise and good man. You see in them a prevailing concern for the honour and glory of God, and his own preservation in the paths of piety and virtue. You see in them a humble sense of his own weakness, and the danger of temptation; he, therefore, desires to

be placed in such a state of life, as will expose him to the fewest trials. An excellent disposition this, and highly worthy of our imitation. How happy would it be for us all, if a desire to please God, and preserve our integrity, lay always nearest our hearts, and had a constant and commanding influence on every step we took in our journey through life.

Neither riches nor poverty are bad in themselves. Neither of them is any recommendation, or hindrance to the favour of God, who is no respecter of persons; there are good and bad in all ranks. Men may be rich, and yet pious; or poor, yet strictly just and honest. It is, I confess, often done, yet it is highly criminal to look upon all that are rich in this world as profane; and it would be equally so to look upon all that are poor as destitute of integrity. Yet it is undeniable, that, from the corruption of the human heart, these two extremes do often become strong temptations to the particular sins mentioned in the text; which we shall now consider separately, in the order in which they lie in the passage before us.

“ Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?”

As to the fact, that riches do often lead to profanity and contempt of God, experience and the state of the world prove it in a manner too plain to be denied. We not only see, that those who are born and educated from their infancy in the higher ranks of life, are most prone to neglect the duties of religion; but those who, from a low or mean condition, are remarkably raised in the course of

providence, do often change their temper with their state, and shew the unhappy influence of riches in leading them to a forgetfulness of God. Are there not some, who were regularly in God's house when they but barely subsisted, who have not time for it now, when they are busy and wealthy? Are there not some families where the worship of God was constant and regular in early life, while they were undistinguished, and now it is no more to be heard in their sumptuous palaces and elegant apartments? Shall I say, that any worm of the earth is become too considerable to fall down before the omnipotent Jehovah!

I may add, as being of great importance in the present subject, that such changes do often take place gradually and insensibly, very much contrary to men's own expectations; so that we really do not know ourselves, nor can we determine, before trial, how far we would resist or yield to the force of temptation. The prophet Elisha foretold to Hazael, the cruelties he would be guilty of when raised to an higher station; to which he replied with disdain and abhorrence, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." The conduct of the children of Israel in their prosperity, is but an emblem of the general conduct of the children of men. "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked. Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness: Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation."

What hath been said might be sufficient to shew the propriety of the prophet's prayer; for if such hath been often, or generally, the influence of worldly greatness upon other men, why should any be so confident as to presume it would be otherwise with themselves? But perhaps it may afford matter of useful instruction, to inquire a little further into the subject, to trace the causes of this effect, and shew how and why riches become an inducement to irreligion and profaneness, for this will best enable us to apply the remedy. When I speak of examining the causes of this effect, I confess that no reason can be given for it, but what reflects great dishonour upon human nature in its present state. Were we to judge of the matter by the dictates of sound reason, we should naturally expect to find it directly contrary. God is the author of every blessing which men possess, and his gifts should lead us to gratitude and acknowledgement. It seems natural to suppose, that those who are most highly favoured in the course of providence, should discover the greatest sense of obligation, and be ready to make every dutiful return. One would think, that though the poor should be impatient, surely the rich will be content and thankful. Is not this reasonable? Had any of you bestowed many favours upon others, would you not expect that their gratitude should bear some proportion to the number and value of benefits received? Had any of them been remarkably distinguished from the rest, would you not expect from them the most inviolable fidelity and attachment? Strange, that our conduct should be so directly opposite in the

returns we make for the goodness of our Maker! that those who are distinguished from others by the largest possessions, and the greatest fulness of all temporal mercies, should be the most prone to wickedness of all sorts; but especially that they should be peculiarly inclined to forgetfulness and contempt of God! Yet so it is in truth. But however dishonourable it is to human nature, let us search into it a little, and perhaps we may discover the cause of impiety in persons in affluent circumstances, and the danger the prophet would avoid, by attending to the following observations.

I. An easy and affluent fortune affords the means, not only of pampering our bodies, but of gratifying all our lusts and appetites. They are as strong probably in persons of inferior stations, but Providence has rendered the gratification more difficult, and in some cases impossible. Many work through necessity, who would be as idle and slothful as any, but for the fear of want. These will be the first and readiest to reproach the rich, and call them idle drones, who revel in that abundance for which they never toiled; and to put to their own credit that which is wholly owing to the restraints under which they are laid. Many are generally sober, because they cannot afford the charges of intemperance, who want nothing but the means to riot in the most brutal sensuality. But to persons of great wealth, the objects of desire are always placed in full view, and are evidently within their reach: so that the temptation has uncommon force, and few are able entirely to resist it.

2. The indulgence of pleasure insensibly induces a habit, and leads men to place their happiness in such enjoyments. Habit, you know, is very powerful, and while the habit acquires strength, the power of resistance is gradually weakened. These gratifications consume so much time, that there is little left to reflect upon God, and our relation to him. I reckon it none of the least temptations to persons in high rank, that not only their self-indulgence, but the attendance and obsequiousness of others, so engrosses their attention, and wastes their time, that they have few opportunities of calm and sober reflection; or at least can easily escape from it, and take refuge in company and amusement. Add to this, that a great variety of sensible objects and enjoyments render the mind, not only less attentive to things of a spiritual nature, but indeed less able to understand them.

3. Observe further, that when the better part is thus neglected, and no care taken of the cultivation of the mind, every vice will spring and shoot up in the soul, as briars and thorns do upon uncultivated ground. Sin, my brethren, is natural to us; it is the produce of the soil; if it is not destroyed, it will not die; if it is but neglected, it will thrive. Now, whenever persons fall under the power of vice, they begin first to excuse, and then to vindicate it. Those who are under the government of lust, soon find it their interest that there was no such thing as religion and virtue. Whatever we wish, we are easily led to believe to be true. Loose and atheistical principles then find a ready admittance, and are swallowed down greedily. This is

a short sketch of the steps by which people in affluent and easy circumstances are often led to deny God, and to say, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" Loose principles are, at first, more frequently the effect, than the cause of loose practices; but when once they have taken deep root, and obtained full dominion in the heart, they have a dreadful and fatal influence on the devoted victim.

But, my brethren, I find a strong inclination to make another remark, though perhaps it may be thought of too refined and abstract a nature. It is, that the danger of affluence in leading to contempt of God, arises from the nature of all sin as such. The original and first sin of man, was plainly affecting independence. They desired and expected to be as gods, knowing good and evil. And still sin properly consists in withdrawing our allegiance from, and throwing off our dependence upon God, and giving, as it were, that esteem, love, and service to ourselves, in one shape or another, that is due only to him.

Now, observe, that affluence nourishes this mistake, and suffering kills it. The more every thing abounds with us, the more our will is submitted to, and our inclinations gratified on every subject; the more we look upon ourselves as independent, and forget our obligations to God. Whereas, on the other hand, disappointments and calamities open our blind eyes, and make us remember what we are. Was not the proud monarch of Babylon in-

pired with this delusive sense of independence, when he expressed himself thus: "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake and said, 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?" But mark the more powerful word of the King of kings: "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar! to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee." That this is the proper source of worldly greatness, may be seen in the temper such persons usually acquire and settle in, which is pride, insolence, and contempt of others. Nay, it appears still more clearly in some few instances, in which the intoxication comes to its height, and the poor deluded mortal literally aspires to be considered and treated as God. It may seem incredible, but we have the most authentic evidence that history can afford, that some men have demanded and received divine worship. This was the case, not only with Alexander the Great, who was really an illustrious prince, but with some of the later Roman emperors, who were the meanest and basest of all men. No wonder, then, that prosperity makes men neglect God, when it prompts them to sit down upon his throne, and rob him of the service of his other subjects.

Before I proceed to the other part of the prophet's argument, suffer me to make a few remarks, for the improvement of what has been already said,
And,

1. See hence the great malignity and deceitfulness of sin. It hardly appears more strongly from any circumstance, than that which has been the subject of this discourse, viz. that the gifts of God, in the course of his providence, are so far from exciting our gratitude, in proportion to their number and value, that, on the contrary, those who *receive most* are usually *most profane*. They make his favours instruments of rebellion against him, and return contempt for his indulgence, and hatred for his love.

Let us not take occasion from this to gratify our own envy; by particular or personal reproach against those who are great, or have become rich amongst ourselves; but let us act a far wiser and juster part, and be humbled for the sinfulness of our nature, and warned of the deceitfulness of sin. We may feel the seeds of this disposition in us all. You find the wise man charging a similar ingratitude upon man in general. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." And do you not observe every day, nay, has it not turned into a proverb, that we think light of our mercies, spiritual and temporal, when they are common and abundant? And what is the true and proper interpretation of this, but that the greater God's goodness is to us, commonly the less is our gratitude to him.

2. Let me beseech you to make a wise improvement of the advantages you enjoy over one another.

Let them excite in you a holy emulation to testify your sense of superior blessings, by superior piety and usefulness. Do you excel others in any respect? Are you successful in trade? Have you risen to reputation? Are you exalted to offices of dignity? Are you endowed with capacity of mind? Can you remember the time when those were your equals who are now your inferiors? Do not look with insolence upon others, making odious and perhaps unjust comparisons. Do not swell in pride and self-complacence, as if by your own power you had made yourselves to differ, but rather look the other way, to God, who is the maker both of rich and poor, and pray that your thankfulness and duty to him may exceed that of the poor man, as much as his liberality to you exceeds what he has thought proper to bestow upon him. This affords me an opportunity of relating a little piece of private history, that happened in Great Britain, and appears to me very worthy of remembrance, and very conducive to the ends of edification.

A gentleman of very considerable fortune, but a stranger to either personal or family religion, one evening took a solitary walk through a part of his own grounds. He happened to come near to a mean hut, where a poor man with a numerous family lived, who earned their bread by daily labour. He heard a voice pretty loud and continued. Not knowing what it was, curiosity prompted him to listen. The man, who was piously disposed, happened to be at prayer with his family. So soon as he could distinguish the words, he heard him

giving thanks with great affection to God, for the goodness of his providence, in giving them food to eat, and raiment to put on, and in supplying them with what was necessary and comfortable in the present life. He was immediately, no doubt by divine power, struck with astonishment and confusion, and said to himself, Does this poor man, who has nothing but the meanest fare, and that purchased by severe labour, give thanks to God for his goodness to himself and family, and I, who enjoy ease and honour, and every thing that is grateful and desirable, have hardly ever bent my knee, or made any acknowledgement to my Maker and Preserver? It pleased God that this providential occurrence proved the mean of bringing him to a real and lasting sense of God and religion.

Let all persons in health, quiet, and plentiful circumstances, learn from the preceding discourse, what it is they ought clearly to guard against. Pride, security, forgetfulness of God, are peculiarly incident to that state. "Lo this," saith the Lord to Jerusalem, "was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." A serious reflection on the obligation such lie under to God for what they have received in their continued dependence upon him, and the instability of all earthly things, would save them from the hurtful influence of worldly prosperity. To enforce this, I shall only read the apostolic charge to Timothy: "Charge them who are rich in this world,

that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly 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.”

S E R M O N VIII.

THE DANGER OF ADVERSITY.

PROVERBS, xxx. 9.

*Lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my
God in vain.*

I PROCEED now to consider the argument by which the prophet urges the *second* branch of his request, which, in connection, runs thus: "Give me not poverty, lest I be poor, and steal." Having not only explained the general principle that runs through the whole of this subject, but also very particularly pointed out the dangers attending an opulent and wealthy state, I shall endeavour to do the same thing with respect to a state of poverty and straitness. While I attempt this, I am sincerely sorry that there is so much propriety in the subject; and that it is so well suited to the circumstances of the inhabitants of this place. You see the prophet considers the great and general temptation to which the poor are exposed, to be dishonest, by using fraudulent means of relieving their wants, or

bettering their condition. You see also, he considers this temptation in its progress, not only inclining them to act unjustly, but sometimes proceeding to the terrible degree of concealing or supporting the fraud by falsehood, and perhaps at last by perjury or false swearing; "lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

Let us, *first*, consider a little the matter of fact, as it appears in experience, and then a few of its principal causes.

As to *first* of these, shall I be afraid to affirm, that extreme poverty often inclines persons to dishonesty and fraud? Will it be thought harsh and severe to those already sufficiently depressed? As I would not seem to stand in this place, and flatter the pride of the greatest and most eminent of my fellow-sinners, so neither will I dissemble the truth from a false compassion for the poor. This would indeed be doing them the greatest possible injury; it would be treating them, from mistaken tenderness, as the rich are often treated from the fear or partiality of those who are about them; fostering their self-deceit, and not suffering them to hear the most salutary truths, because they are not pleasing to the flesh.

It is undoubtedly matter of experience, that great poverty makes many take unjust and unwarrantable methods of procuring relief. Not only so, but they seem often disposed to justify and defend them, as if they had a title to rectify the mistakes of Providence, in the distribution of worldly possessions. This, in the event, receives great encouragement from some who seem to have imbibed

a general false principle, and act upon it, both in their own conduct, and in their judgement of others. In the division of controversy, or dividing disputed property, when one party is, or is supposed to be rich, and in easy circumstances, and the other poor, and in a mean condition, they think, that instead of acting according to strict justice, the advantage should always be made to fall to the poorer side. This conduct is considered by some, not only as lawful, but as laudable. It is, however, a false principle, and is condemned in scripture, which says, "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause." It may be thought, perhaps, that the other is the more common and dangerous partiality, and probably it is so; yet this also is blameworthy; and when followed out, as I am afraid it too often is, must involve numbers unawares in the guilt of stealing; for when they have once laid down this rule, that the poor have some claim upon the rich, they are ready to apply it to their own case, and extend it very far. But in all matters of property, or right and wrong, whether a person is rich or poor, ought to be utterly out of the question; the only thing to be considered is, what is just and lawful. The rich are indeed, in point of conscience, bound to assist the poor; but this must be their own act; no person can take the smallest part of their property without their consent, but he is guilty of an act of injustice, and violation of the law of God. No person has a right to make them generous and charitable against their wills, or to exercise their own generosity and charity at their expence. This must be left to the

Supreme Judge at the last day, who will say to them, " I was a stranger, and ye took me not in ; naked, and ye clothed me not ; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." But what will give us the most distinct view of the influence of poverty, as a temptation, is the too frequent conduct of those who are reduced from what was once their state, to poverty or debt, by misfortunes or extravagance, or mismanagement of their affairs. The temptation of poverty is not by far so great to those in the meanest ranks of life, whose income, though small, is not very disproportionate to what hath always been their condition, as to those who are reduced from a higher to a lower state. The few, who in such a situation preserve their integrity inviolated, and their sincerity of speech unsuspected, deserve the highest honour. Nay, I am persuaded, that, bad as the world is, every person in reduced circumstances, would meet with compassion and assistance, if all about him were sensible that he had neither lost his substance by neglect, nor wasted it by riot, nor concealed it by fraud. But though we cannot help ascribing some measure of what is laid to the charge of persons in this unhappy state, to the rage and resentment of those who have suffered by them ; yet, alas ! there is too great reason to affirm, that they are too often guilty of prevarication and fraud, the sins mentioned in the text.

I will dwell no longer upon the fact, but will consider a little the reasons of it, which will directly serve to promote the design of this discourse, by exciting men to concern and solicitude, as well

as pointing out the proper means of avoiding the temptation. The general reason of this, to be sure, is obvious to every body, that persons in poverty, being strongly solicted by the appetites common to all men, and not having of their own wherewith to gratify their desires, are tempted to lay hold of the property of others. They grudge to see that others have the enjoyments from which they are debarred; and since they cannot have them in a lawful, make bold to seize them in an unlawful way. But this I do not insist on, that I may mention one or two particular reasons, which will suggest suitable exhortations to duty.

1. The *first* I shall mention is ignorance. This is peculiarly applicable to those in the lowest ranks of life. Through poverty they are not so well instructed as they ought to be, in the principles of religion, and the great rules of duty. An ignorant state is almost always a state of security. Their consciences are less tender, and they are less sensible of the great evil of prevarication and fraud. I am obliged, in fidelity, to say, that in the private inspection of my charge, though I have found some instances both of poverty and sickness borne with the most pious resignation, there are also some whose condition might move the hardest heart, living in the most fordid poverty, grossly ignorant, and at the same time so dispirited, so slothful, or so proud, that they will do little to obtain knowledge for themselves, or communicate it to their children. Many will not attend upon the public means of instruction, because they cannot appear

in such a decent garb as they could wish ; and for the same reason they keep their children from them, till they contract such habits of idleness and vice, that they come out into the world without principle, obstinate and untractable. Is not the duty here very plain? All such should exert themselves to obtain the knowledge of the things which belong to their peace. They should neither be unwilling nor ashamed to make application for supply ; and even the coarsest raiment should not hinder them from appearing in the house of God. Thus they will find acceptance with him, if they worship him in the beauty of holiness, preferable to those who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and their hearts are after their covetousness.

2. Another great reason why poverty becomes a temptation to fraud is, that they are introduced to it insensibly, and led on by degrees. The sin steals on them by little and little. People involved in their circumstances, to get rid of importunity and sollicitation, make promises, more of what they hope or wish, than of what they are able to do. Necessity serves as an excuse for their failing to their own minds, and thus they are gradually brought into a breach of sincerity, and proceed from lower to higher degrees of falsehood. Little arts of evasion are first made use of, and doubtful practices are entered upon. One sin seems necessary to strengthen or conceal another, till at last the grossest fraud, and sometimes perjury itself, closes the unhappy scene. I have read an excellent observation, that there is hardly such a thing as a single sin ; they

are always to be found in clusters. I am sure, this holds in a particular manner as to sins of injustice. They are so interwoven and connected together, that you cannot receive any one without being obliged to admit the rest. This is one great branch of the deceitfulness of sin in general; with a view to which the apostle says, "But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

3. I only mention one other reason of poverty being a temptation to fraud, viz. that in time it destroys the sense of shame. I am not ignorant, that a sense of shame, which is nothing else but a fear of the censure of others, neither is nor ought to be the main principle of a good man's actions. But as there is no other principle at all in many, so it is a good assistant, and corroborative, when justly directed; but now, through the corrupt maxims of the world, poverty is so much the object of contempt; and those who are in this state meet every day with so many marks of neglect from all, that, before their condition is known, they will do almost any thing to conceal it, and after it is known, they become in time so destitute of shame, that they are under no further restraint.

From this particular branch of the subject, let me put you in mind,

1. What reason many have to be thankful to the God of life, who hath given them their daily provision, if not in all the abundance of immense riches, yet in fulness and sufficiency. An humble, thank-

ful disposition is not only your duty, in return for the divine bounty, but is itself the richest and sweetest ingredient in all temporal mercies. It is that indeed which makes them mercies. Envious persons do not taste what they have, their evil eye being fixed on what they cannot obtain. Things in this respect are just what they seem to be. Our comforts are as we are enabled to relish them. The same possessions which are despised by the impatient or ambitious, are a treasure and abundance to the humble and grateful.

2. If poverty is a temptation, it ought to be an argument to all to avoid it, or seek deliverance from it by lawful means. Apply yourselves with steadiness and perseverance to the duties of your calling, that you may provide things honest in the sight of all men. It is a duty of the law and of the gospel; and it hath this promise, in general, annexed to it, that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Read, I beseech you, that vast treasure of useful instruction, the book of Proverbs; where you will meet with many excellent counsels and wise observations upon this subject. Of these I shall mention, at present, but two passages, selected both for the soundness of the instruction, and the beauty of the illustration: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard! When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth,

and thy want as an armed man." And again, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down."

3. Are any of you poor and reduced in your circumstances? set a double watch upon your conduct, and earnestly pray that God may preserve you from fraud and dissimulation of every kind. Rather suffer yourselves to be stripped of every thing, and apply to the charity of others, which is not sinful, and ought not to be shameful, than take any dishonest methods of bettering your state. O melancholy thought, that many, when they become desperate in their circumstances, become also desperate in their courses, and drown the reflection of their consciences in slothfulness and sensuality! Sincerity, integrity, patience, and sobriety in a ruined fortune, are doubly eminent; at least, whatever they may be in the sight of the world, they are honourable and precious in the sight of God, and of all good men.

Before concluding, suffer me to make one or two reflections on the subject in general; the several parts of which I have now explained. And,

1. On what hath been said on this subject, I would graft this important lesson, that you should not only study to preserve yourselves from sin, but from all such circumstances of temptation as are dangerous to human constancy. This was the very ground of the prayer of the prophet in the text, and

is the substance of the reasons he assigns for his request. We are taught the same thing in the strongest manner, by the several instances of human frailty, and the folly of presumptuous confidence, recorded in scripture. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We are also taught the same thing by him who knew what was in man, as he has given us directions in the form of prayer which he taught his disciples, to say, Lord, "lead us not into temptation."

Are you really unwilling to do evil? you will be concerned to keep yourselves out of the way of every solicitation to it. This is constantly the effect of judicious and solid piety; and those who act otherwise shew that they either have no real goodness, or that they are very weak Christians, and little acquainted either with themselves, or this present evil world.

2. You may learn how necessary it is that you should look for the divine assistance and direction, to avoid the temptation of every state of life. We are truly of ourselves unequal to the trials with which we are surrounded. Not that there is any thing unjust or oppressive in the measures of providence; but because it seems good to our Maker, to oblige us to a constant dependence upon himself and his promised help. "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The least temptation may prove too hard for us, if we neglect to apply for supreme aid; but in divine strength, we may bid defiance to the most formidable opposition. This temper is well exemplified and described by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians: “ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecution, in distresses, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

3. From what hath been said, you may see what an inseparable connection there is between true religion and your employments and state in this present world. They have a mutual, strong, and constant influence upon one another. It is fatal, though a common error, to separate them; entirely to confine religion to the times and places of immediate worship, and suppose that it hath nothing to do with the maxims of trade and commerce, or other worldly callings. On the contrary, your impressions of things spiritual and eternal, will direct and regulate your views as to the present life; and your success or misfortunes in worldly schemes, will have a certain and visible effect upon your Christian conversation, and the state of your souls. Therefore, let them never be separated in your own views, and let them still be kept in their proper order and subordination. Though the light and trivial use, not only of the name of God, but of scripture-

language, is both sinful and dangerous; and though a forward ostentatious piety may sometimes look suspicious, yet it were to be wished we had more of a grave and habitual acknowledgement of God in all our ways. This was the language of the patriarchs of old. In one of the former discourses upon this subject, I took notice of Jacob's prayer, when he set out for Padan-aram. See, after the increase of his family, how he expresses himself in answer to his brother Esau: "And he lift up his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, Who are these with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant." See also the apostolic direction for the manner of projecting our future purposes: "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."

In the *last* place, let me beseech, in the tenderest manner, every one of you, rich and poor, to remember an approaching eternity. It will not be long till the honourable and despised, the wealthy and the needy, the master and the servant, shall lie down in the dust. Lay hold of that covenant of peace which is ordered in all things, and sure. Hear a great and constant truth: "What is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" How many a Lazarus is now in Abraham's bosom! and how many a rich man, that once lived delicately on earth, is at this moment tormented in hell-fire! The gospel

of peace is now preached in your ears. Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved. I cannot promise that you shall be rich, but all things necessary are assured to you by the divine promise; food and raiment, support under trials, strength for duty, and in the world to come everlasting rest.

S E R M O N IX.

ON THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Preached in the Old Presbyterian Church in New York, to a very numerous audience, on the evening of the second Sabbath in May, 1789.

MARK, X. 13, 14, 15, 16.

And they brought young children unto him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, 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.

THERE are few things in which people of reflection in general, and especially those who fear God, are more agreed, than the importance of the rising generation ; or, which is the true meaning of that expression, the importance of the instruction and government of youth.

This is a subject of great extent, and may also be taken up in a great variety of lights. I am one of those who think that it may, as well as many others, be, with much advantage, considered doctrinally; and that a clear view of divine truth upon every subject, will have the most powerful and happy influence, not only in directing our sentiments, but in governing our practice.

There is much to be seen of the proper glory of the Redeemer in this passage of scripture: His usefulness, his attention to improve every seemingly accidental occurrence for the purpose of instruction, and his amiable condescension to all who humbly applied to him, and tender feeling for their wants and weaknesses. It appears from this passage, that the inhabitants about Jordan, where he then was, not only brought their sick to be healed, as they did in most other places, but brought young children, "that he should touch them." In Luke they are called infants; and in the latter end of the passage now read, it is said, he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them; so that it is probable they were all of them of very early age, and some of them, perhaps, literally what we call infants, who could not yet speak or walk. I see not the least foundation for what some commentators imagine, that they might labour under some disorder, from which the parents supposed he would cure them: If this had been the intention, the disciples would not, probably, have found any fault with it. The probability is, that the parents or relations of the children brought them, expecting that he would lay his hands on

them, authoritatively bleſs them, and pray for them ; from which they believed important benefits might be derived to them. The diſciples, we are told, “ rebuked thoſe that brought them,” ſuppoſing, doubtleſs, that it was an impertinent and unneceſſary interruption of their Maſter, and that the children could receive no benefit at that early time of life ; and who knows but, like the human wiſdom of later times, they might think the attempt ſuperſtitious as well as unneceſſary ? However, our Lord was of a different opinion, and ſaid, “ Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not ; for of ſuch is the kingdom of God.”

Now, the ſingle ſubject of this diſcourſe ſhall be to inquire, What is the import of this declaration ? and, What we may underſtand our Saviour as affirming, when he ſays of young children or infants, “ of ſuch is the kingdom of God ?” After this, I will give ſuch advices as the truths that may be eſtabliſhed ſhall ſuggeſt, and as they ſeem to me moſt proper to enforce.

LET us, then, conſider what we may underſtand our Saviour as affirming, when he ſays of young children or infants, “ of ſuch is the kingdom of God.”

And, in the *firſt* place, we may underſtand by it, That children may be taken within the bond of God’s covenant ; become members of the viſible church, and in conſequence be *relatively* holy. I do not found the lawfulness of infant-baptiſm on this paſſage alone, and mean to enter into no controversy on the ſubject at this time ; but, as it is

clearly established in other passages, it may well be understood here. At any rate, so far as I have affirmed is undoubtedly certain, that they *may be* admitted within the bond of God's covenant. We know, that under the Old Testament, they received the sign of circumcision, which in the New Testament is said to be "a seal of the righteousness that is of faith," (Rom. iv. 11). Many benefits may arise from this. As in the natural constitution of man, many advantages and disadvantages are derived from parents upon the offspring, so, in the moral constitution of divine grace, many blessings, spiritual and temporal, may be inherited from pious parents. Children are the subjects of prayer; and, of consequence, within reach of the promise. The believer may justly hope for his seed dying in infancy; and in after life many eventual providential mercies may be expected from that God "who sheweth mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him."

It was usual in the most ancient times, for aged or holy persons to bless children formally. I do not recollect in ancient history, a more beautiful, or more tender scene, than that we have recorded, Gen. xlviii. 15. of the patriarch Jacob's blessing his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph, when he was about to die: "And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life-long to this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac: And let them grow into a

multitude in the midst of the earth." We are told by an ancient writer of the Christian church, that Ignatius, afterwards bishop of Antioch, was one of those children thus brought to Christ for his blessing; and there is no reason, that I know of, to oppose the tradition: For supposing him to have been an infant, or even from 2 to 5 years of age, it would make him only between 70 and 80 at the time of his martyrdom, in the year 108 from the birth of Christ.

2. The declaration, "Of such is the kingdom of God," may be understood to imply, that children may, even in infancy, be the subjects of regenerating grace, and thereby become *really* holy. This is plain from the nature of the thing; for if they can carry the corrupt impression of Adam's nature in their infant state, there can be no doubt but they may be renewed after the image of him that created them. Almighty power can easily have access to them, and can, in answer to prayers, as well as endeavours, form them for their Maker's service. See what the prophet Isaiah says, ch. xxviii. 9. "Whom shall we teach knowledge? and whom shall we make to understand doctrine? Those that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts." Samuel was a child of prayer, and dedicated to God from his infant years, and it is said of him, 1 Sam. ii. 26. "And the child Samuel grew, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men." It is an expression frequently to be found in pious writers, and among them that are far from denying the universal corruption of human nature, that some may be said to be sanctified from

the womb, that is, that the time of their renovation may be beyond the reach both of understanding and memory ; and this being certainly possible, may justly be considered as the object of desire and the subject of prayer. Few, perhaps, have failed to observe, that some children discover, upon the first dawn of reason, an amiable and tractable disposition, and drink in spiritual instruction with desire and delight ; while others discover a srowardness and repugnance, that is with much difficulty, if at all, and sometimes never, overcome.

3. I think this declaration implies, that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit, even by outward means, than is generally supposed. No doubt the reason of the conduct of the disciples was, that they supposed the children could receive no benefit. In this, from our Lord's answer, it is probable he thought them mistaken. I will not enlarge on some refined remarks of persons as distinguished for learning as piety ; some of whom have supposed, that they are capable of receiving impressions of desire and aversion, and even of moral temper, particularly of love or hatred, in the first year of their lives. I must, however, mention a remark of the justly celebrated M. Fenelon, archbishop of Cambray, because the fact on which it is founded is undeniable, and the deduction from it important. He says, that ' before they are thought capable of receiving any instruction, or the least pains are taken with them, they learn a language. Many children at four years of age can speak their mother-tongue, though not with the same accuracy or grammatical precision, yet with greater readiness

and fulness than most scholars do a foreign language after the study of a whole life.' If I were to enlarge upon this, I might say, they not only discover their intellectual powers by connecting the idea with the sign, but acquire many sentiments of good and evil, right and wrong, in that early period of their life. Such is the attention of children, that they often seem to know their parents' tempers sooner and better than they know their's, and to avail themselves of that knowledge to obtain their desires.

To apply this to our present subject, or rather the occasion of it, allow me to observe, that the circumstances of solemn transactions are often deeply engraven upon very young minds. It is not impossible that some of those young children might recollect and be affected with the majesty and condescension of Jesus of Nazareth, and the impression be attended with happy fruits. At any rate, as no doubt the parents would often relate the transaction to their children, this would be a kind of secondary memory, and have the same effect upon their sentiments and conduct.

4. This declaration implies, that the earliest, in general, is the fittest and best time for instruction. This part of the subject has been treated at full length by many writers in every age, I therefore shall say the less upon it. Only observe, that the importance of every instruction is written upon the whole system of nature, and repeated in every page of the history of providence. You may bend a young twig, and make it receive almost any form: but that which has attained to maturity, and taken

its ply, you will never bring into any other shape than that which it naturally bears. In the same manner those habits which men contract in early life, and are strengthened by time, it is next to impossible to change. Far be it from me to say any thing in opposition to the infinite power and absolute sovereignty of God; but let us also beware of considering these as opposed to the natural course of things, or the use and efficacy of means. We have many warnings upon this subject in scripture, where the recovery of an habitual and hardened sinner is likened to a natural impossibility, Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." God will reserve to himself his own absolute sovereignty, but it is at every sinner's own peril if he presume upon it, and abuse it.

5. This declaration of our Saviour, "Of such is the kingdom of God," may imply, that, in fact, the real disciples of Christ chiefly consist of those who are called in their earlier years. The visible church of Christ is a numerous and mixed society; but his mystical body, consisting of real believers, I think we are warranted from this passage of scripture and others, as well as the analogy of faith, and the reason and nature of things, to suppose, consists for the most part of those who are called in infancy and youth. This is an important truth, and deeply fraught with instruction to all, of every rank. There are some called after a course of opposition to God, but they are few in comparison; therefore the apostle Paul styles himself, "one born out of

due time." Perhaps experience and a deliberate view of the state of the world is sufficient to prove this assertion. The instances of conversion in advanced life, are very rare: and when it seems to happen, it is perhaps most commonly the resurrection of those seeds which were sown in infancy, but had been long stifled by the violence of youthful passions, or the pursuits of ambition and the hurry of an active life. I have known several instances of the instructions, long neglected, of deceased parents, at last rising up, asserting their authority, and producing the deepest penitence and real reformation. But my experiences furnish me with no example of one brought up in ignorance and security, after a long course of profaneness, turning, at the close of life, to the service of the living God. The most common case is, that the deep sleep continues to the last, and, as the saying is, they die as they live; though in some instances when the sins have been of the grossest kind, conscience awakens at their going off the stage, and they seem, as it were, to begin the torments of hell with the terror of despair.

You will find in some practical writers an opinion or sentiment, that seems not ill-founded, to the following purpose: 'Some are called at the eleventh hour, that none may despair;' and there are few, that none may presume. Others make a distinction, not without ground, as it seems founded upon the wisdom and equity of the divine government, That when the gospel comes to a people that had long sitted in darkness, there may be numerous converts of all ages; but when the gospel has been

long preached in plenty and purity, and ordinances regularly administered, few but those who are called in early life are ever called at all. A very judicious and pious writer, Mr Richard Baxter, is of opinion, that in a regular state of the church, and a tolerable measure of faithfulness and purity in its officers, family instruction and government are the usual means of conversion, public ordinances of edification. This seems agreeable to the language of scripture ; for we are told, that God hath set in the church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, (not for converting sinners, but) “ for perfecting of the faints for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ.” It seems to add further weight to this, that most of those who are recorded in scripture as eminent for piety, were called in early life ; and we know not but it may have been the case with others, though not particularly mentioned. Those I have in view are, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Josiah, Daniel, and the three Children, in the Old Testament ; and in the New, John Baptist, and John the beloved disciple, of whom I may just observe, that no reason has ever been given for the Saviour’s distinguishing him by particular affection, but that he was the youngest of the twelve.

6. In the *last* place, This declaration implies, that the comparative innocence of children is a lesson to us, and an emblem of the temper and carriage of Christ’s real disciples. This instruction we are not left to infer for ourselves. Our Lord has made the remark in the passage where the text lies, “ Who-

soever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein." This is directly levelled against the pride of self-sufficiency, and every rough and boisterous passion. It is remarkable that the very same image is made use of in several passages of scripture. Thus, Matth. xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4, "At the same time the disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." So also the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xiv. 20. "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." And further, 1 Peter, ii. 1. 2. "Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The graces of the spiritual life recommended to us by this beautiful image, are humility, gentleness, teachableness, sincerity, and easiness to be reconciled: all which are remarkable in young persons, and are frequently lost or vitiated by growing years.

I COME NOW to make a practical improvement of the subject, which shall be confined to pointing out the duties suggested by the foregoing truths.

as they are severally incumbent on, 1st, Parents; 2^d, Children; 3^d, Every hearer of the gospel.

1. Let us consider the duties incumbent on parents. Is it so, that of children or infants the Redeemer said, "of such is the kingdom of God?"

Then parents should be, (1.), thankful. Thankfulness is a happy frame of spirit in itself, and powerfully reconciles the mind to difficult, and animates it to important duties. Be thankful, then, for the honour that is done you, for the trust that is reposed in you, and for the encouraging promise of God to assist and accept of you in the discharge of it: "Children are the gift of God; and the fruit of the womb is his reward." I cannot easily figure to myself any greater earthly blessing than to have children to be the objects of your care and diligence while you live, and to inherit your name and substance, when you yourselves must, in the course of nature, go off the stage. And is it a little honour to be entrusted with the care of these rational creatures of God, born to immortality, and whose present peace and future welfare depend so much on your conduct? Are you not called to prepare members for the church of Christ? "for of such is his kingdom;" and however important the ministry of the gospel is, (which I should be the last to detract from), you may know, that it is out of a minister's power to speak to the understanding of those who are not prepared by previous instruction. But, above all, how thankful should you be for the encouragement given you to bring your children to the Saviour, and for the promise of his blessing! "He

took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." Fathers! Mothers! What ground of praise to the condescending Saviour!

(2.) Be early and diligent in instruction. This is the great and substantial evidence you are called to give of your thankfulness for the mercy. You have heard, that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit by outward means than is commonly supposed: Let not, therefore, the devil and the world be too far beforehand with you, in possessing their fancy, engaging their affections, and misleading their judgement. Is it a fable, or do I speak truth, when I say, many children learn to swear before they learn to pray? It is indeed affecting to a serious mind, to hear children lisping out ill-pronounced oaths, or scurrilous and scolding abuse, or even impurities which they do not understand; so that the first sentiments they form, and the first words they utter, are those of impiety, malice, or obscenity. Nay, I have seen children in their mother's arms actually taught to scold, by uttering angry sounds, before they could speak one word with distinctness. It is wholly impossible for me here to introduce a system of directions as to the method of early instruction; this must be learned elsewhere, and at another time; but I mean to impress your minds with a sense of the importance and necessity of the duty, and, I will add, the *efficacy* of it. Remember the connection between the duty and the promise: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I knew a pious and judicious minister, who affirmed, that we did

not give credit to that part of God's word, if we did not believe the certainty of the promise, as well as the obligation of the duty; he was of opinion, that every parent, when he seemed to fail, should conclude that he himself had been undutiful, and not that God had been unfaithful.

(3.) Be circumspect and edifying in your example. All the arguments that press the former exhortation, apply with the same, perhaps I may say with double force, to this. Example is itself the most powerful and successful instruction; and example is necessary to give meaning and influence to all other instruction. This is one of the oldest maxims upon the subject of education. The Roman satyrist says, *Nil dictu visuve fœdum hæc limina tangat intra quæ puer est.* 'Let nothing base be seen or heard within these walls in which a child is.'—And if children naturally form their sentiments, habits, and manners, by imitation of others in general, how much more powerful must be the example of parents, who are every hour in their sight, whom nature teaches them, and whom duty obliges them to love, and when it comes recommended by the continual intercourse, and the endearing services that flow from that intimate relation.

(4.) *Lastly*, Parents are taught here perseverance and importunity in prayer. This, indeed, is an important thing upon every subject of our requests to God. Our Saviour spoke a parable on purpose to teach men, that they should pray always, and not faint, Luke, xviii. 1. And if we are called to believe, that "if we ask any thing agreeable to his will,

he heareth us," what more agreeable to his will than frequent and importunate prayer for the temporal and spiritual happiness of children? What a support this to the faith of prayer! You ought, at the same time, to remember that, as the prophet Jeremiah says, "it is good for a man to hope, and quietly to wait for the salvation of God." The answer of prayer may come at a much greater distance than we are apt to look for it. There is a remarkable anecdote handed down to us, respecting the famous St Augustine. He was the son of an eminently pious woman, whose name was Monica, yet he was in his youth very loose and disorderly. One of his fellow-citizens, it is said, seeing him pass along the street, reflected upon him with great severity, as a disgrace to society; but another made answer, that he was not without hopes of him after all, for he thought it next to impossible that the son of so many prayers should perish. And we know, that in fact he became in due time one of the most eminent champions for evangelical truth. There is not the least doubt, that many prayers, and especially of this kind, may have their answer and accomplishment after the believer that offered them has been many years sleeping in the dust.

2. The truths above illustrated, suggest important advices to children, that is, to such young persons as are able to understand and apply them.

(1.) Preserve a tenderness of heart, and be thankful that you are not yet hardened by habitual guilt, nor sentenced to perpetual barrenness, by the judgment of a righteous God. Esteem, embrace, improve the precious but flying season. Harken to

the instructions of parents; the admonitions of pastors, the lessons of providence, and the dictates of God's Holy Spirit speaking by the conscience. Think of the amiableness of early piety in the sight of men, and its acceptableness in the sight of God: "I love them that love me," says he by his prophet; "and they that seek me early shall find me."

(2.) Be not satisfied with, or trust in outward privileges. If you are the children of pious parents, who have lived near to God, if you have been favoured with early instruction, unless these advantages are improved, they will not plead for, but against you, at the great day. This is the dictate both of scripture and reason, "To whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required." There is a common saying, that is neither agreeable to truth nor experience, and yet sometimes obtains belief in a blinded world, that the children of good people are as bad as any: as if early education, which is of so much influence in learning every thing else, should have no effect in religion. On the contrary, where do we expect to find pious youth, but in pious families, or sober and industrious youth, but in sober and industrious families? I should call that man prudent in the conduct of life, who, in the choice of a servant, an apprentice, or a partner in business, would pay almost as much attention to the blood and parentage, as to the person with whom he was to be immediately connected. But if we take notice of what probably gave occasion to the mistake, viz. that the wicked children of pious parents are the worst of any, it is a

truth of the utmost moment, and easily accounted for. They burst asunder the strongest ties; they are under the unhappy necessity of marring conscience by high-handed wickedness, and commonly come to speedy and deserved ruin: "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

(3.) Do not satisfy yourselves with a name to live, while you are dead. Though some young persons religiously educated, by falling into dissolute society, become open profligates, there are others who retain the form without the life of religion: Therefore, if nature hath given you amiable dispositions; if these have been cultivated by a pious and prudent education; if you feel the restraint of natural conscience; if you are desirous of public praise, or afraid of public shame, do not neglect any of these preservatives from sin; but yet endeavour to obtain, and see that you be governed by a principle superior to them all, the hope of final acceptance with God through Christ. Ask of him to give you a new heart, and a new spirit, to "create you anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them."

In the *last* place, this subject suggests some important instructions to the hearers of the gospel in general. (1.) Lose no time in providing for your great and best interest. Every argument that tends to shew the importance of early piety, may be applied with equal or greater force, to shew the danger of delay in more advanced years. What is wise or amiable in youth, is necessary to those who

are nearer their journey's end. But considering myself as speaking to professing Christians, what I would earnestly advise you is, to apply the principles above laid down to particular purposes, as well as to your general conduct. If conscience, or providence, has pointed out to you any thing that you may do to advantage, either for yourselves or others, lose no time in setting about it, because you do not know how little time may be yours: So says the wise man, Eccl. ix. 10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

(2.) Do not forget the improvement of this subject, which our Saviour himself has pointed out; imitate the temper of children; learn to be humble and teachable, gentle and easy to be intreated. Both watch and pray against all violent attachments, rude and boisterous passions, and deep-rooted resentment. Observe how the little lambs lay down their resentment, and forget their quarrels. Under this particular, it is proper to recommend a decency of deportment, and a contempt of all vanity and affectation, as well as simplicity and sincerity of speech, and a contempt of all artifice and refinement. The apostle has given an excellent description of this, 2 Cor. i. 12. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

(3.) Set a good example before others in general, but especially young persons. The old rule, *Maxi-*

ma debetur pueris reverentia, ought to be pondered as well as recollected. It is of much importance what our visible conduct is, at all times, and in all places, because we continually contribute to form each others tempers and habits ; but greater caution is necessary in presence of young persons, both because they are most prone to imitation, and because they have the least judgement to make proper distinctions, or to refuse the evil, and choose the good. Some instances might be given, in which things might be said or done, before persons of full understanding, without injury, that could not be done without injury, or at least without danger, before persons in early life.

(4.) In the *last* place, be not wanting in your endeavours and prayers for the public interest of religion, and the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. Support, by your conduct and conversation, the public credit of religion. What is more powerful over the minds of men and the manners of the age, than public opinion? It is more powerful than the most sanguinary laws. And what is public opinion? It is formed by the sentiments that are most frequently heard, and most approved in conversation. Had we a just sense of the importance of visible religion, what a powerful principle would it be, of prudent, watchful, guarded conduct, in every state and circumstance of life! Whatever reason there may be to complain of the frequency of hypocrisy, or seeking the applause of men, I am afraid there is no less reason to complain of the want of attention to that precept of the apostle, " Look not every man on his own things,

but every man also on the things of others ;” or of our Lord himself, Matth. v. 16. “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” I apprehend, that these seemingly opposite faults are not always separated, but often found in the same persons ; that is to say, there may be a strong desire after, and endeavour to obtain public applause, by a few splendid and popular actions, and yet but little attention to that prudent and exemplary conduct, which promotes public usefulness. Consider what you have heard, and the Lord give you understanding to improve and apply it, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

SERMON X.

DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD.

PSALM cxvi. 16.

*O Lord, truly I am thy servant ; I am thy servant,
and the son of thine handmaid : thou hast loosed
my bonds.*

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is something so fervent and affectionate in the language of the man after God's own heart, that it is extremely proper to be adopted by us in acts of adoration, trust, or supplication to God. I am at a loss to determine, whether we ought to consider the Christian's access to God, at his holy table, chiefly under one or other of these views. I am inclined to think, that it is a sort of compound or union of the whole,—Veneration and worship of the eternal God, and the incarnate Redeemer, exhibited to us, and as it were brought near to us by the help of the instituted signs: Reliance and confidence in

God, from the opportunity given us of laying hold of his covenant; and thankful supplication to God for his support and countenance, in the surrender of ourselves to his service. I cannot help looking upon the words of the psalmist in this passage, as carrying in them a mixture of all these holy affections: "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

This psalm, of which David is universally admitted to be the author, seems plainly to have been composed after some signal deliverance, of which the remembrance was fresh upon his mind. It was such as had brought his life itself into the most imminent danger. He acknowledges, in the verse preceding the text, the peculiar and gracious care which God takes of the life of his people: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints;" and then makes the profession of relation, gratitude, and duty, contained in the words of the text. As they seem to me to be very comprehensive, and with great propriety to express what ought to be the habitual temper of a Christian, and the frame of spirit with which a communicant ought to draw near to God at his table, I shall endeavour, in dependence on divine grace,

I. To open the import of the psalmist's declaration and purpose.

II. To apply it to you as hearers of the gospel in general, as well as with a view to the sacred employment immediately before you.

I. THEN, I propose to open the import of the psalmist's declaration and purpose in the text. This I think may be included in the following particulars, to which I intreat your serious attention.

1. This expression of the king of Israel, implies a very humble sense of his distance from, and dependence upon God as his creature. This is the first view which a penitent hath of himself when he returns to God. It is the first view which a good man hath of himself in his approaches to, or communion with God. And indeed it is what ought to be inseparable from the exercise of every other pious affection. To have as it were high and honourable thoughts of the majesty and greatness of the living God, and a deep and awful impression of the immediate and continual presence of the heart-searching God, this naturally produces the greatest self-abasement, and the most unfeigned subjection of spirit, before our Maker. It leads to a confession of him as Lord over all, and having the most absolute right, not only to the obedience, but to the disposal of all his creatures. I cannot help thinking this is conveyed to us in the language of the psalmist, when he says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant." He was a prince among his subjects, and had many other honourable distinctions, both natural and acquired, among men; but he was sensible of his being a servant and subject of the King of kings; and the force of his expression, "Truly I am thy servant," not only signifies the certainty of the thing, but how deeply and strongly he then felt a conviction of its truth.

Suffer me to say, my brethren, that there is much more in this than many apprehend. The scripture speaks often of the knowledge of God, of a discovery of the glory of God, as a thing peculiar to his people, which is very different from merely speculative opinions as to his nature and perfections. It implies an awful impression of his power and greatness, a deep sense how little the creature is before him, and how entirely it is in his hand. I love that expression used by several pious writers of the last age, of bowing before the sovereignty of God. When a believer or a worshipper hath a proper view of this, when it is brought home upon his spirit, it as it were banishes all other things, all other relations, all other persons; and he is, to his apprehension, alone in the presence of the invisible God. And then, what abasement of soul is of necessity produced! then no language can be found sufficient to express his vileness and nothingness in his own sight. He may be a rich man among his poor neighbours, or a great man among his numerous attendants, or a learned man among the ignorant vulgar; but, alas! he is no more than sinful dust and ashes before the omnipotent Jehovah. There is something very magnificent in the description given by the prophet Isaiah of the majesty of God, and the correspondent sentiments of those who see and feel it, in the 2d chapter of his prophecies, verse 10, 11. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." And again, verses 19, 20, 21,

22. " And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the rugged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

2. This declaration of the psalmist implies a confession of his being bound by particular covenant and consent unto God, and a repetition of the same by a new adherence. This, as it was certainly true with regard to him, having often dedicated himself to God, so I take it to be concluded on the reiteration of the expression here, " O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant." As if he had said, ' O Lord, it is undeniable; it is impossible to recede from it. I am thine by many ties. I am by nature thy subject and thy creature; and I have many times confessed thy right, and promised my own duty.' I need not mention to you, either the examples in the psalmist's writings, or the occasions in his history, on which he solemnly surrendered himself to God. It is sufficient to say, that it was very proper that he should frequently call this to mind, and confess it before God, as what, though it could not make his Creator's right any stronger, would certainly make the

guilt of his own violation of it so much the greater. It was certainly also a repetition of those engagements, and a solemn promise of continued adherence to them. There is no appearance in his language, that he either regrets or repents his subjection to God; on the contrary, he manifests his deliberate approbation of it, as his interest as well as duty. What he says here to God, has something of the same meaning with what he says elsewhere to his own soul, Psal. xvi. 2. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord." And he afterwards expresses the greatest complacency in this choice, verses 5. 6. of the above psalm, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and my cup; thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

I take it to be very natural for pious persons to look back upon their former engagements to God. It is a part of the worship they owe to him, not only to glorify him as God, but to adhere to him as their God. It comes in with propriety as a part of confession, of praise, and of holy resolution. It humbles the spirit under a sense of sin, as a breach of promise as well as of duty. It is matter of praise, that we have been inclined and enabled to give ourselves to God, according to the beautiful sentiment of David, who gives thanks to God, that he and his people had been enabled to make such free and liberal contributions to the building of the Temple: 1 Chron. xxix. 13, 14. "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and

what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." It is also plainly a part of our new engagement, which is no more than a ratification of what we have often and willingly done before.

3. This declaration of the psalmist is an expression of his peculiar and special relation to God, "I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid." There is another passage of his writings, where the same expression occurs: Psal. lxxxvi. 16. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid." There is some variation indeed among interpreters in the way of illustrating this phrase. Some take it for a figurative way of affirming, that he was bound in the strongest manner to God, as those children who were born of a maid-servant, and born in his own house, are in the most absolute manner his property. Others take it to signify his being not only brought up in a visible church of God, but in a pious family, and educated in his fear; and others would have it to signify still more especially, that the psalmist's mother was an eminently pious woman. And indeed I do not think that was a circumstance, if true, either unworthy of him to remember, or of the Spirit of God to put upon record. In the New Testament, we find the apostle Paul taking notice of a similar circumstance in the case of Timothy: 2 Tim. i. 5. "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee," &c. Without determining precisely in what sense to take the words, it is certainly added here

to signify some peculiar and intimate relation to God, which laid him under the strongest ties of adherence and subjection.

As there was much beauty and propriety in the psalmist's mentioning this circumstance, so every pious person ought, especially in the Lord's supper, to recollect the peculiar relations he stands under to God. Even as members of the visible church, we are the servants of God, born in his house, baptised in his name, favoured with the light of the gospel, blessed with clearness and fulness of instruction, animated by eminent and shining examples. As many as have been brought up either as children or servants in pious families, separated from the solicitations, and sheltered from the insults of wicked men; careful instruction, regular government, faithful admonition, and kind invitation, laid as it were a strict and powerful constraint upon them, brought them into, and kept them in the paths of piety and truth; ought they not to remember it with humility and gratitude? nay, if by means of but one pious parent, or other relation, they had been brought to acquaintance with God, it ought to be remembered as laying them under peculiar ties. To all which I only add, that if by the goodness of a gracious God, any former means of instruction, public or private, or singular dispensation of providence, has been accompanied with power, it ought to be improved in this new surrender of ourselves to God, at once to increase our present gratitude, and promote our future steadfastness in the paths of obedience.—This leads me to observe,

4. That the declaration of the psalmist implies a sense of gratitude for signal mercies: "Thou hast loosed my bonds." I think it is possible that what he had in view immediately here was, deliverance from personal affliction, probably a dangerous sickness, threatening immediate dissolution. But the way in which it is introduced, and the use to which it is applied, is equally suited to deliverances of every kind, to all signal mercies which were greatly needed or highly prized. He ascribes the honour of it to God, he puts it to his own charge as a debt due to God, and on this account proposes a return of duty and gratitude to God. It were no difficult matter to produce examples of a similar conduct in the psalmist, on his being favoured with remarkable deliverances in his family, from the enemies of his country, from slander and reproach, or in unexpected honour and advancement, as was his from the sheepfold to the kingdom of Israel.

Now, ought not every good man to follow the example of the psalmist in this particular, to remember and acknowledge all instances of signal mercy? There is scarcely any person, but may recollect several examples of these in the course of their lives. They may remember how earnestly they desired deliverance in the time of danger, what a sense of gratitude was upon their minds, when the mercy was recent; and this may be profitably improved for strengthening the ties which they lie under to God their Saviour. This will have a double effect, if the deliverance is implored by the prayer of faith, and if any marks can be discerned,

of their having obtained the sanctified improvement of it. But above all, with what propriety may they adopt the language of the psalmist, if they have been delivered from bondage of spirit, as well as fear and solicitude, as to their outward state. And it frequently happens, that these two go together. It was almost always so with the psalmist, and it is natural to expect that it will be so with every serious person; for affliction brings sin to remembrance, and they do not only tremble for the issue of the trial under which they groan, but apprehend the holy displeasure of that God, who cast them into the furnace, and with whom they have to do. But if the candle of the Lord again shineth upon them, and they are walking in the light of his countenance, they may well say with the psalmist, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the son of thy hand-maid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

5. In the *last* place, This declaration implies a solemn dedication and surrender of himself to God and his service for the time to come. This is the end of the retrospect which he takes of his character and state, "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." He was resolved to live a life of gratitude to God, to take all methods of openly and publicly acknowledging him as the author of his mercies. If we would see further his purpose, we may look back to verses 8, 9, & 10. "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." He promises therefore a life of obedience; and as the source of

thankful trust and acquiescence in God, he seems, by the 11th verse, to have been disconcerted by discovering the treachery of men; but every thing is rectified and made up by the goodness and all-sufficiency of God.

So, my brethren, ought every person who is this day to sit down at the table of the Lord, after a serious recollection of all his past mercies, to devote and consecrate himself unto God. Take him for your portion: place your happiness in his favour; receive your daily bread from him as his gift; pay for every mercy the tribute of praise; live not upon the creature without God, but endeavour to enrich and sweeten created comforts, by communion with God: Resolve to serve him with your body and spirit which are his; serve him sincerely, resolving that nothing shall have quiet possession of your heart, or indulgence in your life, that is contrary to his will. Serve him with zeal, espouse his interest, plead his cause, and esteem it your honour, if by your authority, by your talents, by your substance, you can promote his glory. Put your trust in his providence. You are yet in the body, liable to all the vicissitudes of this mortal state. Be persuaded of the infinite wisdom and all-sufficiency of God. Let him dispose of you freely. Resist excessive anxiety and fear, and oppose to all the gloomy horrors of a fruitful apprehension, the shield of faith in almighty strength, which is able to bear you up superior to every trial, and to every enemy. Do in every case of difficulty as the prophet Isaiah, in the name of God, invites the people of Israel to do on the approach of public judgement, Isaiah xxvi. 20.

“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.”

I PROCEED now, in the *last* place, to make some practical improvement of this subject.

I. Suffer me, my brethren, to plead with every sinner; to plead with every hearer in this assembly, the right of his Maker to his service. He hath made and formed you, and his visitation preserves your spirits. He only holdeth your soul in life, and unto him belong the issues from death. Of him, and to him, and through him, are all things. Have you therefore served him as your master, and placed your happiness in his favour? I choose, my brethren, to assert God's dominion over his creatures, that if it please him to accompany it with his Spirit, it may carry conviction to many who are living in quiet and self-satisfaction, although they are dead in trespasses and sins. Many, if they are free from grosser corruptions, are no way apprehensive of the danger of being *without God* in the world. Ignorance of themselves, extenuation of sin, foolishly placing a merit in a few common outside duties, and presumptuous hopes in God's general mercy, are the delusive grounds of the hope of such persons. Nay, sometimes (alas for their folly!) the chief thing they have to trust to, is the ill that they have *not* done. I really do not swear, says one, I hate drinking abominably, it is a beastly vice. What signify these partial justifications? I have known, though it is not common I confess;

an habitual adulterer that would not swear, and I could shew you a covetous hard-hearted wretch, grinding every day the faces of the poor, that will neither drink nor swear. But are you the servants of God? are you devoted to his fear? Believe it, sirs, there is an absolute necessity for an entire change in your nature, to fit you for the kingdom of God. You are his creatures, you ought to be his servants; and in one sense indeed his enemies are his servants, because they are under the dominion of his providence, and shall at last be the monuments of his vengeance. Be warned then in time, for you may rest assured that no man hath hardened himself against him, and prospered.

2. But, in the *next* place, I will not omit giving warning of their danger, to such as are living in open and avowed profanity. They are so far from being the servants of God, that they are his enemies, his confederated enemies, and the enemies of every thing that stands in a visible relation to him. I will once more, my brethren, take the liberty to denounce the judgement of God against all such persons; and I am preaching the gospel of Christ while I am doing so, for he shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire. And all profane swearers that speak the language of hell on earth, shall have it as their abode for ever. All despisers of the sabbath of rest

S E R M O N XI.

THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY SAVED, AND THE
WICKED CERTAINLY DESTROYED.

2 PETER, iv. 18.

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

ALL mankind may be divided into two great classes, the righteous and the wicked, the friends and the enemies of God, the heirs of glory and the heirs of hell. These, though mixed together on earth, and in many cases not easily to be distinguished by men, are yet essentially different in their characters, and shall at last meet with a very different fate. Of how much moment would it be for every one to see his own character and state before the final separation, when the Judge shall divide them, one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats!

There are many awful tokens of divine justice and holiness in the administration of providence, which ought to be considered by us as preludes to the great day of retribution, when God shall ren-

der to every man according to his works. The apostle Peter, in the verses preceding the text, is speaking of the divine judgements which were coming upon that generation, and which were in part to fall even upon the church and people of God. From this he takes occasion to point out the infinitely greater danger of impenitent sinners, who were exposed not only to the same or heavier temporal strokes, but to a final and eternal destruction, verse 17. "For the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" Consider also, that God in righteous severity sees it necessary to make even his own people to pass through the furnace, and through much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of God. He institutes the comparison in the text, to point out the dreadful state of the finally impenitent: "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

In discoursing further upon this subject, what I propose is,

I. To explain the import of the declaration, or supposition, in the first part of the text, that "the righteous scarcely are saved."

II. To consider the conclusion drawn from it by the apostle, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

III. I shall make a practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

In the *first* place, then, I am to explain the import of the declaration, or supposition, in the first

part of the text, that "the righteous are scarcely saved." There is the greater necessity for this, that the expression is both strong and singular. There are many passages, indeed, which carry in them truths akin to it, and founded upon it; but the sentiment itself is almost peculiar to this passage, that "the righteous are scarcely saved." There are some, who suppose that the expression is borrowed from, or alludes to, Prov. xi 31. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the finner." The meaning they give thus: Even the righteous must expect to meet with sufferings and calamities on earth, much more wicked men, under the just displeasure of a holy God. But I think it is plain, that the apostle in our text has an eye to the decisive judgement of the last day; for he says in the preceding verse, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" It is no where said in scripture, that wicked men shall be punished in the present life, in a manner fully adequate to their guilt, much less that a just and visible proportion is to be observed between their sufferings and those of the servants of God. On the contrary, they are called the men of the world; it is said, they have their part and portion in this life, and their prosperity, compared with the trials and sufferings of good men, appears to have been in every age a source of temptation to the children of God.

We must therefore understand the apostle as speaking of the eternal state, both of the righteous and the wicked, in the correspondent parts of this passage. What, then, is the meaning of the righ-

teous being scarcely saved? It cannot mean that there is any defect or straitness in the mercy of God. The invitation to sinners in the gospel, is not only urgent, but full, free, and infinitely gracious. It cannot mean that there is any defect in the mind or power of our Redeemer, as if the security of those who put their trust in him were to be doubted, or their victory over all the enemies of their salvation were uncertain. To affix any such meaning to the words, would be to set them in direct opposition to many other passages of scripture, and to do the greatest injury to the divine wisdom and truth. In order, therefore, to open the import of this interesting declaration, you may observe the following things.

1. The righteous may be said to be scarcely saved, because all are justly liable to divine vengeance; and it is only of the free grace, and sovereign mercy of God, that any are saved. This, my brethren, is a truth of the greatest moment, repeated in almost every page of the sacred oracles, but which none can either understand or approve, till they are effectually humbled by the Spirit of God. It is, however, the sum and substance of the gospel. See in what terms it is applied by the apostle Paul, Eph. ii. 4.—10. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through

Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." There is not a believer on earth, nor a saint in heaven, but who is ready to acknowledge, that he was by nature an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works; that he had highly provoked him; and that if God had dealt with him in strict justice, he would have been for ever banished from his presence and enjoyment. Probably many will recollect the time of their ignorance and security, and admire the patience of God towards them, and see that they are indeed scarcely saved, since they have been brought back from the very brink of destruction. If any malefactor had been arraigned, judged, and condemned to die, and after apprehending the just punishment of his crime, should be saved by an act of royal clemency, at a stake or on a scaffold, would he not consider himself as scarcely saved? But this is no more than a just image of the state and views of a pardoned sinner, and what will continue to be the views of those who have entered into rest. They are clothed with white robes, as an emblem, not of innocence, but absolution, and the song of praise which they sing intimates the condition from which they were brought, Rev. v. 9. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;" verse 12. "Worthy is

the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

This leads me to observe, that as their salvation is of sovereign grace in the Father's love, so it was purchased by the most amazing sufferings of their Redeemer in their room. They are scarcely saved, not only from the want of merit in themselves, but from the infinite expence and cost laid out by him for their redemption. Such was the evil of sin, and so deplorable the state of the sinner, that the wisdom, truth, and holiness of God, seemed all to demand his perdition. The whole creation could not furnish a sufficient ransom; for the redemption of the soul was precious, and it ceased for ever. Then the eternal Son of God, clothed with infinite mercy, and conveyed in sovereign power, presented himself as our Redeemer, saying, "Lo, I come," &c. Oh, amazing truth! Oh, unsearchable subject! Justly may I say, that the righteous scarcely are saved, since it required so costly an expiation. Let us remember in faith what our Saviour endured in the garden and on the cross, before he could say it was finished; and we shall be constrained to confess that it was no easy undertaking to redeem those souls that were forfeited to divine justice.

To conclude this particular, the righteous are scarcely saved, because the application of this redemption to their souls, and their being brought to an unfeigned acceptance of it, required the almighty power and energy of the Spirit of grace. This also is a part of that revealed truth, which the natural man hears with reluctance, and cannot receive.

Yet it is not only plainly taught in scripture, but daily ratified in experience. John, i. 13. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Without the power of the Holy Ghost, the gospel may be preached to finners from day to day, and from year to year, and yet they shall continue in their natural and miserable state.

It is the work of the Spirit to open the blinded understanding, to awaken the secure and dozing conscience, and to bend the stubborn will to the obedience of the gospel. We are also plainly given to understand, that if a sinner long resists the motions of the Spirit, the consequence, in the œconomy of providence, is frequently that this divine agent departs from him, and ceases any longer to strive with him. Every such person is left to himself, given up to the dominion of his lusts, and the enslaving power of habit; and so fills up the measure of his iniquities, till he is ripe for final judgement and destruction. Let us seriously consider, that if such provision was made by an all-wise God, for the recovery of such of his creatures as had fallen by their iniquity, it could not be unnecessary. And surely the whole of these views conspire in opening the meaning and confirming the truth of what we are told in this passage, that the righteous are scarcely saved.

2. The righteous may be said to be scarcely saved, because their number is but very small. There are few that be saved, in comparison of those that perish, and in comparison of those that seek and pretend to hope for salvation.

This, if it be a truth, is certainly pregnant with meaning, and deeply interesting. I know there are some who have no great love to any thing that directly tends to disturb the repose of a drowsy slothful spirit, who are fond of denying or calling in question this truth. They alledge that our Saviour evaded it as an improper question, when proposed to him by his disciples. Luke, xiii. 23. "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" But truly I cannot see how he could have answered it more plainly, or indeed more properly, than in the following words: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able;" especially if we compare them with the parallel place in Matth. vii. 13. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

What shall be the number of the redeemed at last, and what proportion it shall bear to the whole race of Adam, before the end of this state of things, it is impossible for us to know. It is pleasant to indulge the hope that it shall be very great, and that there are times yet to come, when the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom shall be glorious, and the triumphs of his grace perhaps universal. But when we speak of the number of such as shall be saved, we must speak of it as relating to those whom we now see, and their characters as drawn in the oracles of truth. And surely, if we pay the least regard to the marks of religion laid down in the scriptures, we must be sensible what

multitudes are living in direct opposition to them, and that there are many, who, though they are called by the name of Christ, and maintain some degree of outward profession, yet they are far from being Christians indeed and in truth: Matth. vii. 21. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

3. When the apostle says that the righteous scarcely are saved, it may mean that many make not only a common but an eminent profession of religion, who yet shall be found finally defective, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. It may mean, that not only the ungodly and openly profane sinners shall be rejected, but that all who seem to be righteous shall not be found so upon trial. This seems to lead us to consider the difference between the charitable, general, and uncertain judgement of man, and the strict, infallible, and decisive judgement of God. This is beautifully represented by our Saviour, in the parable of the tares of the field, Matth. xiii. 24. and onwards; but you may particularly see what is said from the 28th verse, "The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until 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."

There is a circumstance to be particularly attended to here, that not only shall many deceive their fellow-creatures by a false profession, but not a few shall more effectually and more fatally deceive themselves, saying they shall have peace though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. There are many exhortations in scripture, to guard against deceiving ourselves; of which I shall only mention one, Gal. iv. 7. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If our Saviour found it necessary to say to the twelve whom he had chosen, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of;" much more may the same thing be said to numbers of professing Christians in these last days. There are many sins that may adhere to a religious profession, or be covered with a sacred veil, which yet are inconsistent with true religion. See what the apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." And the apostle James, i. 26. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." It is an awful description given us by our Saviour, Matth. vii. 22. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

I shall only add one evidence, with which experience furnishes us, that even in an eminent profession there may be at bottom no sincerity. There never was a time of trial in the church by persecution, but there were several of the most eminent in station, gifts, and profession, who were guilty of apostacy; a sure evidence that they were not found in the faith, and a great lesson of humiliation and caution to us. True religion bears all trials, and it is only he that endureth to the end that shall be saved. It is highly probable that the apostle had this very thing in view in the passage where my text lies; for in the preceding verse, he had been animating them to suffer as Christians, and concludes in the following verse thus: "Wherefore let them that suffer, according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator."

4. In the *last* place, The righteous are scarcely saved, because those who are saved shall be saved with much difficulty; that is to say, it will require the utmost exertion of their care and vigilance. They may expect a continual conflict with temptations and trials from without, and the stirrings of corruptions from within. There is nothing more contrary to the scripture-view of our Christian course, than to suppose it a state of unmolested quiet, security, and indulgence. It is represented to us by every image that carries in it the idea of opposition, activity, and vigilance. It is striving, Matth. vii. 13. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go

in thereat." It is contending in a race, Heb. xii. 1. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." It is fighting, 1 Tim. vi. 12. "Fight the good fight of faith;" and it is represented as incessant labour, Phil. ii. 12. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Indeed, when we consider from what, and how many quarters, we must expect opposition, this truth will appear with the fullest evidence. Consider the implacable hatred of the great adversary, the reproach and injuries of wicked men, their still more pernicious example and solicitation, the allurements of the world in this sensible state, and the treachery and deceitfulness of our own hearts. Of the great danger of all these we have the greatest reason to be convinced from the confession and testimony of those who have gone before us; yet over them all the believer must obtain the victory, and shall obtain it in his Redeemer's strength: 1 John, v. 4. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

There is nothing here said contrary to what the scripture informs us, of the peace and consolation that attends the practice of true religion. It is not said to discourage the believer; but to put him on his guard, and to warn him not to mistake the nature and foundation of that peace he is entitled to expect. It does not consist in a neglect of his enemies, far less in a confederacy with or subjection

to them, but in the assured prospect, and growing evidence of his victory over them. Further, the inward consolation of a Christian does not consist in thinking light of sin, by excusing it, or justifying himself by denying it; but in unfeigned self-denial, a willingness to see the evil of sin, and taking shame to himself by confessing it, together with evangelical views of divine mercy in the pardon of it, and the promised strength of divine grace to enable him to resist and subdue it.

II. I PROCEED now to the *second* thing proposed, which was to consider the inference drawn in the last part of the verse, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" I need scarcely tell you, that the form of a question used here, is a very common figure of speech to signify their dreadful situation. This just but very awful inference, is intended for the terror of those who live in open ungodliness, and avowed contempt of divine mercy. Perhaps it may be proper, from the context, to consider a little the time when the wicked shall be exposed to this terrible danger; and then the import of the threatening itself. As to the time when the difference is to appear, it may be,

I. In a time of public calamity, or any remarkable visitation of divine severity. Such a time is described, Luke, xxi. 25. 26. "There shall be upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Then the conscience of

the most obdurate is sometimes alarmed. I am sensible, and I have formerly hinted, that good men have no charter of exemption from outward sufferings. But in these times of general trial, the difference between them and others is very great. They have an anchor of hope in the favour of a reconciled, and in the wisdom and providence of an omnipotent God. But the profane and ungodly, terrified by the reproaches of a guilty conscience, are made to tremble, through fear of the execution of deserved judgement.

2. In a time of personal distress, and apparent danger of death. This important change is no light matter, even to the best. They have often no small degree of sollicitude and fear, as to the manner of going through this last and decisive conflict. But how much more fearful an aspect must the king of terrors wear to the impenitent sinner! when the charm is dissolved, and all his sinful pleasures are turned into wormwood and gall; when he sees he must bid an eternal farewell to every sensual delight, enter into a world of spirits, and appear in the presence of God. But,

3. Both these are only preparatory to the day of judgement, "For we must all appear before the judgement-seat of Christ." Then his people shall lift up their heads with joy, for the day of their redemption has arrived. But with what inexplicable confusion shall the wicked then be covered! In vain shall they call upon the mountains and hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb. Now they affront his person, oppose his reign, resist his Spirit, and scorn his servants. But where shall they

appear, and what will they do, when the " Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel?"

This leads me more particularly to consider the import of the inference in the text, " If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" And I think it plainly carries in it three things, that from the holiness and severity of God, and the righteous scarcely being saved, we may learn the certainty, the greatness, and the justice, of the punishment of impenitent sinners.

I. The certainty of it: That as the threatenings are awful, the execution shall be inevitable. Men are exceedingly prone, from partiality to themselves, and from the suggestions of the father of lies, to disbelieve the threatenings as well as the promises of God. This was a great part of the temptation to the commission of the first sin, Gen. iii. 4. " And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." And the credit that was given to it at that time, has been continued by sinners in every subsequent age. They are ready to presume upon the general goodness of God, and to flatter themselves that his threatenings shall be either wholly remitted or greatly abated. We find that some men of corrupt minds have even set themselves to reason against the rigour of the scripture-denunciations against sin, and the eternal punishment of sinners.

But how fatal the delusion! The truth of God is an inseparable bar to this deceitful expectation:

Isa. iii. 10. 11. " Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him ; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked ! it shall be ill with him ; for the reward of his hands shall be given him." Pſal. l. 21. 22. " Theſe things haſt thou done, and I kept ſilence : thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch an one as thyſelf : but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thine eyes. Now, conſider this, ye that forget God, leſt I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Nay, not only is this aſſerted in the word of God, but the whole procedure of divine providence ſerves to confirm it. If the ſalvation of the righteous is with difficulty obtained ; if their redemption is ſo dearly purchaſed ; if Chriſt muſt bleed before they can be forgiven ; how ſhall the ungodly be able to ſtand in the judgement ! If even the ſervants of God muſt be expoſed to ſo many ſufferings in the day of trial, what muſt be the condition of his enemies in the day of retribution ? If even the ſins of the holy muſt be viſited, how ſhall the crimes of the impenitent paſs unpuniſhed ? This is plainly one part of the truth contained in this paſſage ; and whoever will deliberately conſider the uniform tenor of the holy ſcriptures, and compare it with the diſpenſations of divine providence, will have reaſon to tremble at the dreadful ſtate of incorrigible ſinners, and to ſay with the apoſtle Paul, Heb. xii. 25. " See that ye reſuſe not him that ſpeaketh. For if they eſcaped not who reſuſed him that ſpake on earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven."

2. The expression in the text implies the greatness of the punishment of sinners. It is indeed, my brethren, every where represented in scripture in such terms as serve to convey to us the most dreadful apprehensions of its weight, as well as the deepest conviction of its certainty. It is represented as the blackness of darkness for ever, and as a worm that shall never die. But the image most commonly used is fire, which is the most terrible to sense, of all the elements we have any knowledge of. It is a lake that burns with fire and brimstone for evermore. Without entering at all into the question, How much is literal, and how much figurative in these images, the just conclusion from them is, that those who shall be the final monuments of divine vengeance, shall be in a state sorrowful and comfortless as darkness, painful as a gnawing worm, and dreadful as fire.

This is also manifestly founded on the reflection in the text, "If the righteous are scarcely saved:" if they suffer so much at present by divine permission, if they suffer so much by the persecution of the ungodly, what a load of vengeance awaits the wicked in the day of reckoning, when he will recompense tribulation to the troublers of his chosen! If there is so much holy severity necessary on account of sin even in the present life, which is the time of divine forbearance, even towards the children of God, who are the objects of his everlasting love, what shall be the state of those who have out-sinned the season of his grace, and forfeited all title to his mercy, on whom he intends at once to glorify his justice, and to magnify his power? Hear

the words of the Holy Ghost, 2 Theff. i. 9. "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

3. The expression in the text implies the justice of the punishment of sinners. This is a circumstance always to be taken in, for at the last day he shall judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained. He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth. This is a circumstance not only for the illustration of the glory of God, but for the manifestation of the present truth. If the punishment of sinners were not just, it could not be great; if it were not known and felt by themselves to be just, it would not be intolerable.

S E R M O N XII.

THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW, xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

A CLEAR view of divine truth is of the utmost moment, both to the holiness and comfort of the children of God. They are sanctified by the truth. It is no less necessary, by manifestation of the truth, to turn sinners from the error of their ways; for the word of God is quick and powerful. While we keep these things in view, we ought also to remember, that the truths of God are injured, not only by opposition, but perversion. We are assured, that those who are unlearned and unstable wrest this good word of God to their own destruction. If this is the case, it follows naturally, that as the bait is most dangerous, when the hook is most effectually concealed; so falsehood will be most apt to insinuate itself, when it wears the habit, and has the greatest resemblance to real truth.

The reason of my using this introduction to what shall be offered on the text now read, is, that it is one of the passages most frequently, and most artfully perverted, or most unhappily misapplied. It

contains a most important and salutary truth, if taken in its proper meaning, and according to the analogy of faith. But, as it is wrested and perverted by men of corrupt minds, it is often made to convey a stupifying and dangerous poison. What more important, than to destroy the unjust accusations of the father of lies, as if religion were a heavy and unsupportable burden? But if, on the other hand, the same thing is made use of to sew pillows for all arm-holes, and lull the sinner asleep in security, it is equally destructive. Therefore, in discoursing of this subject, through the assistance of divine grace, I will endeavour,

I. To shew you what you are not to suppose implied in this declaration of our Lord, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

II. What is its true and proper meaning; and,

III. In the last place, to apply the subject.

I. Then, I am to shew you what you are not to suppose implied in this declaration of our Lord, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” On this, I beseech you to attend to the following observations.

I. When our Saviour says, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” you are not to suppose that he has narrowed the extent, or weakened the obligation of the law of God. There are some who speak in such terms, as if they thought that Christ had granted some license and indulgence to human corruption; that he had abated the severity of the law, and would not be so highly offended by the transgression of it. Because we are

taught that he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, or the rigour of its sanction as a covenant of works, they speak as if they thought, or at least so as to lead others to think, that he hath made void the obligation of it as a rule of duty. But the law of God is perfect, eternal, and unchangeable. It is a transcript of his own nature, which he will not, or which, I speak it with reverence, he cannot dispense with. The scripture expressly says, that he cannot deny himself.

Now, our blessed Lord himself has told us upon this subject, Matth. v. 17. 18. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Agreeably to this, he hath been so far from narrowing the extent of the law, that he hath asserted its honour, vindicated it from the false glosses and loose interpretation of the Scribes and Pharisees; and pointed out its spirituality and influence upon the conscience and heart. See several instances of this in the above-cited chapter, particularly verses 21. 22. & 27. 28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: and, whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgement: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgement; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt

not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." How distant is this from relaxation, or from modifying and accommodating the law to the corruptions of men! And as to the obligation of the law, nothing is more clear, than that our Saviour has not taken from, but added to it in many ways. He has added to it by the clearness of the discovery which he hath made of the divine nature and will; by the most glorious display of divine mercy through him; and, as a just and necessary consequence, by the awful threatenings which he hath denounced against those who shall continue to despise the grace of the gospel. Hebrews, ii. 2. 3. "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" And the same epistle, ch. x. verses 26, 27, 28, 29. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 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 unto the Spirit of grace?"

2. When our Saviour says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," you are not to suppose he means to say, that real and acceptable obedience to the law of God is an easy thing to men, as they are in themselves, or in a sinful and unrenewed state. O! say some, the gospel is a humane and gentle dispensation, the same does not bear hard upon human weakness. If we should make him to say this, my brethren, we should make him to speak in direct opposition to many other passages of scripture, as well as to daily experience, and the nature and reason of the thing. Men may, if they please, create to themselves an image of religion, that shall be quite gentle and pliant, that shall have nothing in it offensive to corrupt nature, or at any time opposed to the manners of fashionable life; but nothing can be more distant from New-Testament truth. There we are told, that, Rom. viii. 7. 8. because "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be: so then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God." There we are told, that men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, that their recovery is the work of Omnipotence, even *the mighty power of God*, and that none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, but God alone. But why should we multiply passages of scripture to this purpose, when it is manifest from the nature of the thing and daily experience? If it were easy in this sense to put on Christ's yoke, it would also be common. Is not the prevalence of wickedness a proof to the contrary? Can any thing be more opposite than sin and holiness? Nothing, not ever.

light and darknefs. Can any man, then, ferve two mafters? Is it an eafy thing to love fin, and praftife holinefs? Do' we fee it is fo in any inftance? Do we reckon it is eafy for the drunkard to deny his appetite, when he fees the liquor giving its colour in the cup, and moving itfelf aright? Is it eafy for the malicious perfon to govern his tongue, or the covetous man to open his heart? The truth is, it is a direft contradiction, for the law of the Lord fearches, and chiefly requires the obedience of the heart; and therefore to fuppoſe, or imagine, that the generality of men, who are under the dominion of fin, may notwithstanding keep the commandments of God, is an abſurdity which we would not be guilty of, in any other ſubject. “ Either, ſays our Saviour, “ make the tree good, and his fruit good,” &c. “ Can a fountain fend out at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter?”

3. When our Saviour ſays, “ My yoke is eafy, and my burden is light,” you are not to ſuppoſe, that it is an eafy or trifling thing, or what the finner may do at any time by his own ſtrength, to turn from fin to God. Nothing can be a more pernicious or a more ſtupifying doſe to a poor carelefs finner, than to make him ſuppoſe that he may eaſily at any time repent, when neceſſity ſhall urge him to it. The whole ſyſtem of divine truth ſtands in direft oppoſition to this error. There our condition by nature is conſidered as not only miſerable, but helpleſs. It is divine power alone that can effect the change: John, vi. 44. “ No man can come to me, except the Father which hath ſent me draw him: and I will raiſe him up at the laſt day.”

Pfal. cx. 3. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." The greatness of the change necessary to salvation demonstrates the same thing: John, iii. 3. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The multitudes that perish is a further proof. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," &c. To this may be added the danger of delay, and the hardening power of habit, as frequently mentioned in scripture: Ecclef. xii. 1. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also who are accustomed to do evil learn to do well." To crown the whole, there are instances in which the day of God's patience and forbearance is closed, and the sinner's eyes shall not be opened on his danger: Luke, xix. 41. 42. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." 2 Theff. ii. 11. "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

4. When Christ says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," we are not to suppose that even the children of God shall meet with no difficulties in their way. It seems to be the mistake of some persons to think that so soon as they have truly embraced the gospel, and obtained peace with God, the conflict is over, they shall have an easy

and slothful assurance, without opposition either from affliction or temptation. But this is quite contrary to what the scripture teaches to expect. It teaches us to lay our account with opposition from every quarter, injury from without, and treachery from within. The life of a Christian must be a life of vigilance and prayer. Outward peace, ill-founded peace, a secure unfaithful conscience, is what we have the greatest reason to dread. These are hard sayings in the gospel, which even the children of God find it difficult to receive. We are exposed to continual temptation from the world and from worldly men, and to frequent trials, both as we are men and Christians: Heb. xii. 5. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." In the Christian warfare there is no truce. It is only he that shall endure to the end that shall be saved. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

HAVING thus rejected these false and mistaken apprehensions sometimes suggested by this passage of scripture, and greatly encouraged by smooth and mollifying teachers, it remains, that I should proceed to point out the true and proper meaning of it, and what we are to understand when the Redeemer invites sinners to come to him, by saying, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." And because there are many things pertaining to this subject, that throw light upon each other, I shall endeavour to take in the whole compass of it, ma-

king, however, the illustration of each particular very short.

1. The yoke of Christ may be said to be easy, and his burden light, because his right to command is undeniable : the authority with which he is invested is complete and full. I have placed this first, because it lies at the foundation of all religion, and is nothing else but the supreme authority and absolute dominion of Jehovah. We all naturally think it hard to submit to usurped authority, or unjust dominion ; but when the title to command is clear, obedience immediately appears to be reasonable and necessary, and becomes our unfeigned choice, or the desire of the heart. Thus, nothing can be more clear than the right of our Maker to the obedience and submission of all his creatures. It is the sense of this carried home upon the conscience, that gives the first rise to conviction of sin. A discovery of the power and majesty of the living God, lays the creature in the dust, and produces subjection. But when to this is added, that he is Lord and proprietor of all ; that all things were made by him, and for him, then sin appears in the light of injustice and rebellion, and obedience, absolute and unconditional, is felt to be his due. Believe it, my brethren, when the revolted creature returns to his allegiance, when the convinced sinner sees the guilt of his rebellion, it at once reconciles him to the law, and makes him willing to put on the yoke.

The same thing is a constant and growing principle of obedience to the believer. He sees that he is not his own. He perceives and admits his Creator's and Redeemer's right. He is convinced, that as all

things were made for, as all things shall finally tend to, so every intelligent creature ought supremely to aim at the glory of God. It is this radical principle that chiefly constitutes the difference between genuine obedience, and that constrained service which may be sometimes falsely so called. Hence it is that true obedience is considered as a debt that is *due* to God; false obedience, on the contrary, is considered as a debt *charged* upon God. The real Christian is happy in so far as he is able to obey, and sincerely grieves for any remaining backwardness and reluctance in his mind. The yoke may well be said to be easy, when he is brought to that temper and disposition, that it is not what he does, but what he omits, that fills him with grief, or covers him with shame.

2. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because all his commands are in themselves perfectly just and right. It is hard, indeed, to be obliged to do what we cannot approve; and so long as the sinner has any objection against the law, obedience must be a burden. But every renewed mind obtains a discovery of the infinite amiableness of the divine nature, and the excellence and perfection of the divine law. The law is holy, says the apostle, Rom. vii. 12. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." The law of God is a transcript of his own infinite excellence, and therefore must be perfect and faultless. We may take up this matter in a very simple, and at the same time clear and conspicuous point of view. The sum of the moral law is, "Thou shalt love," &c. The whole is con-

tained under these heads, especially the first of them, from which the other is a corollary. Is there any thing more manifestly reasonable, than that we should love supremely what is supremely excellent? or where is the rival, that can plead a better title to our affection? If he hath commanded us to love what was not amiable, or to do what was not reasonable, there would have been ground for complaint. If we take the sense of the second table by itself, we shall see the same thing very plainly, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" or, which is the same thing, "Whatsoever ye would that men do unto you, do ye the same unto them." Is this unreasonable? Is any man's reason so perverted, or his conscience so depraved, as to complain of this, as an unjust or oppressive law? There are some who talk upon this subject in such a manner as we may truly say of them, with the apostle, "They speak of the law, and know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" and they will say, Our Saviour has made merciful abatements of the law. Pray, has he made any abatement of the love of God, and of our neighbour? Would you be satisfied to hear any man trace out a system of moral duty, and make any alteration in these? Yet they are the whole in substance; wherever these are, every thing will follow of course. If you love God supremely, and your neighbour as yourself, you will neglect no duty to the one or to the other.

When I am upon this branch of the subject, the reasonableness of God's commands, it will be proper to obviate an apparent, and at the same time

an important objection. You will perhaps say, To keep the commands of God, is above our power. Have not you yourself often taught us, that no mere man in this life is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? 'Can that be reasonable, then, that is impossible?' Now consider, I pray you, what sort of impossibility this is. It is not natural, but moral. It is not want of power, but want of inclination. Nothing is required of us that is unfruitful to our situation, or above our natural powers; so far from it, that even what was our duty before, if by any accident it becomes impossible in this sense, it ceases to be a duty. God no where commands you to be taller or stronger than he has made you: and though he commands you to labour, working with your hands, if he confines you with sickness, this duty no longer binds. He has given you faculties and natural powers for every thing that he requires. Are not all your powers, both of mind and body, as fit for your Maker's service as for any other purpose? Is not the tongue as fit to speak truth as falsehood: and every member of the body as fit to do what is lawful or useful, as what is sinful or hurtful? The commands of God, then, are neither impossible nor difficult to those who are willing to obey them. No man can say with truth, that he desired with all his heart to do his Maker's will, and could not. But perhaps some will say, 'This indisposition itself, is my nature, I cannot help it.' If any think this excuse may be offered to God, let him first make trial of offering it to his fellow-creature, or suppose another to offer it to himself. Suppose you should complain

of another, for stealing your substance, or blasting your name, or otherwise injuring you; and that he should answer, that he could not help it. What! you would say, you could not help it! what necessity obliged you? Why, says he, it was my nature, because I hate you, and it grieves me to see you prosper. Would that be accepted as an excuse? I think not; for it is the very essence of the injury. On the whole, it plainly appears, that the commands of God are all reasonable and just; neither can they suffer any abatement, without infringing upon the holiness of his own nature, and the wisdom and equity of his government itself.

3. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because all his commands have an immediate and direct tendency to promote our own comfort and happiness. They are not less reasonable as they express the right of the Creator, than they are gracious as they are calculated to promote the interest of the creature. I do not mean here, only or chiefly, the great reward which he hath in mercy provided and promised to those that keep them, but that in their own nature they are fitted to promote our happiness.

I have before sufficiently taken notice, that we are not to understand, by keeping the commands of God, a constrained outward obedience, without the inclination of the heart. Constrained obedience, I confess, is neither acceptable to God, nor delightful to man. But when the service of God is chosen from the heart, it is both delightful and profitable in all respects. If we examine the matter with care, we shall find, that true religion consists in the ex-

ercise of the most noble and grateful affections of mind, or rather the one leading disposition, which, when rightly directed as to its object, makes the sum of religion, and is also the source of felicity. It is love, supreme love to God, and, through him and for him, to all his creatures, that is the sum of religion; and must not every body be sensible, that this is a temper and frame of mind much more desirable than its opposite? Carry the one and the other through all their branches and expressions, and see if they will bear the comparison. From love spring thankfulness, contentment, submission, benevolence, beneficence, meekness, compassion, forgiveness; and from hatred spring ambition, rage, impatience, malevolence, envy, revenge, and cruelty. If there were no law of God at all, which of those tribes of affections is more desirable of itself, or most conducive to our inward comfort and peace?

If we try this matter by experience, let us ask the children of God, whether they have found his service burdensome? whether they would exchange a meek, thankful, and contented frame of spirit, for the storms of rage, envy, or ambition? Do they look with a jealous or envious eye on the liberty of wicked men? on the contrary, they would not exchange with any of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. Perhaps, though there is great blindness in the understanding itself, of wicked men, we may learn the truth even from their experience and confessions. We many times hear them acknowledge their bondage; and when they do not explicitly acknowledge it, yet it is easy to perceive it. You never hear a bad man taking

comfort to himself from the evil he has done, but sometimes comparatively from the greater evil that he has not done. Without going particularly through every minute circumstance, let us just say in general, that whether we consider the inward temper, or the outward practice, our relations, business, and enjoyments in life, or hope for futurity, we cannot in any instance depart from the commandments of God, without at the same time acting contrary to our own manifest interest: so that Wisdom says with great truth and justice, Prov. viii. 36. "He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me, love death."

4. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because he has given the most free and gracious invitation to sinners to return to God. By his sufferings he purchased their pardon, and is invested with full authority to negotiate peace. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved him to suffer, that repentance and remission of sins," &c. What we are particularly to remember upon this subject is, that the invitation is, without reserve or exception, to all of every character, however deep and aggravated their offences: Is. i. 18. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The offer is also free as to the terms, without any costly or meriting condition: Isa. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirst-

eth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Rev. xxii. 17. " And 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 take the water of life freely." Can there be any thing more encouraging than these gracious invitations ? Here it is that we ought to take in the wise and happy constitution of the Redeemer's person, as the son of man, as well as the Son of God, and the meekness and gentleness of his disposition. This was prophesied of him of old, Isa. xlii. 1, 2, 3. " Behold my servant whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth : I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break ; and the smoking flax shall he not quench : he shall bring forth judgement unto truth." This was beautifully and admirably fulfilled by his appearance in the flesh, by the meanness of his birth, though not of his parentage, by the poverty and self-denial of his life, by the meekness and lowliness of his carriage, not only through life, but in the last and suffering stage of it ; for he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself ; when he was reviled, he reviled not again. So that he might with the greatest justice say as in the context, " Take my yoke."

5. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because he hath made abundant provision of divine strength, to enable us to keep his command-

ments. How gracious these laws, when the Law-giver communicates strength for performance? This takes away all objection, and removes every difficulty. What is impossible with man, is possible with God. There is no heart so hard, but Omnipotence is able to soften it; no temper so depraved, but the Creator is able to renew it. The conversion of a sinner is always considered in scripture as the work of God: "God, who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness," &c. The promise of the new covenant is thus described by Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." And in the New Testament, faith which unites us to Christ, and every other good disposition, is represented as the gift of God: Eph. ii. 8. "For by grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

And as the conversion of sinners, so the daily growth of the spiritual life in believers, is to be imputed entirely to the same cause; for this end it was, that it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell in Christ; and we have this testimony from the apostle John, i. 16. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." —

S E R M O N X I I I .

THE GLORY OF THE REDEEMER IN THE
PERPETUITY OF HIS WORK.

PSALM lxxii. 17.

His name shall endure for ever : his name shall be continued as long as the sun ; and men shall be blessed in him : all nations shall call him blessed.

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THE whole system of providence and grace was fixed in the eternal purpose of God, before the foundation of the world. Hence he is represented, II. xlvi. 10. as “ declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” The writings of the Old Testament give us the history of the several openings of this plan, during that dispensation, in which we may observe almost continual references to the appearance of an illustrious person, at a certain important period, called “ the fulness of time.”

The appearance of the Saviour in our nature, including his obedience, his sufferings and death, his triumphant resurrection and ascension, was an event so astonishing in itself, and so great in its effects, as being the means appointed of God for the redemption of a lost world, that we need not be surpris'd at the care taken in the Old-Testament church, to keep it always in view. It was natural for holy and good men, who had so many intimations given them of it, to think on it with pleasure, and when they were led to speak of future times, to bring in this remarkable period, and mention it with rapture. And when God inspir'd his servants to prophesy of the prosperity and happiness of his church and kingdom, he could not fail to raise their descriptions, and lead them to give such views of things as were suitable to that great event, which was to be such a signal illustration of his glorious goodness, and so great a blessing to mankind.

Hence it is, that we find several prophecies begun, in appearance, to celebrate some public blessing, at or near the times in which they were delivered, gradually so heightened by several expressions, as we may perceive that in their full extent they could only relate to the times of the Messiah. Such, for instance, is that in my text: for if we lay together the accounts we have of Solomon, in scripture, and the felicity of his reign; if we remember the scandalous steps he made in the latter part of his life, the dreadful rent that happened in the reign of his son and immediate successor; and that, after the course of a few ages, Judah was carried into captivity, we must be sensible, that the expressions

in the text are by far too much exalted, if nothing else was intended by them. But if we consider them as relating to Messiah the Prince, then we see every thing literally fulfilled to the utmost import and extent of the prophetic language. "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

It is below the majesty of the scriptures, to make use of strong and lofty expressions to denote a very common and ordinary event, to which they cannot be applied without making great abatements. This is a fault men often fall into; but it would be very unjust to impute it to persons speaking under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God. We may therefore lay it down as one good rule for understanding the prophetic writings, that whenever they rise far above the subject they were treating of, into expressions literally applicable to the Messiah, and which, in their full extent, can belong to none but him, he is to be considered as chiefly in the view of the Spirit of God. Now, this being the case with my text, as I hope appears sufficiently from what has been already said, I shall consider it as a noble and animated prophecy of the glory of his reign; which will be the more proper introduction to this day's work, as what we are now to be employed about is an eminent part of its accomplishment.

In discoursing further on it at present, I shall circumscribe the subject, and only,

I. Endeavour to open the import of this magnificent declaration, as understood of Christ. "His name shall endure for ever," &c.

II. Make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and assistance in the present duty.

I. THEN, let us endeavour to open the import of this magnificent declaration as understood of Christ, "His name shall endure for ever," &c.

And, in the *first* place, It carries in it an assurance of the greatness of his power as a Saviour, and the perfect security of all those who put their trust in him. The word *name* often signifies the excellence or perfection of the person named or referred to. This is especially the case in scripture, with respect to God, where his name is just his glory and all-sufficiency revealed. The name of the Lord is in many passages of equivalent meaning with the power of God: thus, Prov. xviii. 10. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Psalm xx. 1. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee." This may with the greater propriety be applied to Christ, that you may know the name of Jesus, was by the express appointment of the angel of the Lord, given to him at his birth, to denote the great deliverance he was to work for sinners, in saving them from their sins. This is the great errand on which the Son of God came into the world, 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The success he should have in this work is often celebrated; as Isaiah liiii. 10. 11. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he

hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." His power as a Saviour, to break the chains of Satan, and to deliver the captive soul, is frequently declared in the strongest terms; as *Is. xlii. 6. 7. 8.* "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." *Isaiah, lxiii. 1.* "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." This power of Christ to save, seems to be plainly called his name, *1 John, iii. 23.* "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Thus it is reasonable to think, that the power of Christ as a Saviour is celebrated in our text, as what would ever remain a pure and plentiful source of salvation to mankind, and be ever depended upon and acknowledged as such by all the redeemed.

This glory of Christ's name as a Saviour, has a par-

ticular respect to the wretched and deplorable state of those who are the objects of his mercy, and that there are none beyond the reach of his power ; that there is none so loaded with guilt, or so stained with pollution, but he is able to purchase their pardon, and to effect their deliverance. Persons, you know, afflicted with inveterate and dangerous diseases, are apt to hearken with eagerness to the name of an eminent physician, from whose skill they may entertain some hopes of recovery, and the greater and more illustrious his name is, they are apt to place the greater confidence in him. So when we hear that Christ's name shall endure for ever, it should encourage sinners of whatever rank to fly to him, and to put their trust in him. God reasons thus in illustrating his own mercy, *Is. i. 18. 19.* " Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." And to the same purpose, *Is. lv. 7.* " Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But he hath given us still greater encouragement, by committing the work of our salvation to so glorious a person, in whose hand it cannot fail, *Psal. lxxxix. 18. 19.* " For the Lord is our defence ; and the Holy One of Israel is our King. Then thou speakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty : I have exalted one chosen out of the

people." Is. ix. 6. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Not to insist on the many passages in the New Testament, which point our attention to the power and dignity of Christ, I shall only mention, Heb. vii. 25. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

I shall only further say, that the glory of Christ's name, as an almighty Saviour, may be considered in its superior lustre to every thing that might be supposed to come in competition with him, or pretend to be put in his place. This is certainly the meaning of a great name, when applied to men. He is said to obtain the greatest name, who outstrips or eclipses others by the glory of his deeds; the same must be the meaning of this passage, as applied to our Redeemer: "His name shall endure for ever." The names of others shall soon be lost. Their inferior brightness will soon decay: but his shall continue for ever with unfading and increasing lustre.

This, my brethren, is a circumstance that ought never to be omitted. We cannot honour Christ as an almighty Saviour, unless we believe and remember that he is the only Saviour. There are some passages in the prophetic writings, in which God asserts his own incommunicable glory, in opposition to the vanities of the Gentiles, and that in language inimitably strong: Isa. xl. 17. 18. "All nations

before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" Isa. xliii. 10. 11. 12. 13. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant, whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" Hosea, xiii. 4. "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no God but me: for there is no favour beside me." The same peculiar and exclusive honour belongs to Christ, as the hope of sinners: Acts, iv. 12. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

I might illustrate this sense of the passage before us, by shewing you that all the rites and ceremonies of the ancient dispensation derived their efficacy from their relation to Christ. But I shall only tell you, that all the dependance which you place in any thing else for your acceptance with God, is an injury to the honour of your Redeemer; that all self-righteousness and self-dependance, to which there is in man by nature so strong a tendency, obscures the lustre of that name which shall endure

for ever ; that as he is able to save sinners to the uttermost, so they shall never obtain salvation, but by him. As it is he who laid the foundation of this great work, who carries it on through all the steps of its progress, and at last brings it to perfection, so he will have (and why should he not have?) the undivided glory.

This leads me to observe, that the magnificent declaration in the text concerning Christ, implies the immortal honour and renown which he would acquire by the work of man's redemption. Every one knows that, in scripture-style, to get a name is to acquire renown and glory, by some illustrious achievement ; as, 2 Sam. viii. 13. " And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting the Syrians in the Valley of Salt, being eighteen thousand men."

And surely, my brethren, the undertaking of Christ was the most glorious in itself, the most arduous in its accomplishment, the most blessed in its effects, and the most generous and disinterested in him, that can possibly be conceived. Think on this part of the subject, I beseech you, with attention ; and weigh the intimations we have of it in scripture. And for this purpose observe, that he acquired glory with God, with angels, and with men.

As the salvation of sinners was a work in which the glory of God the Father was eminently illustrated, so he is represented as looking with the highest complacency on Christ, in the undertaking and accomplishment of it. Thus, Matth. iii. 17. " And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is

my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And again, at his transfiguration, Matth. xvii. 5. "While he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Isa. xlii. 1. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles." We see also, that God is represented as having put the highest honour on the Redeemer, in reward of his sufferings: Phil. ii. 9. 10. 11. "Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Heb. ii. 9. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the sufferings of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." See also Heb. xii. 2. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

I am sensible, my brethren, that this delight and approbation, which the Father is represented as expressing in the undertaking of the Son, is a subject of the most elevated nature, on which we ought to think and speak with the utmost veneration, and with the greatest reserve. But since he hath re-

vealed, it is our duty to improve it. Does it not carry your thoughts naturally to that expression we find used in scripture, at the finishing of the material creation, mentioned at the end of every day's work, and repeated on a review of the whole, Gen. i. 31. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

We must needs conceive the omnipotent Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as possessed, not only of absolute and unchangeable perfection, but of infinite and inconceivable felicity. And may we not, must we not conceive, that this felicity consists both in the contemplation and exercise of all his glorious attributes, and in nothing more than in the redemption of sinners, in which his power, wisdom, holiness, justice, and mercy, are severally and jointly so conspicuously displayed? Nay, may we not venture, with reverence, further to say, that the three persons in the Trinity, by their distinct properties, and peculiar agency, receive and impart everlasting delight to one another, in their ineffable communion? The eternal Word is represented as saying, Prov. viii. 30. "Then was I by him as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

(2.) The Redeemer acquired immortal renown among the angels, and the whole celestial host. This we may speak of with abundance of certainty, and with yet clearer comprehension. Doubtless their happiness consists in the vision and contemplation of an infinite God. And therefore the manifestation and exercise of the divine perfections, both in providence and grace, administer to them matter

of continual and increasing delight. There is a beautiful representation of their employment, Is. vi. 1. 2. 3. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Now, there is no reason to doubt that the work of redemption, in all its parts, in which they themselves have an inferior employment, as ministering spirits, under the dominion of the uncreated Angel of the covenant, must be a source of the purest felicity, and a subject of the most elevated praise; in a particular manner, the assumption of our nature into a personal union with the divine. You see how they sing praises at the birth of the Saviour, Luke ii. 13. 14. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth: peace, good-will toward men."

The humiliation, sufferings, and death of God's eternal Son, his victory upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and triumph over principalities and powers, that is to say, the revolted angels, must have often laid these servants of the living God prostrate in adoration. This is not a matter of conjecture, but clearly revealed; the whole plan of redemption being called a mystery, which the angels desire to penetrate, 1 Peter, 10. 11. 12. "Of

which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow: unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

Realize these great truths to yourselves, my brethren. What think you were the views of the innumerable hosts of cherubim and seraphim, when some of them conducted the ascending Saviour, and others received him, when he entered within the veil? What think you were their views when they beheld the Mediator, God-man, exalted at the right hand of God, and had a new object of adoration, bearing the scars of his sufferings, and known by the print of the nails, and by his bleeding temples? Heb. i. 6. "And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Or, when they saw the dominion and power with which he was invested as King of kings, and Lord of lords, 1 Peter, iii. 22. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him."

This renown of the Saviour must have been much greater among them, if it is true what many

intelligent divines have supposed, that by the same glorious undertaking by which he redeemed elect sinners, he established and confirmed the obedient angels in a state of holiness and happiness. I shall only further say, that we are expressly told, the administration of divine grace, or the government and preservation of the church of Christ, is a continued illustration, to the spirits above, of his Father's wisdom: Eph. iii. 10. "To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Agreeably to this, we find that in the book of Revelation, which opens the great scenes of providence to the church militant, there are several visions in which the angels are represented as uniting their praises with redeemed sinners, and directing their worship to the same great object. This leads me to observe,

(3.) That the Saviour acquired immortal renown among sinners of mankind. If the angels, who were either spectators only, or at most but partial sharers in redeeming grace, do yet hold him in the highest honour, what is, and must be, the sense of gratitude which dwells in the heart of a pardoned sinner? O, my brethren, how many circumstances concur to bind the heart of the believer in eternal bonds of gratitude to Christ! Who can conceive or express the debt of the sinner to the Saviour! He is redeemed from everlasting destruction, he is saved from wrath through him. Whoever is humbled, through fear of the vengeance of a holy and jealous God, what fervent love will he bear to him, who hath wrought his deliverance, who hath pur-

chafed his pardon! If he is filled with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, of his aggravated and inexcusable provocations, with what rapture must he look upon that Saviour, who forgave him graciously, and loved him freely? Who is not moved with that inimitable picture of penitent love, when Mary Magdalene came in, as it is related, Luke, vii. 37. 38. "And, behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him, weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." And how just and proper that reflection of our Saviour, in the 47th verse, "Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." The believer's esteem and gratitude must be greatly increased, by considering the unspeakable cost at which his deliverance was bought, the amazing and affecting sufferings which the Redeemer endured in his room. When he follows the patient and immaculate Saviour, by the eye of faith, from his inward anguish in the garden, to his shameful sufferings on the accursed tree—with what relenting of heart will he view that blessed head crowned with thorns, that sacred body nailed to the cross! And when he carries forward his views to the glory and happiness prepared for him, in the Redeemer's presence above, what is the sum of his obligations? What bounds can be set to this conqueror's renown? In

what better way can we express this, than by repeating and adopting these animating songs of praise, which are now making a great part of the worship of Heaven? Rev. v. 11.—14. “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, 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 that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.”—And Rev. vii. 9. 10. 11.

3. In the last place, the magnificent declaration concerning Christ in the text, implies the stability and perpetuity of his kingdom. The glorious promises made to the house and family of David, have their chief and full accomplishment in Christ the son of David. The earthly kingdom erected in that family has long ago been destroyed; but the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion shall have no end. This was the promise of the Father to the Messiah, Psal. lxxxix. 36. 37. “His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall

be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah."

It is one great end of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, to perpetuate the Redeemer's name: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come;" and it is a noble and reviving object of faith, that we know that his kingdom shall stand fast for ever. Hell itself may rage, and the princes of this world may combine to shake his glorious throne; but he that sits in heaven shall laugh, the King of Zion shall hold their impotent attempts in derision. He shall maintain his interest in spite of all the efforts of his numerous and inveterate enemies. He hath often done so already, and shall continue to do so till the end of time, Rev. xvii. 14.

I PROCEED now to make some practical application of what hath been said. And,

I. Let us adore the wisdom and the power of Christ.

My brethren, when we consider the simplicity of the gospel, and the scandal of the cross; when we consider the whole system of the doctrine according to godliness, and salvation by grace, how directly contrary it is to the pride of our nature, how many attempts have been, and continue to be made in every age, to suppress it by violence, to blacken it by slander, and to adulterate it by mixture; it is a standing miracle that it has been able to hold its ground. Whoever will reflect either upon the present state, or the past history of the church of Christ, must be obliged to say, that our

faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I must not omit to say, that we are perhaps as much indebted, in this nation, to the goodness of Providence in this respect, as any corner of the earth; and I cannot but be pleased with the choice which our fathers made, of an emblem and motto for the church of Scotland, a bush burning, but not consumed. Let us rejoice in the faith, that the Prince of the kings of the earth, who hath hitherto maintained his truths and interest against all the power and cunning of earthly policy, will continue to preserve them, and that "his name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

2. You may learn from what hath been said, the guilt and danger of the enemies of Christ; of all those who set light by the glory of his person, and are unwilling to be indebted to the riches of his grace. I would willingly aspire to the character which the apostle Paul assumes to himself, 2 Cor. ii. 17. "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope: 1 Cor. iii. 11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There may be a form of godliness, nay, there may be an ostentatious parade of human virtue, but there can be nothing of the spirit and power of true religion, without a clear discovery and sincere confession of our lost and depraved state by nature, without a believing application to the mercy of God, through the blood

of the atonement. Think not, I beseech you, to frustrate the word of God. The following testimony comes from the Amen, the true and faithful Witness, John, xiv. 6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." If so great honour is put upon the Redeemer by God the Father, and by his holy angels, how unspeakably dangerous must it be for sinners to despise him. You can never despise this ordinance of God for salvation, but from the greatest ignorance of yourselves. My heart bleeds to think of the delusion of the despisers of the gospel. What views can you have of the immaculate nature and holy law of God, if you trust in yourselves that you are righteous? What experience have you of the stability of these resolutions that have been taken as in your strength? How weak and defective is that virtue which is founded only on human prudence, or motives of present convenience? One believing view of a Saviour on the cross, will have a more powerful influence in mortifying corruptions, than all other arguments whatever. One fervent prayer, urged in the name of Christ, will be more effectual for your preservation, than a thousand merely human resolutions.—Obey this salutary counsel, John, xv. 4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

3. From what has been said, let me beseech you to try your title to sit down at the Lord's table. This ordinance was expressly instituted for putting honour on the Redeemer's name. He is the sum

and substance of it; his death and sufferings are the immediate subject of it. Have you, then, my brethren, a high and inward esteem of his person; a deep sense of gratitude for his mercy; an entire and unshaken reliance on his grace and power? Can you call the Searcher of hearts to witness, that you unfeignedly approve of this way of salvation, by which God is glorified, and the sinner abased? Are you not ashamed to profess it? And while others are ready to despise it, are you willing to glory in it? Does it please you to hear that the Saviour's name shall endure for ever? Is it with holy triumph you reflect, that the glory of his kingdom shall be unchangeable, and his power to eternity itself? If this is your disposition, I hope you will come with acceptance to his table; and I would flatter myself with the pleasing expectation, that many of this day's worshippers shall be everlasting monuments of their Redeemer's power; that they shall be happy subjects of his grace, and taste of the consolations of his gospel on earth, and be heirs and partakers of his glory in heaven.

4. I would improve this subject, by earnestly beseeching every sinner to embrace this salvation, and enlist himself under the banner of this renowned Saviour. There are, no doubt, many within these walls who are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. O that the Redeemer would glorify his own power in their conviction and their salvation! "Gird on thy sword upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty!" Are there not some in this assembly who are sensible that they are lying under a load of unforgiven guilt; that they are still slaves

to habitual sin? Does not the very sacred action we are going about, fill you with fear that you are far from the state and temper of God's children? Is not the old nature so strong in you, that you have good reason to suspect you have never yet put on the new? Let me beseech and exhort you, to believe in the name of the Son of God. His merit is of infinite value; his power is of infinite efficacy. Many notorious sinners have been, from age to age, the happy witnesses of both. Nothing in your condition ought to be a discouragement to you from applying to this all-sufficient Saviour; he invites you by me, or rather I invite you by his commission, and in his own terms, Matth. xi. 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Isa. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." John, vi. 37. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." How shall I urge your compliance? is not this name so powerful that you may safely put your trust in it? Are you not desirous that your conversion to God should illustrate it, and make it glorious? I shall leave the matter with you after making this remark, that in vain do his enemies oppose him; in vain do sinners despise him. He is getting him a name by the preaching of the gospel. It is still serving its purpose, for the calling and confirmation of the vessels of mercy, for aggravating the guilt and increasing the condemnation of the obstinate and disobedient: Luke, xx. 17. 18. "And he beheld them, and said,

What is this, then, that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whofoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

In the *last* place, You may learn from what hath been said, the wisdom of God, in the institution of the Lord's supper, and what ought to be your employment at his table. How wisely fitted is this ordinance to keep up the remembrance of Christ as a Saviour, as a suffering dying Saviour. Perhaps no one circumstance has contributed more to preserve the pure uncorrupted doctrine of the gospel, than the sacrament of the Lord's supper. It sets the truth before our eyes, while the words of the institution repeats it in our ears, 1 Cor. xi. 24. “ This is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me.” And verse 25th, “ This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” Professing Christians, but of worldly minds, may be ashamed of the cross; self-righteous persons may put something else in the room of the cross; perverse disputers may oppose it, or keep it out of their writings; and erroneous teachers may keep it out of their sermons; but there is no keeping it out of the sacrament of his supper. Under this auspicious banner, the name of Christ has been spread to the most distant nations, and handed down from the most distant ages; and so it shall continue till he come again, “ for as often as ye eat this bread,” &c. How, then, ought you to be employed, in a thankful and joyful acceptance of salvation through

his blood, in the lively exercise of faith in his power, in deriving from his fulness every thing necessary for your support under temptation or trial; and in fervent prayer, that his name may be hallowed, his kingdom may come, and his will may be done in earth, as it is in heaven.—Amen, and amen.

S E R M O N XIV.

THE PETITIONS OF THE INSINCERE UNAVAILING.

PSALM lxvi. 18.

*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not
bear me.*

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is not, I think, a more striking light in which we can consider an assembly of professing Christians, than as united in their common relation to God, and upon an equal footing as to outward privileges, but very different as to their inward character. This difference shall only be completely manifested in the final decision of their state at the last day. The mixture of saints and sinners must continue till that time, when there shall be an eternal separation of the precious from the vile, of the sheep from the goats. Must, then, all things continue in suspense and uncertainty till the great day? Is there no way by which we can judge, at present, what will be the event at that interesting period?

What is now the inward temper, or the spiritual state, and what shall be the eternal condition of every person here present, is perfectly known to God, the searcher of all hearts. It cannot be known indeed, with any certainty, by his fellow-sinners, but it may be known in a great measure by every one with regard to himself. It may be known with such a degree of evidence as to deliver him from distressing anxiety, and even to fill him with the most joyful hope and expectation. Is not this sufficient? and ought it not to excite every one of us to a serious and impartial trial of that great question, in which we have no less than an infinite concern? This ought to be our care, in a particular manner, when we have in view to make a near and solemn approach to God, in his sanctuary on earth, because his acceptance of our worship in the body is an earnest and pledge of his final approbation, as appears from the words of the text, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;" and likewise from another passage, John, ix. 31. "Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

This psalm was composed, in all probability, by the psalmist David; though some are of a contrary opinion, and attribute it to one of the prophets, after the captivity. The inspired author celebrates the goodness of God in some signal and national deliverance, and, towards the close of the psalm, takes particular notice of the distinguishing kindness of God to himself, as in Psal. lxvi. 16. "Come and

hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." He then considers the countenance and acceptance he had met with from God, as an evidence of his own sincerity, in the 18th & 19th verses, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; but verily God hath heard me;" he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. I cannot at this time take in the whole compass of this subject, or consider how the one of these assertions is related to the other; but as the first of them contains an interesting truth in itself, and very proper for the trial of our state, I shall endeavour, through divine assistance, to illustrate it in the following method.

I. I shall consider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart.

II. What is to be understood by God's not hearing such persons. And,

III. I shall make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

IN the *first* place, then, Let us consider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart. And I think it is plain, that these words do not directly point at open, scandalous, and profane sinners, who have burst every bond, and look with disdain and defiance in the face of every reprove. There are too many of this character, my brethren, who fall under the description of the prophet Jeremiah, ch. xlv. ver. 16. and first clause of the 17th, and who practically say, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly

do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." To these I shall speak in the application of the subject, as there is no doubt that they regard iniquity in the heart, since they openly and obstinately practise it in the life. But certainly the words of the text do chiefly relate to those whose characters are more doubtful, both to others and to themselves. Many there have been in every age, and there are many amongst us, who maintain their character before men; but when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, shall be found wanting; but at the same time, by the power of self-deceit, they are ready to say, they shall have peace, though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. For undeceiving all such persons, and for the trial of others, that they that are approved may be made manifest, let me beseech your attention to the following particulars.

1. They regard iniquity in their hearts, who practise it secretly, who are under restraint from the world, but are not possessed of an habitual fear of the omniscient God, the searcher of all hearts, and from whose eyes there is no covering of thick darkness where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves: Jer. xxiii. 24. "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." If you remember in what manner I stated the general meaning of the words, you will be sensible that I do not here chiefly point at gross hypocrisy, or those who under the cloak of religion practise all manner of wickedness in their secret retirement. There are many others on whose con-

duct the judgement of men has a strong, though at the same time an insensible effect, who are perhaps regular and guarded in their visible deportment, but on whom a sense of the continual presence of the invisible God, with whom they have to do, hath not a commanding and habitual influence. It is a dangerous symptom of this, when your repentance is very slight, and you easily forgive yourselves for those sins of which the world is ignorant, or in those that are known, when you remember the shame longer than the sin.

How many unhappy examples of this do we see every day ! How many can go very easily under their sins that are known only to God, but are filled with vexation when they have been betrayed into what exposes them to the censure of their fellow-creatures. There are some who seem to be much more affected with the censure of others for trifling errors, than the displeasure of God for heinous sins. Nay, there are to be found some who evidently suffer more uneasiness from the censure of others, even where it is wrong, than from frequent neglects or breaches of the law of God. Now, what signifies the opinion of others, when it is founded on mistake, or malice ? I do not mean, my brethren, to extinguish, or bid you endeavour to extinguish, a sense of shame ; but let it be subordinate to the fear of God. The distress of a real penitent should arise from the dishonour he hath done to God. The reproach he hath brought on religion should wound him more deeply than the shame or fear he hath brought upon himself. Let the shamefulnes of every bad action bear a part in shewing you its

abominable nature. But I am bold to affirm, that they are strangers to true penitence, in whom a sense of shame is stronger than a sense of sin.

This attachment to secret sin admits of various degrees. It is sometimes stronger, and sometimes weaker; sometimes general, and sometimes more confined. There are instances in which it appears chiefly by the continuance and influence of some one darling lust, which the sinner cannot give up. This holds its place after others are surrendered; and though it dare not appear openly in the conversation, retains its dominion in the heart, and is indulged under the covert of secrecy. The arguments adduced in its defence, the excuses offered for it by the sinner to his own mind, are very many; but that it is a regarding iniquity in the heart, appears from its being concealed. It would seek no hiding place, if it were not one of the works of darkness.

2. They regard iniquity in the heart, who entertain and indulge the desire of sin, although in the course of providence they may be restrained from the actual commission of it. I am persuaded the instances are not rare, of men feeding upon sinful desires, even when, through want of opportunity, through the fear of man, or through some partial restraint of conscience, they dare not carry them into execution. This will be best illustrated by particular examples; and therefore I shall just mention the three following—impurity, sensuality, and malice.

Men may indulge themselves in unchaste and lascivious thoughts; they may allow their imagina-

tions to run out upon such subjects, meditate and dwell upon them with delight, drink in with pleasure such discourses or such writings as present them with polluted images, although they are restrained from the commission of gross acts of uncleanness. All who voluntarily indulge themselves in such mental impurity, who think it enough to abstain from the criminal action, or perhaps maintain some prudent reserve and decency of conversation, but do not make conscience of watching over their inward desires, beyond all question they regard iniquity in the heart. For this we have the express testimony of our blessed Saviour, Matth. v. 27. 28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Again,

Men may habitually indulge themselves in sensuality of heart, when they have little or no opportunity of giving the rein to sensuality in practice. They may please themselves with the imagination or expectation of worldly greatness, or worldly delights. Such things may be the theme of their meditation, and the objects of their sinful affections, although they shall never come into their possession. Their sensuality of heart may discover itself by impatient complaints of their own state, which has not given them the means of indulgence, or by envious repining at the outward prosperity of others, who are more liberally provided for. Nay, I would say the same thing of those who have the means of gratification, and yet are usually sober,

if their restraint is owing to no better principle than the fear of sickness, or the fear of men.

Once more: Men may indulge themselves in malice against others, although it be chiefly confined to the secret working of their hearts. Prudence or cowardice may hinder men from doing mischief, even when they are full of inward malice. Envy, that corroding, wasting worm, chiefly preys upon the heart. Men may rejoice at the calamities of others, or indulge resentment of supposed injuries, which is never carried into effect. All such, my brethren, regard iniquity in their heart, and are living in the wilful and deliberate breach of the law of God, which is pure and spiritual, and hath the heart as its principal object: Matth. v. 21. 22. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and, whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgement. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgement: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire."

3. They regard iniquity in their heart who reflect upon past sins with delight, or without sincere humiliation of mind. Perhaps our real disposition, both towards sin and duty, may be as certainly discovered by the state of our minds after, as in the time of action. The strength and suddenness of temptation may betray even a good man into the commission of sin; the backwardness of heart, and power of inward corruption, may make duty burdensome,

and occasion many defects in the performance : but every real Christian remembers his past sins with unfeigned contrition of spirit, and a deep sense of unworthiness before God ; and the discharge of his duty, however difficult it may have been at the time, affords him the utmost pleasure on reflection. It is otherwise with many : they can remember their sins without sorrow, they can speak of them without shame, and sometimes even with a mixture of boasting and vain glory. Did you never hear them recall their past follies, and speak of them with such relish, that it seems to be more to renew the pleasure, than to regret the sin. Even supposing such persons to have forsaken the practice of some sins, if they can thus look back upon them with inward complacency, their seeming reformation must be owing to a very different cause from renovation of heart. How opposite the sentiments of Job, who considers his afflictions as a visitation of God for his sins in early life, Job, xiii. 26. " For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." See also the prayer of the psalmist, Psalm xxv. 7. " Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions : according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord."

4. They regard iniquity in the heart, who look upon the sins of others with approbation, or indeed who can behold them without grief. Sin is so abominable a thing, so dishonouring to God, and so destructive to the souls of men, that no real Christian can witness it without concern. Hence it is so frequently taken notice of in scripture, as the character

of a servant of God, that he mourns for the sins of others, Psal. cxix. 136. 158. "Rivers of water run down mine eyes: because they keep not thy law. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved: because they kept not thy word." See also the language of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xiii. 17. "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep fore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive." 2 Peter, ii. 7. 8. "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)." Have we then among us any, my brethren, who can look upon the sins of others with complacency or approbation, who excuse or palliate, who justify or defend them? how different is their temper from that of the scripture-saints just now referred to! Whatever outward regularity they may possess or pretend to, it is plain they are of the number of those who regard iniquity in the heart. To some sins their own nature may not prompt them; from others, the fear of man may restrain them; but the Holy Spirit surely never has reformed them. It is an infallible maxim, That no man can think lightly of sin in others, who has an unfeigned hatred of it in himself.

This will hold with equal or with greater strength as to those who make the sins of others the subject of their mirth and entertainment. The wise man tells us, Prov. xiv. 9. "Fools make a mock of sin." And the observation will hold equally true, whether we consider the sin committed, or the danger of

the finner. Is there any thing we should hate more than what is so offensive to God, of which he hath expressed his detestation? And must he not regard iniquity in the heart, who can find pleasure in what should be viewed by every Christian with horror? And what name does he deserve, who can make himself merry with the everlasting perdition of his fellow-creatures? We have the greatest reason to lament the prevalence of sin amongst us, and the boldness of finners; and little less, to lament the reception which both sin and finners meet with among those of whom better things might have been expected.

5. In the *last* place, I suspect that they regard sin in the heart, who are backward to bring themselves to the trial, and who are not truly willing that God himself would search and try them. Sin often lurks secretly, and in disguise. He is a stranger to religion, who does not know this from experience. Hear the language of the psalmist, Psal. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." Psal. cxxxix. 23. 24. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

If any, therefore, are unwilling to be tried, if they are backward to self-examination, it is an evidence of a strong and powerful attachment to sin. It can proceed from nothing but from a secret dread of some disagreeable discovery, of the detection of some lust, which they cannot consent to forsake. The force of conscience is such, that some deception is necessary to keep the finner in peace with

himself. Too much light would either debar him from his delights, or poison the enjoyment of them. This is strongly described by our Saviour, John, iii. 20. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."

WE proceed now to the *second* thing propos'd, which was to show, what is to be understood by God's not hearing those who regard iniquity in their hearts. This expression of God's not hearing them, may be considered very generally, as signifying that they are not, nor while they continue in that temper can be, the objects of his favour; he will not remember them with the love which he beareth to his chosen. But as the expression is used in some particular and distinct significations in scripture, which will merit our attention, I shall briefly mention the chief of them, which seem to be the four following.

1. He will not hear them, when they cry to him for deliverance from affliction. I take this to be at least one thing, if not the main thing, intended by the psalmist in the passage where the text lies. After giving praise to God for a signal deliverance, he draws this comfortable conclusion from it: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me: he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." It is one of the characters, as well as one of the privileges, of the children of God, that they fly to him as their refuge in distress; and he hath given his gracious promise, that he will hear them in mercy: Psal.

xcii. 15. "He shall call upon me; and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honour him." Psa. l. 15. "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." But those who regard iniquity in their hearts, have no reason to expect that God will hear them in this sense. They are liable to the calamities of human life; they are liable to the strokes of God's righteous providence: but they have no title to go to him for relief. Every affliction carries in it the severity of a judge, without any mixture of the mercy of a father. It is true, that wicked men do sometimes cry to God in distress, but not in the spirit of his children; and, as we learn from this passage, their prayers do not find acceptance with him.

There are three different objects of desire to a good man, while in affliction: the divine presence to support him under it; the sanctified use of it for the improvement of the spiritual life; and, in due time, complete deliverance from it. The two first, he that regards iniquity in his heart will hardly ask; and the last he shall not be able to obtain. The prayer of one unacquainted with God, is little better than the howling of despair and terror, without any mixture of filial confidence. Hosea, vii. 14. "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." As to the sanctified use of their sufferings, they neither ask nor receive it; on the contrary, they are commonly made worse by their sufferings, as earthen vessels are but hardened in the fire. And as to deliverance from suffering, they shall never

obtain more than perhaps a temporary suspension of outward strokes, till they fill up the measure of their iniquities, and be ripe for final destruction.

I cannot help just hinting in this place, that when God visits his children's faults with rods, and their sins with chastisements, till they forsake their sins by true repentance, he will not hear them. If they have departed from the paths of truth and righteousness, if they have taken of the accursed thing which was between him and them, there cannot be peace: *Isaiah, lix. 1.* "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." The very intention of affliction to the children of God, is to separate them from sin, and it must continue till it produces its effect. What he says of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in general, is but an emblem of the manner in which he will treat every particular person of the true Israel: *Isaiah i. 25.* "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin."

2. He will not hear them, when they intercede for others. It is in this sense that the word is used in the gospel according to *John, ch. ix. 31.* "Now, we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." We are expressly taught by the apostle *James*, that it is the prayer of faith, and the prayer of the righteous, that hath power with God: *James v. 15. 16.* "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another,

and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." I am sensible, my brethren, that this will seem of very little moment to many, or probably to the greatest part, of those who regard iniquity in their hearts. Not much accustomed to the exercise of prayer for themselves, it will make but a light impression on them, to be told that they will not be heard in their intercession for others. The truth is, many, if they would attend to it, carry their own condemnation in themselves, from this very circumstance. Conscious that they have little interest at the throne of grace, they seldom think of employing it at all. But considering that there is scarcely any person wholly unrelated to others, and that many have occasion, from time to time, to see those to whom they are united by the most tender ties, lying under the pressure of affliction, it ought to cover them with confusion, that they know not what it is to look to God, as the hearer of prayer, and to lend that help which they may shortly require. When we see one member of a family lying under the rod, and a profane husband or wife, parent or child, standing by in hopeless distress and prayerless tears, it is hard to say which of the two is the greater object of distress.

And what an incitement should it be to those who are often called to the duty of intercession, either from their office or their character, to walk circumspectly, that they may not mar their confidence in God. Let them guard with double diligence against any thing that is provoking to God.

Let them strive to keep clear their interest in his favour, lest they should at once wound their peace and destroy their usefulness; for if they regard iniquity in their heart, the Lord will not hear them.

3. He will not hear them, when they draw near to him in worship. This also is often the meaning of the expression in scripture, Isaiah, i. 14. 15. "Your new moons, and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." There are many other passages to the same purpose, particularly that of Solomon, Prov. xv. 8. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The psalmist was so sensible of this, that he says, Psal. v. 4. 5. 6. 7. "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

This ought to make a deep and serious impression on your minds. There are but too many who, though they live in the practice of sin, and regard iniquity in their hearts, do yet continue their outward attendance on the ordinances of divine institution, and at stated times lay hold of the seals of

God's covenant. Shall they find any acceptance with him? No. He counts it a profane mockery; he counts it a sacrilegious usurpation, Psalm 1. 16. 17. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." Shall they have any comfort in it? No, unless in so far as in righteous judgement he suffers them to be deceived; and they are deceived, and most unhappy they who lie longest under the delusion: Psalm 1. 21. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." Shall they have any benefit by it? No, instead of appeasing his wrath, it provokes his vengeance. Instead of enlightening their minds, it blinds their eyes. Instead of sanctifying their nature, it hardens their hearts. See a description of those who had been long favoured with outward privileges, and gloried in them, John, xii. 39. 40. "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." So that nothing is more essential to an acceptable approach to God, in the duties of his worship in general, and particularly to receiving the seals of his covenant, than a thorough and universal separation from all known sin: Job, xi. 13. 14. "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him; if ini-

quity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles."

4. He will not hear them, when they cry for mercy at last. Sooner or later the sinner's eyes will be opened. Sooner or later he shall be convinced of the folly of his miserable choice. Many of those who regard iniquity in their hearts, sleep in security, and flatter themselves with mistaken hopes; but, Gal. vi. 7. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." From the account given by our Saviour, it would appear that the final sentence shall, in many instances, be matter of surprise as well as terror to the sinner: Matth. vii. 22. 23. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Nay, perhaps we may say, that to some the day of God's mercy may be over before the close of life; and they may find no place for repentance, though they may seek it carefully, and with tears. Not but that wherever there is true penitence, even at the eleventh hour, forgiveness will be the effect; but we may justly suppose that there may be a despairing cry for mercy, from the apprehensions of impending judgment, without any thorough conviction of sin. The reception that such will meet with, and the reason upon which it is founded, is represented in the strongest language, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have

stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: 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."

I PROCEED now to make some practical improvement of this subject, for your instruction and direction. And,

I. Suffer me to speak a little to those who live in the open habitual practice of gross sin. It grieves me to think, my brethren, that any such should be found or supposed in this worshipping assembly. It distresses me still more, to think that any such should have the presumption to ask, or the art to obtain permission, and the dreadful hardness to sit down at the Lord's table. I shall describe you, not by your names, which are known to men, but your characters and hearts, which are open before God. Swearers and profaners of Jehovah's name, despisers of his Sabbaths, scorers of sacred things, neglecters of prayer, sons of violence, midnight rioters, beastly drunkards, unclean fornicators, takers and holders of unjust gain, liars and slanderers, hard-hearted oppressors, and whosoever liveth under the dominion of known sin. Is the nature of God so holy, is his law so spiritual, is his judgement so severe, that those who but regard iniquity in their hearts shall inevitably perish? then how shall you

escape the damnation of hell? Is memory so unfaithful, as not now to bring your sins to remembrance? Is conscience so feared as not to charge you with the guilt? Can you doubt of the being, do you not feel the presence, do you not fear the judgement of God? "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God; for Tophet is ordained of old," &c.

O that it would please God, by his omnipotent grace, to reach your hearts, to shake your confidence, to humble you to the dust! I call God to record, that you have received warning. I know that you may despise it; I am afraid that many will do so. Away to your cups, away to the blessed stage, that dear friend to virtue; away to your merry, social life, drink confusion to your preachers, and pour forth every term of reproach that your little wit can suggest, against these poor priest-ridden creatures, who are afraid of their minister's reproof. Alas, alas! when the king of terrors, on his pale horse, shall make his approach, you will be of another mind, unless perhaps, as it often happens, you meet with a sudden call, an immediate translation from the fire of lust to the fire of hell.

2. Let me intreat you, my dear brethren, from what has been said, to search and try yourselves, whether you regard iniquity in your hearts, or not. This is the rather necessary, as you have in view an immediate and solemn appeal to God, that you are sincere in his covenant. Does the fear of the Lord possess you in secret, as well as in public? Are you willing that it should be so? Is it your

daily study, and is it the subject of your daily prayer, to have a deeper and more lively impression of his presence upon your spirits? Is it truly matter of comfort to you, when you are delivered from the fear of human censure, or desire of human approbation? Have you ever got above both in your experience, and do you not wish to maintain the superiority? If it is so, happy, happy are ye indeed! and may the Lord himself lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Do you know what it is to mourn over secret sins, the vanity of your minds, the worldliness of your affections? And do you truly make conscience of keeping the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life? I will not ask, because I know you cannot deny, that you have had many sinful thoughts, in breach of every command of God. But are they approved or abhorred? are they submitted to, or resisted? are they now recollected with pleasure, with indifference, or with shame?

What are your thoughts with regard to the sins of others? Have you ever grieved for them in truth? Do not think that I am leading you to ostentation. I do not ask you whether you have openly testified against them, or honestly reproved them; because, though these are both important and binding duties, they may be more easily counterfeited; and I am not now pressing you to the discharge of your duty to others, but trying your sincerity before God. Have you, therefore, mourned in secret for the sins of others? have they ever brought you to your knees? have they added fervour to your prayers?

If it be so, I cannot think that you regard iniquity in your own hearts. This is no pharisaical hypocrisy. It is known only to God. The profane cannot curse you for it, because they do not hear it : and if they were told it, it is probable they would not believe it.

But methinks I hear some serious person say, ‘ I have attended to the interrogatories ; and though I would fain hope I know something of a sense of duty in all, yet, O ! how miserably defective have I been ? Nothing like that deep sense of the presence of God, that humiliation of spirit for sin, that concern for the divine glory, that I ought to have had, that I have sometimes felt for a season, and that I wished to preserve.’

Therefore, my brethren, I would once more ask you, Can you now sincerely pray that God would search and try your ways, discover every secret sin, convince you of it, humble you for it, and deliver you from it ? Is there no reserve, no exception whatever, nothing that you are willing to cover, that you are backward to examine, and disposed to excuse ? Is there no doubtful practice, but what you are willing to think of deliberately, to examine impartially, and if it either appears to be sinful, or but remaineth doubtful, to surrender freely ? If you can say there is not, then, after having pleaded your divorce from every sin, I have only further to rob you of every duty too, and leave you nothing whereof to glory ; to call you to renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and make you to say, “ Not I, but the grace of God that was with me : surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.”

3. I shall now shut up this discourse with giving you a very few directions for your future preservation.

(1.) Guard against the sin or sins that you may be most liable to, from your natural temper and constitution, which may be said to be your own iniquity, and the sin that most easily besets you. It is lamentable to think what disgraceful blemishes are sometimes to be seen in the conduct of the servants of God. I know this is permitted in providence, and cannot be wholly prevented. But no watchful Christian will sit still easily under it. If such a sin gives him no rest, he should give it no quarter. Some very bad things are sometimes borne with, under the notion of unavoidable infirmities. Yet they are to the prejudice of your own peace; they are a reproach to your profession, and a dishonour to your Master. If you cannot wholly destroy, I beseech you wound and weaken them. If there is no probability that they will die wholly, but with the body, let it be seen that they are daily losing strength, and dying gradually.

(2.) Set a particular guard upon those sins that you may be opposed to, in your ordinary calling: in that way, where you go most frequently, the tempter knows he can most easily find you, and he will certainly be there to meet you. Besides, interest often pleads so strongly in behalf of some sins of this kind, and they are so much justified by example, that few can withstand the temptation. But consider, I beseech you, that no honour, profit, or convenience, can possibly counterbalance the loss of God's favour! What a miserable excellency is it,

indeed, to add a little to our earthly store at the expence of his displeasure, while we ourselves are in his hand, and all that we have is in the most absolute manner at his disposal!

In the *last* place, If you desire to be preserved from the dominion of sin, seat yourselves often in the presence of God. He seeth in secret, his eyes do see, his eye-lids try the children of men. Ask of him, therefore, that he may not suffer you to deceive yourselves, but lead you in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

S E R M O N XV.

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST.

Preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating
Christian Knowledge, in the High Church of Edinburgh,
on Monday, January 2. 1758.

ACTS, iv. 12.

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is
none other name given under heaven among men
whereby we must be saved.*

IT is not easy to conceive any subject at once
more important in itself, more seasonable in
this age, and more suited to the design of the pre-
sent meeting, than the absolute necessity of salva-
tion through Christ. We live in an age in which
(as is often complained) infidelity greatly prevails;
but yet in which the cause of truth hath much less
to fear from the assaults of its open enemies, than
from the treachery of its pretended advocates. The
latest infidel writers have carried their own scheme
to such perfection or extravagance, that it must dis-

credit the cause in the eye of every sober judge.* And indeed the gospel can scarcely receive a greater injury, than when any professing attachment to it, condescend to enter the lists with such absurdities, or give ground of suspicion that they stand in need of a serious refutation.

But there is another quarter from which we have much greater reason to apprehend danger, viz. that class of men, who, being nominal Christians, disguise or alter the gospel, in order to defend it. These often endeavour to give such views of Christianity, as will render it palatable to a corrupt worldly mind; and, instead of abasing, will sooth and gratify the pride of man. Hence the unnatural mixture often to be seen of modern philosophy with ancient Christianity. Hence the fundamental doctrines of the gospel are softened, concealed, or denied; as, the lost and guilty state of man by nature, his liability to everlasting misery, and the necessity of that satisfaction and ransom which was paid by our Re-

* See David Hume's writings on morals throughout; where, besides leaving out entirely our duty to God, which he hath, in common with many other late writers, he expressly founds justice upon power and conveniency, derides chastity, and turns many of the most important virtues into vices. See also *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*; the author of which, at one decisive blow, takes away all sin, by founding virtue on a delusive feeling. These writings are far from being hurtful in proportion to the intention of their authors: for though the principles contained in them are often retailed in conversation, yet it is only by way of amusement, on account of their boldness or novelty, not one in an hundred appearing to have any serious conviction of their truth.

deemer when he died on the cross. Instead of these, are we not many times presented with a character of Christ as a teacher only, and not a Saviour; as one excellently qualified to reform the abuses that had somehow or other crept into the world, but the real source of which is hardly confessed, and never willingly brought into view? Is not our blessed Redeemer thereby put on a level, and expressly classed with mortal reformers? Perhaps, indeed, a small compliment of superiority is paid him; which, however, there is reason to suspect arises more from a prudent compliance with established faith, than from any inward and cordial esteem.

What could be reasonably expected as the effect of such conduct? No other than we find by experience hath actually taken place, that a cause so ill defended must daily lose ground. The nearer Christianity is brought to the principles of infidels to solicit their esteem, the less occasion will they see for it at all; and when it is perverted from its original purpose, it can expect no countenance from its real author. The truth is, if there be no more in the gospel than many by their language and writings would lead us to conceive, it is of small consequence whether it be embraced or not; and there can be little merit in a society who have this as the design of their union, to spread and propagate Christian knowledge. But very different are the sentiments expressed by the apostle Peter in the text; where, speaking of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, he says, "Neither is there salvation in any

other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

I am sensible, there are some of the very persons hinted at above, who endeavour to explain away this text, and give it a very different meaning from that in which you will easily perceive I understand it. They make salvation to refer to the cure recorded in the preceding chapter, wrought upon the lame man! as if the apostle had said, "Neither is there a power of healing in any other," &c. This is but one instance among many of the force and constraint they put upon scripture, in order to accommodate it to their own sentiments. I shall not waste your time by a tedious refutation of this criticism, as the sense I affix to the words will be sufficiently supported by what shall follow on the subject. They appear to me plainly to affirm, that there is no other way by which sinners of mankind can escape everlasting misery, but through Christ.

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, through divine assistance,

I. After a little illustrating the meaning of the assertion, to establish and confirm its truth from the word of God.

II. To make a few reflections on this scheme, and shew, that it is not only most self-consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts of scripture, as well as to the visible state of the world; and therefore that those who, in reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any measure, do thereby betray the cause which they profess to support.

III. I shall make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I RETURN to the *first* of these.

And as to the meaning of the assertion, the word *saving*, or *salvation*, evidently supposes a state of misery from which our deliverance must be wrought; and therefore no more than the full meaning of the passage is expressed in what follows, That all the posterity of Adam are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; alienated in heart from the love of God, and exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure. That they have not only access to salvation through Christ, but that in this work he hath no rival; it is his, exclusive of all others: so that no man, whatever be his character, or whatever be his hope, shall enter into rest, unless he be reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ.

Now, that all mankind are by nature in a state of guilt and condemnation, is evident from the whole strain of the holy scriptures. This originally constituted the necessity of a Saviour, and alone illustrates the love and mercy of God in the appearance of his Son in our nature. Unless this is supposed, the whole dispensations of the grace of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New, lose their beauty, and lose their meaning; nay, and would be justly esteemed foolishness, as they are in fact by all who see not this foundation upon which they are built. As our first parents, and the earth for their sakes, were laid under a curse immediately after the original transgression; so the effects of this apostacy on their posterity are amply declared in scripture. We have this repeated testimony from God himself concerning the old world: Gen. vi. 5. "And God saw that the wickedness

of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And again, Gen. viii. 21. "And the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

The rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation also, together with the whole history of providence contained in the Old Testament, suppose the guilt and impurity of our nature. But the gospel, as it is in all respects a clearer dispensation than the former, so it is most full and expresses upon this subject. Instead of enumerating many passages, we may consult the epistle of the apostle Paul to the Romans, where there is a distinct and laboured illustration of the guilt and apostacy of all mankind; towards the conclusion of which he thus expresses himself, Rom. iii. 9.—12. "For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one." And a little after, Rom. iii. 19. "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." To this I shall only add one passage from the same apostle: Eph. ii. 3. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

That the same scriptures point out to us one only remedy for this our misery, is equally evident. Christ Jesus was promised to our first parents under the designation of the seed of the woman, who should bruise the head of the serpent. He is afterwards promised to Abraham as his seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; to Jacob as Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be. He is pointed out by Moses as the great Prophet that should come into the world. And unless we suppose a typical reference to Christ in the legal washings, sacrifices, and other services, they will appear altogether unworthy of God, and altogether insufficient for the purposes for which they were used. This indeed is affirmed by the apostle to the Hebrews, Heb. x. 4. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." In the later prophets, there are many distinct and particular, many high and magnificent descriptions of the glory of Christ's person, and the greatness of his work. The attention and expectation of every believer is directed to him; and he is styled, Hag. ii. 6. "The desire of all nations."

And in the New Testament, at his conception it is said, Matth. i. 21. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." At his entrance on his public ministry, he is thus designated by John the Baptist, John, i. 29. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The great design of his appearing in our nature, is declared in many passages of scripture. And as salvation is promised to those who

believe, so the condemnation of all unbelievers is necessarily implied as its counterpart, and often expressly affirmed. Thus the apostle John represents our Saviour himself as teaching, John, iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not PERISH, but have everlasting life." And when he gave commission to his disciples to preach the gospel, it was in these terms: Mark, xvi. 15. 16. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." The very meaning of the word *gospel* is glad tidings; importing not only the great, but the distinguishing happiness of those who hear the message, and comply with the call. The apostles, who spread these glad tidings through the world, considered themselves as bringing salvation to those who before sat in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death. And by the following description given by the apostle Paul of the state of the Ephesians before conversion, may be seen what view he had of the condition of all who knew not God, as well as who believed not the gospel, Eph. ii. 12. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." From the above summary, I hope it clearly appears, that, according to the scriptures, there is no salvation in any other than in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

It will, however, be proper, for the further illustration of this subject, to consider a little to what this doctrine stands opposed. And though it is impossible distinctly to enumerate every thing that may in some shape or other be put in Christ's room, or attempt to rob him of his glory as a Saviour; yet, in general, they may all be reduced to the two following heads: *1st*, False religions, and uninitiated rites; *2dly*, Self-righteousness, or the merit of our own defective obedience to the moral law. It is necessary to consider each of these by itself, and to state the bounds between them: for however little relation they may seem to have one to another, they are often mingled together in our apprehensions, and mutually support and strengthen each other's cause.

In the *first* place, then, All worship of false gods, holding for truth what hath not the stamp of divine authority, and all uncommanded worship, be the object of it what it will, is wholly ineffectual to salvation: nay, so far is any thing of this kind from being sufficient to supplant, or proper to co-operate with what Christ hath done, that it is detestable in the sight of God. Perhaps it may be thought, that this is of small moment, and wholly unworthy of notice; as in these days few or none will so much as pretend, except in jest, to lay any stress upon fabulous deities, or superstitious practices of human invention. But I did not choose to omit it, because it appears to me a thing peculiarly insisted on in the holy scriptures, which contain nothing unnecessary. It is also very much the ob-

ject of the repentment of infidels.* At the same time, many pretended Christians have, by design or inadvertence, spoken too much the language of infidels on this subject, or on subjects nearly related to it.

How much stress the scriptures lay upon the knowledge of the true God, nay, how pernicious and destructive all false religions are, it were easy to shew at great length; but a few hints will suffice, as it is not a point controverted, so much as neglected and forgotten. The very first commandment of the moral law is, *Exod. xx. 3.* "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the second, which forbids uninstituted worship, hath this strong sanction, *Exod. xx. 5.* "For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Through the whole Old Testament, the idolatry and false worship of the heathens is represented as highly criminal in them, and an abomination in the sight of God. It is there considered not as a small part, but as the first and most provoking of their enormities; and, in particular, is assigned as the ground of the utter extirpation of the nations of **Canaan**. In a perfect consistency with which, in the charge brought against them by the apostle

* It is very remarkable, that though infidels always set out on pretence of searching impartially after truth; yet they have unanimously agreed in putting truth and error entirely upon the same footing, both as to worth and influence.

Paul, this is the leading part or ground-work of the whole, Rom. i. 21. "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Ver. 23. "And changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

The great end also of the separation of the children of Israel, and their being kept from intercourse with other nations, was, that they might be preserved from idolatry. To the worship of the true God their blessings are promised, and against defection from his service to other gods the heaviest curses are denounced. Thus, after an enumeration of the blessings that should attend them if they kept God's commandments, it is said, Deut. xxviii. 14. "And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words that I command thee this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them." And when they stood before the Lord, to enter into his covenant, it is said, Deut. xxix. 16. 17. 18. "For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the nations which ye passed by. And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them. Lest there should be among you, man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of the nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." The

same thing may be seen running through the whole of the prophetic writings. Almost every judgment of God, threatened or inflicted, is ascribed to their idolatry as its cause. I only mention one passage, not for any thing particular in it, but as a sufficient specimen of the whole. It is a message from God by Ezekiel to the children of Israel: Ezek. xiv. 6. 7. 8. "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself, and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

In the very same manner, in the New Testament, embracing the gospel of Christ, and continuing stedfast in the faith, is required as absolutely necessary to salvation: John, iii. 36. "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The importance of holding the truth without mixture, is plainly declared in the following passage: James, v. 19. 20. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his ways, shall

save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

It had been easy to have given a much larger proof of this from scripture; but it is unnecessary, for our enemies themselves confess it, nay, object it as a ground of reproach. How many invectives have we from infidel writers against the unpeaceable, unsocial spirit of the Jewish first, and afterwards of the Christian religion! And how often are these contrasted with the mild and associating temper of the Heathen worshippers! Among them it implied no absurdity, that different nations should have different gods, and different forms of worship; nay, they often intermixed, compounded, and mutually adopted each other's worship. The Athenians, that wise people, were so prone to receive every foreign rite, that they got this character from an ancient writer, (whether by way of encomium, indeed, or satire, is at this distance uncertain), that they were hospitable to the gods. According to the sentiments of modern unbelievers, they would deserve much praise for this; but according to the sentiments of an inspired apostle, “professing themselves wise, they became fools.”

In this, then, it is acknowledged, that the gospel of our salvation essentially differs from every human invention; that it constantly represents itself as THE TRUTH, and all things opposite to it as false, dishonourable to God, and unprofitable to men. This has been the case in every step of its progress, from its rise in the comparative obscurity of the original promise, through all the preparatory discoveries of succeeding ages, to its complete manifestation in

the fulness of time. And though it has been exposed on this account to the virulent reproaches of men of corrupt minds, it is but so much the more credible, and appears to be from the one only, the living, unchangeable, and true God.*

It may be proper here to observe, that it is either the same objection assuming a different form, or one very much like it, when it is alledged against the gospel, That it lays too much stress upon mere belief of the truth. To this some have, perhaps by mistaking the true spring of the objection, given a very wrong and dangerous answer. They deny the fact, that the gospel does lay too much, or any stress at all upon bare belief, separate from goodness of life. The danger of this answer does not lie in its being false, but in its being ambiguous, incomplete, and in a great measure improper. It seems to allow, at least not to deny, that there may be sincere belief, while yet it is not attended with its proper fruits. Thus, unbelievers, whose real quarrel is with the alledged importance and efficacy of the truth, are hardened in their indifference and disregard to it; whereas they ought to be taught to consider the principles which are productive of real reformation, as more excellent in themselves, as both necessary and effectual for this purpose.

The gospel does indeed lay great stress upon belief of the truth, not without, but as the only way of producing holiness. Many passages may be cited from the Old Testament, in which going

* See this subject handled with great clearness and precision, by Dr Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*

after false gods, and committing other gross crimes, are represented as inseparable branches of the same character; and worshipping and serving the true God, as a summary description of universal obedience. See Deut. xxix. 18. 19. Numb. xxv. 1. 2. And many passages may be produced from the New Testament, in which the good effects of the truth, and the misery of departing from it, as necessarily implying an un sanctified state, are declared. See John, viii. 31. 32. xvii. 17. 2 John, ver. 4. Col. i. 5. 6. From all this I conclude, that Christ Jesus, the promise of old made unto the fathers, the hope of Israel, the light of the world, and the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, is the only Saviour of sinners, in opposition to all false religions, and every uninstituted rite; as he himself says, John, xiv. 6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

But, *2dly*, Christ is the only Saviour, in opposition to the merit of our own obedience to the moral law. I know, some will be ready to suppose, that though false religion and uninstituted rites may have no positive influence in procuring salvation to those who embrace them, yet they may not hinder their acceptance with God by virtue of their own personal merit and obedience. On this subject there are many things which deserve a more particular and distinct consideration than there is room for at present; such as, 1. That all false religion is not merely unprofitable, but highly criminal in the sight of God. Thus the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. x. 20. "But I say, That the things which the Gentiles sa-

crifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God : and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." 2. That all who embrace not the truth as it is in Jesus, must neglect the whole duties of the first table of the moral law, and so their obedience be not only greatly, but essentially defective. 3. That the Scriptures give us no ground to believe, that false principles can produce any virtue but what is spurious. But instead of insisting upon these at present, I shall only attempt to shew, that the scriptures exclude all human merit, and indeed seem to have it as their express purpose, to stain the pride of all human glory ; and, therefore, that no pretence of this kind can possibly be admitted.

And here I shall wholly pass the sacrifices of atonement under the Mosaic dispensation, because they all pointed at the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross ; and therefore, in the account given of the end and destination of this last, we may expect the clearest view of the grounds of our acceptance with God. Now, Christ appears in scripture as " the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world : " as " giving his life " for his people ; as " bearing their sins in his own body on the tree." And indeed every expression is used that could well be imagined to signify a propitiatory sacrifice, an atonement for sin, or the punishment of an innocent person in the room and stead of the guilty. If this was necessary for any, it was necessary for all ; and there is not the least intimation given in scripture of any distinction, or hint, as if there were any persons with regard to whom it was superfluous. Nothing, therefore, can stand more di-

rectly opposed to the design of the gospel, than any plea of merit in man: and none do in fact receive it with more disdain, than those who trust in themselves that they are righteous.

But, for our satisfaction on this point, we need only consult the epistle to the Romans, before referred to, as there is no part of the sacred writings where there is a more full and connected account of the foundation of the gospel. There, after proving that all the world are become guilty before God, the apostle says, Rom. iii. 20. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Ver. 24. 25. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." And again, ch. v. 18. "Therefore, as by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life." Consonant to this is the doctrine of the same apostle elsewhere: Phil. iii. 8. 9. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*."

* See also Rom. iv. 23.—25. Tit. iii. 5.

I am not insensible, that great pains have been taken, even by some Christians, to evade the force of these passages of scripture, which exclude the merit of man's obedience from any share in his justification before God. Particularly the passages from the epistle to the Romans are evaded, by alledging, that the law, and the works of the law, there, mean only the rites of the Mosaic dispensation. This is not a proper time and place for entering fully into that controversy; and therefore I shall only observe, that, besides the correspondence of the above interpretation with all the other parts of scripture, it may be sufficiently supported by this one consideration, That the apostle, who is speaking both of Jews and Gentiles, expressly states the opposition with respect to our justification between grace and debt, and excludes every thing that might make it of debt: Rom. iii. 27. 28. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith, Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." And to the same purpose, a little after, Rom. iv. 4. 5. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Whatever would make our acceptance with God not free, or not of grace, is here excluded *. Now, certainly, as there

* It is easy to foresee, that a grand objection against what is said on this head will be, That it is going upon a very narrow scheme, and a scheme very uncharitable to many parties of Christians. It is the fashionable language

is a much more plausible plea of merit in favour of works of obedience to the moral, than to the ceremonial law ; the first are at least as much excluded as the last by the apostle's reasoning.

of the age, to give large encomiums upon charity, when the design is to level truth and falsehood ; and to alledge, either that there is little difference between them as to their effects, or that they cannot be distinguished from one another by their proper marks. This is a subject that needs as much to be set in a proper light, as any I know. If the sense in which charity in sentiment is commonly understood, viz. a favourable judgement of the opinions of others, be the scripture-meaning of it, then certainly some bounds must be set to it ; and it must be praise or blame worthy, according to the cases in which it is exercised. I must needs take it for granted, that there are some fundamental errors, and that it is possible to make shipwreck of the faith. Now, however common or fashionable it may be, to think the farther charity is extended the better, it may be demonstrated, that a favourable judgement of errors fundamental, or destructive of religion, doth necessarily imply either a light esteem or weak persuasion of the truth, or both. This surely is no part of a truly Christian character ; and if it be rightly denominated charity, it is become vicious by excess. I confess it appears to me, that justification by free grace is a fundamental doctrine of the gospel. If this be true, I am not wrong in having the deepest sense of the danger of contrary opinions : nay, if I am mistaken, the consequences I draw from it are no breaches of charity, but the necessary effects of an error in judgement ; and so I claim charity in my turn from my adversaries upon their own principles.

But I am persuaded the above is not the meaning of the word charity in scripture, but that it means an ardent and unfeigned love to others, and a desire of their welfare, temporal and eternal ; and may very well consist with the strongest abhorrence of their wicked principles. We do

Thus I have endeavoured both to explain and confirm the assertion in the text, That there is no salvation in any other but in Christ. There is, however, one question upon it which I would willingly pass over in silence, but that the omission of it might, to some intelligent hearers, weaken the conclusion, and make them reckon the subject incompletely handled. The question is, Whether an objective revelation and explicit discovery of Christ, and what he hath wrought, is necessary to salvation? or, if his undertaking may not be the ground of acceptance for many who never heard of his name? In support of the last of these it is said, That many of the ancient patriarchs and prophets were far from having distinct views of the person,

find indeed in scripture many charges, not to judge one another, mutually to forbear one another in things indifferent, and not to suppose that men's outward actions proceed from a bad principle, which they do not profess. But this is never called charity; and it is, by the reasoning on it, expressly limited to the things really indifferent in their nature. (See the 14th and 15th chapters of the epistle to the Romans.) Perhaps it will be said, Some may judge things to be necessary, which in truth are but indifferent. This cannot be denied; but there is no help for it. It is a consequence of the imperfection of human nature. Yet still every man must judge for himself, and must distinguish between things indifferent and necessary, in the best manner he can. It is very remarkable, that the apostle John, who speaks most of the importance of charity and mutual love, hath also perhaps the strongest expressions of any on the hatefulness and danger of error. Thus he says in his second epistle, ver. 10. 11. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."

character and work of Christ ; and if (as all suppose) his undertaking was available for their acceptance, why not of others also ? On such a question, no doubt, modesty and caution is highly commendable ; and perhaps it were wise in some respects to suspend the determination altogether. But there are cases in which it comes necessarily to be considered : for instance, I do not see how it can be avoided, in speaking of the importance or necessity of propagating the gospel among the nations that know not God.

We may therefore observe, that the only just foundation of our hope in God, either for ourselves or others, especially as sinners, is his promise. The first of these ought to be precisely commensurate to the last. In so far as it is defective, or falls short of this measure, we are chargeable with unbelief ; and in so far as it exceeds, with presumption. Now, to whomsoever the true God is revealed in any measure, as merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin ; however obscurely he points out the meritorious cause of pardon, if they believe his word, and accept of his mercy, they shall be saved ; as we are told, Rom. iv. 3. “ Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.” As to any others, if they are in absolute ignorance of the true God, we must say, that there doth not appear from scripture any ground on which to affirm, that the efficacy of Christ’s death extends to them : on the contrary, we are expressly told, that “ they have no hope*.”

* See the forecited passage, Eph. ii. 12.

We find indeed in scripture, that the display of divine perfection in the works of creation, and the conduct of Providence, is represented as rendering the heathens inexcusable in their contempt and neglect of God: Acts, xiv. 17. "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Rom. i. 19. 20. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Should any desire from these passages to infer, that if any of them made a just and dutiful use of these natural notices of God, he would not frustrate their search, but would lead them to the saving knowledge of himself, I have nothing to object against the general position; but I am afraid it will be difficult to make any other legitimate use of this concession than the apostle has made already, that "they are without excuse" in their estrangement from God. One thing more we are authorized from scripture to say, that their guilt is in proportion to their means of knowledge; that they continue in their natural state, and are not chargeable with the sin of rejecting the gospel which they never heard: Rom. ii. 12. "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law."

I PROCEED now to the *second* thing proposed, which was, To make a few reflections on this scheme; and shew, that it is not only most self-consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts of scripture, as well as to the visible state of the world; and therefore that those who, in reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any measure, do thereby betray the cause which they profess to support.

We have many proofs of the ingenuity and art of persons under the power of prejudice, in evading the force, or wresting the meaning of particular texts of scripture; and therefore it must serve much for the confirmation of any doctrine, that it is not only supported by express passages, but agreeable to the strain and spirit of the whole. That this is the case with the doctrine in question, I might shew at great length: at present I content myself with the few following reflections.—

I. There is nothing more frequently or more undeniably found in scripture, than a celebration of the rich mercy and free grace of God in Christ Jesus, in such language as will scarce accord with any other plan than that which I have above endeavoured to explain and support. It has been a remark frequently made, of the justice of which every serious peruser of the sacred writings will be sensible, that the inspired penmen seem, as it were, to be raised and elevated above their ordinary pitch when they are on this theme, and that both in the Old and New Testament. Wherever there is a striking passage in the poetic or prophetic writings, containing sentiments of the most rapturous joy, or most ardent gratitude, there, we may be sure, is a prophecy

of Christ. See the psalmist David often thus distinguishing himself, particularly in the following passage: Psal. lxxii. 17. 18. 19. "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen."

The apostle Paul also, not only when expressly handling the subject, but even when he accidentally meets with it in the illustration of another argument, seems to fire at the thought, and either expatiates upon it with a profusion of eloquence and energy of expression, or collects, as it were, his whole force, and surprises us more, by dispatching it at one single masterly stroke*.

Now, I would ask, Why so many encomiums on the mercy and grace of God in pardoning sinners through Christ, if his undertaking had not been absolutely necessary for their recovery? Whence could arise so deep an obligation to gratitude, if our state had not been absolutely deplorable, or if relief could have been obtained from any other quarter? There must surely be a great impropriety in the scripture-language on this subject, when used by some persons agreeable to their other sentiments. And indeed their being very sparing of this language, avoiding it as much as possible, and dwelling with most pleasure on different themes,

* See an instance of the first of these, Eph. iii. 17.; and of the last, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

is a tacit confession and acknowledgement of this truth.

But, besides the mercy of God to the world in general, in sending his Son to redeem us who were fold under sin, we find in scripture many strong declarations of the infinite mercy of God, in sending the tidings of salvation to those who were ignorant of them before. This appears from several of the passages formerly cited, and many more that might be added. I only mention one of the apostle Paul, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: Acts, xxviii. 28. "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." Now, what is meant by this? Were these Gentiles in a way of salvation before? and what benefit did they reap from this intelligence? If it be said, that they were comparatively in a more advantageous situation than before; this, when strictly examined, will be found to draw after it all the consequences so disagreeable to the pride of man, for which the other supposition is rejected. Or rather, when their comparative advantages are carried so far as to give any thing like a consistent meaning to the above and other passages of scripture, it will amount entirely to the same thing. For I hope no Christian will assert, that any person in the world, who hath the exercise of reason, is under a natural, but only a moral impossibility *, of co-

* I use the words Natural and Moral impossibility in the sense in which they are used by the authors who first applied that distinction to subjects of philosophy and divinity, and not in the absurd sense in which some late infidel writers do obstinately persist in using them. These gentlemen.

ming to the knowledge, and doing the will of God. If the first were the case, it would take away all sin; but the last is only such an obstinate disinclination, as is still consistent with guilt and blame.

Another reflection we may make on this subject, That, according to the constant tenor of the holy scripture, not only an offer of mercy for Christ's sake must be made to the sinner, but a change must be wrought on his heart and temper, so great as to be termed a New Creation, and a Second Birth. The first of these is an act of the divine government, the last is a work of divine power. Now, I would beg leave to ask, How and where is this to be expected? It cannot surely proceed from the influence of fabulous deities, or be the effect of idolatrous rites. It is not the work of man, and therefore only of the Spirit of Christ. Should any think fit to presume, that the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost are bestowed universally, though unknown to the receivers; this again annihilates all the superior advantages of Christians; and, on the very best possible supposition, is an assertion

instead of meaning, by Natural or Physical necessity or impossibility, that which arises from the irresistible operation of the laws of nature, and by Moral, a high degree of probability from concurring circumstances, tell us, that Physical necessity is what arises from the laws of matter; and Moral, that which arises from the laws of mind or spirit. But nothing can be more evident, than that any influence from without upon mind or spirit, if it be irresistible, is as much physical or natural necessity as any other. And the distinction thus explained, or perverted, is utterly useless, when applied to morals.

thrown out at random, and altogether destitute of support from the oracles of truth.

A third observation I would make, That this scheme alone makes the foundation of the gospel sufficient to bear the superstructure. Nothing else can sufficiently account for the cost and expence, if I may speak so, that have been laid out in the redemption of man. It is very evident, that both the prophets in the Old Testament, and the apostles in the New, are at great pains to give us a view of the glory and dignity of the PERSON of CHRIST. With what magnificent titles is he adorned! What glorious attributes are ascribed to him! And what mighty works are said to be done by him! All these conspire to teach us, that he is truly and properly God, God over all, blessed for ever. On the other hand, how much is his humiliation and abasement insisted on; the reproach and contempt of his life, the pain and ignominy of his death! and the infinite value of his sufferings, arising from these two united considerations! Nothing can more plainly shew the guilt and misery of man, than that so great a person should be employed in rescuing him, so infinite a price paid for his ransom. If such a propitiation was necessary for the heirs of glory, how hopeless must be the state of those who have no claim to, or interest in, or dependence upon it*!

* I is a strong confirmation of this, that it holds almost without exception, in comparing the sentiments and schemes of the different parties of Christians, that those who have the slightest sense of the necessity of atonement, and the greatest bias to a self-righteous plan, are always most

The last observation I am to make at present is, That the scheme above laid down is also most agreeable to the visible state of the world, and furnishes the plain and the only sufficient answer to the old objection against the Christian revelation, the want of universality. This assertion to some will appear surprising, as it seems to have been on purpose to avoid or answer this objection, that all the other opinions have been formed. However, they still leave the objection in all its force; nay, it is often supported and strengthened by the reasonings upon them. But, on the principles above laid down, it is capable of the following plain and easy solution. It is of the infinite mercy and free grace of God, that he did not leave all mankind to perish in a state of sin and misery. Where, then, lies the difficulty in believing, that some only, and not all, are saved, or are furnished with the means of salvation? If all are justly liable to wrath, upon which the whole gospel is built, mercy to a part can never be improbable, or unworthy of God, on account of the ruin of the rest: so that the objection can only take its rise from doubt or disbelief of that first and fundamental truth.

If a prince had a number of traitors in his power, whose treason was of the most aggravated and inexcusable kind, and we should be informed that he had granted a free pardon to some, and left the rest to suffer the just punishment of their crime;

disposed to lessen the glory of our Redeemer's person; lean most to, or judge most favourably of, the Socinian or Arian hypothesis.

would it be the least objection against his clemency, that it extended only to a select number of the offenders? or would it be any just impeachment of his management, or render the intelligence incredible, supposing the prince to be wise, as well as gracious? The case is precisely the same with God. If it be but granted, that it is mercy extended to those who escape, this absolutely destroys the force of any objection that can be drawn from the number or circumstances of those that perish.

There is in this respect a beautiful and instructive analogy between the course of divine providence, and the methods of divine grace; and much in both must be resolved into the wisdom and sovereignty of God. There is an immense variety in the distribution both of natural advantages and spiritual blessings; and it is vain for us to expect that we should be able to assign the whole, or indeed almost any, of the grounds either of the one or of the other. But if neither sort is merited, if both are the effects of free undeserved bounty, this cuts off all cause of complaint; and as to the difference which we observe in fact, particularly with regard to the last, we must be content to say, with the apostle Paul, Rom. xi. 32. 33. "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!"

From these observations it will plainly appear, that departing from the principles above laid down,

is a very great injury to the cause of truth, and strengthens that of infidelity. If they are founded upon the word of God, as I hope has been sufficiently proved, then no good can possibly flow from softening or disguising them, in order to lessen their opposition to the pride and prejudices of corrupt minds. Has such conduct in fact lessened the number of infidels, or reconciled them to the doctrine of Christ? On the contrary, have they not become more numerous, and more bold in their opposition to the gospel, in proportion to the attempts that have been and are made to suit it to their taste? Nay, have they not made use of innumerable passages from Christian writers in support of their own cause? For in all such cases, as Christians speak merely the language of natural religion, or magnify the present powers of the human mind, in order to rear up a self-righteous scheme, they are considered by infidels, and justly, not as defending the gospel with success, but as yielding up the great point in debate, and coming over to their own party.

I PROCEED now to make some practical improvement of this subject. And, in the

its place, From what hath been said, you may see the real, the unspeakable moment of propagating Christian knowledge. It is, indeed, so far as it is cordially embraced, turning them "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." These words have a deep and interesting meaning, if understood as above, but not otherwise. Let us only suppose those who deny or call in question the absolute necessity of salvation

through Christ, employed as missionaries in converting the Heathens: how cold, how ambiguous, and inconclusive the arguments with which they would endeavour to press the change! But the view of it given above, must in the strongest manner dispose every serious person to support such a design, and powerfully animate to diligence those who are employed in carrying it into execution.

It is allowed by all, that doing good and communicating happiness, is the most excellent character; that promoting the interest of our brethren of mankind, is a natural fruit and expression of our love to God, and an imitation of the divine benignity. But what comparison is there between any acts of benignity that regard only the present life and the welfare of the body, and those that affect the everlasting interest of an immortal spirit? As far as God's redeeming grace is superior to his providential care, so far must our sincere and successful endeavours to promote the salvation of the soul, excel any relief or help we can give to the wants of the body.

The last of these purposes, however, is often celebrated by infidels, in opposition to the other, which they delight in treating with derision and scorn. But as nothing can be more evident than its comparative excellence, supposing its reality; so there is not the least contrariety between the two designs: so far from it, that they are strongly connected together, and are always best promoted in conjunction. There may be indeed single instances of persons, from ostentation or other false motives, parting with their goods to feed the poor, who have

no true love to God or their brethren. But in general, it is certain, that those who have "their treasure in heaven, who love not the world, nor the things of the world, (which, however hard a saying it may appear, is the real character of every Christian), will more easily communicate of what they possess to those who stand in need. True religion always enlarges the heart, and strengthens the social tie. Every believer must view his poor brethren in several endearing lights, as children of the same heavenly Father, as under the same original guilt, dependent on the same Saviour, and preparing for the same judgement; whereas wicked men, however various their characters, do habitually, by luxury and self-indulgence of some kind or other, feed their pride, increase their wants, and inflame their appetites. This not only gives them a narrow turn of mind, but often wastes their substance; and so necessarily obstructs their liberality, by taking away both the inclination and ability to bestow.

And as those who have a just concern for the everlasting interest of others, will be most disposed to relieve their present distresses; so the bounty of such will always be best directed, and followed with the happiest effects. They never separate the two great ends, of making men happy in this world, and heirs of eternal life; and will therefore have it as their chief care, to promote industry and sobriety in all whom they take upon them to supply. It is too often seen, that what is dignified with the finest names, and represented as the effect of generosity, humanity, and compassion, is wholly without merit

in the giver, pernicious and hurtful to the receiver. How many dissolute livers are not covetous, only because they are under the dominion of a contrary passion? In the mean time, what they bestow, is either entirely thrown away by an indiscriminate profusion; or, as is more commonly the case, it is worse than thrown away, being confined to the most worthless of all wretches, who are their assistants, or companions in their crimes. In opposition to this, a real Christian, supremely governed by the love of God, will direct every action to his glory; and while compassion, strengthened by a sense of duty, excites him to deal his bread to the hungry, he will have a still superior solicitude to preserve them from sin. Instead of an injudicious supply of fuel to their lust, which is easy to a slothful, and gratifying to a carnal mind, he will endeavour to fit them for heaven, by suitable instruction; and rescue them from want and idleness in this world, by lawful industry.

These two great purposes have been jointly promoted by the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. They have been promoted with a most laudable zeal and diligence, and with a success fully equal to the means the society are possessed or furnished with for carrying them on. The promoting of true religion, loyalty, and industry, in the Highlands of Scotland, was the first object of their care; and the importance of encouraging it has been recommended in the strongest light on many former occasions of this sort, and is well known. But there is another part of their design, to spread the knowledge of Christ, the only

Saviour of finners, among the unenlightened Heathen nations. On this the subject of my discourse leads me to speak a little more particularly.

Of the importance of such a design every one who believes the gospel must be sensible. But, except the very restricted efforts of the society, little or nothing has ever been attempted by the British nation. And is not God, in his righteous providence towards us at present, manifestly and severely punishing us for this neglect? Are we not engaged in war with a potent and formidable neighbour, in which the Supreme Disposer of all events hath visibly written disappointment on every one of our attempts? Did not this war take its rise from the disputed limits of our territories in America? And are not our colonies in that part of the world exposed to the most cruel and merciless depredations? Are not families, which ought to be quiet and peaceable habitations, frequently alarmed in the silence of night by the cry of war; and the tenderest relations often butchered in each other's presence, and that by a people of a strange language, while the weak mother and helpless infant can only lift a supplicating eye, but cannot ask for mercy? Who, then, are the instruments of this cruelty? Must we not answer, Those very Indians, a great part of whose territory we possess, and whom, with a contempt equally impolitic and unchristian, we suffer to continue in ignorance of the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent?

Such a particular interpretation of the language of providence may be thought bold; but there are

many circumstances which, in a manner, constrain us to confess its propriety. We have been a nation early and long favoured with the light of divine truth, and are therefore bound to communicate it to others. That distant country was a refuge to many of our pious forefathers, when flying from the rage of ecclesiastic tyranny; and the territory either taken from or ceded to us by these people, has been the great source of wealth and power to this nation. But what seems chiefly to warrant this application is, that the care taken by our enemies to convert the Indians, is the chief, if not the single, cause of their superior interest among that people. Their free, independent manner of living, makes the British temper, character, and customs, in all other respects more agreeable to them. But being once converted, not to the Christian faith, but to the Romish superstition, they are inviolably attached to the French interest. And that politic, but fraudulent nation, are able to cover and excuse their own treacherous designs, by the ungovernable and savage barbarity of their Indian allies.

Can there be, therefore, a more noble, a more important, or more necessary exercise of Christian charity, than enabling the Society to carry on their useful and salutary schemes, especially to extend their missions to the Indian tribes? Who that knows the value of immortal souls, can refuse to contribute his share in promoting this excellent design? Who that fears the just judgement and displeasure of God, can refuse to take this step, amongst others, evidently necessary for averting his threatened vengeance? And who that loves

his Redeemer's name, but must desire that it should be adored from the rising to the setting sun? The boldness and activity of sinners in spreading every species of corruption, should excite an emulation in believers not to be behind hand in the service of a much better master. Have we not seen much profane zeal discovered in support of the most pernicious and criminal amusements, which consume time, enervate the body, and pollute the mind? And shall there not be a like concern to promote knowledge and holiness in the uncivilized parts of our own country, and to carry the glad tidings of the gospel of peace to those who now sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death? Are there not many to whom the name of a Saviour is precious, "even as ointment poured forth;" who burn with desire, that the riches of divine grace, which can never be exhausted, may be more largely diffused? And will not all such cheerfully and liberally contribute to extend the bounds of the Redeemer's kingdom, in the prospect of that blessed time, when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea? or of that still more glorious period, when every vessel of mercy, from the east, west, north, and south, shall be gathered together, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father?

I shall now conclude my discourse, by preaching this Saviour to all who hear me, and intreating you, in the most earnest manner, to believe in Jesus Christ; for "there is no salvation in any other." This is far from being unnecessary or impro-

per, even in an audience of professing Christians. Wherever there is a national profession of the gospel, there are always many who, though they retain the name of Christians, are strangers to real faith in Christ, or union with God through him; nay, who in their hearts are enemies to the truth in its simplicity and purity. It is in vain to attempt, by reasoning, to bring men to an acknowledgement of the truth of the Christian doctrine in speculation, unless we also bring them to such a personal conviction of their guilt and wretchedness, as will make them receive the information of Christ's character and work, as glad tidings to their own souls. No other converts receive any benefit themselves by the change; nor are they of any service to Christ and his cause, except so far as they are over-ruled by the sovereign providence of that God who only can "bring good out of evil."

Wherefore, my beloved hearers, be persuaded, from the word of God, which you profess to believe, from the state of the world, which you may see, and of your own hearts, which you may feel, that you are by nature wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. You are so far from having such a conformity to the pure and perfect law of God, in your thoughts, words, and actions, and the principles from which they ought to flow, as can entitle you to his favour, that the imaginations of your hearts are only evil from your youth, and that continually. Whatever imaginary schemes of a virtuous character you may rest or glory in, you are wholly unable to stand the trial of God's impartial judgement. O! how

hard is it to convince men of sin, even while the earth groans under their guilt! Would but those who are most apt to boast of the dignity of their nature, and the perfection of their virtue, make an exact register of all the thoughts that arise in their minds; there remains still as much of the law of God written upon their hearts, as would judge them out of their own mouths. Instead of being able to bear that such a record should be exposed to public view, they could not even endure themselves to peruse it: for self-flattery is their ruling character, but self-aborrence would be the effect of this discovery. Ought you not, therefore, to be ready to acknowledge, that you are altogether as an unclean thing, and unable to stand before God if he enter into judgement? But whether you acknowledge it or not, I bear from God himself this message to you all, that whatever may be your character, formed upon worldly maxims, and animated by ambitious and worldly views, if you are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, if you are not clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness, you must for ever perish.

But, behold, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. There is a fulness of merit in his obedience and death to procure your pardon. There is no sin of so deep a dye, or so infectious a stain, but his blood is sufficient to wash it out. This is no new doctrine, or modern discovery, to gratify a curious mind. Perhaps you have heard such things so often, that you nauseate and disdain the repetition. But they are the words of eternal life, on which your souls' salvation abso-

lutely depends; and therefore, though this call should come but once more to be rejected, it is yet again within your offer; and as "an ambassador from Christ, as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled unto God." You have heard the danger of all who are without Christ; but I beseech you remember the aggravated guilt, and the superior danger of those who continue obstinate under the gospel. All the mercy that is shewn to sinners in the offer, shall inflame the charge against them in the great day, if they are found impenitent. Mercy and justice are never separated in any part of the gospel-plan. They illustrate each other in the contrivance, they shine together on the cross, and they shall be jointly manifest in the day of judgement. Shall not the blood of Christ, which is so powerful in its influence for taking away the guilt of those who trust in it, greatly add to the guilt and danger of those who despise it? Psa. ii. 10. 11. 12. "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings," and all of every rank; "be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

AN
I N Q U I R Y

INTO THE
SCRIPTURE MEANING

OF
C H A R I T Y.

IN a note in the sermon on Acts, iv. 12. "Neither is there salvation in any other," the reader will find that I have intimated two things: 1. That if a favourable judgement of opinions of others, be the scripture-meaning of *charity*, then certainly some bounds must be set to it; and it must be praise or blame worthy, according to the cases in which it is exercised. 2. That I am inclined to think that this is not the meaning of the word in scripture; but that it means an ardent and unfeigned love to others, and a desire of their welfare, temporal and eternal; and may very well consist with the strongest abhorrence of their wicked principles, and the deepest concern for their dangerous state. At the same time it was hinted,

that this subject deserved a more distinct and full illustration. I was sufficiently aware, even at the time of writing, that this declaration would bring down upon me the high displeasure of certain persons. And so indeed it happened, to such a degree, that some, according to their wonted candour, and (in their own sense) most charitable interpretation, have affirmed, that I had in that passage openly declared against charity. This hath induced me, on notice of a second edition being intended, to offer a few reflections on this subject; which I hope shall be conducted in as cool and critical a manner, as can in reason be desired, that I may not offend against charity, even when writing upon the subject.

LET me begin by settling precisely the subject of the inquiry. It will, or at least ought to be, acknowledged, that with many the current meaning of the word *charity* is, to have a favourable opinion of the sentiments of others, who are supposed to differ from us; that is to say, (for it is not very easy to define it clearly), to think that they are innocently mistaken in judgement, and that they have as honestly inquired after truth as ourselves; and therefore to conclude, that as persons truly sincere, and acting according to their light, they shall meet with the final acceptance of God. That this is the meaning with many, if it should be denied, I prove from the following circumstance, that charity in sentiment, or charity in general, (except when it is taken in a limited sense, as signifying bounty to the poor), is always applied to those who

differ from us, and never to those who agree with us; and indeed it is about the difference that it is supposed to be exercised.

1. Now, the *first* thing I observe upon this is, that if the above be the scripture-meaning of charity, then certainly some bounds must be set to it; and it must be praise or blame worthy according to the cases in which it is exercised. I make this supposition, because, though it is proposed in the course of these remarks to shew, that the above is not the scripture-meaning of the word; yet there is really, within certain limits, a duty of this kind prescribed to us in scripture, but never called *charity*. The duty I mean is mutual forbearance, and guarding against rash judgement; but it is remarkable, that neither in the description of this duty, nor in the arguments urging to the practice of it, is the word *charity*, or the necessity of charity, ever once introduced*. The proper objects of forbearance are matters of indifference, or rather matters of comparatively small moment; and the sin of rash judging consists in believing things to be of more moment than they are, and attributing out-

* I do not know whether I should call it an exception from this, that in one passage, when the apostle Paul is speaking of the opposite sins, of judging others on the one hand, or despising them on the other, he introduces walking charitably. But it is in a sense quite opposite to what it would have been used in by one pleading for the modern charity. It is not the man who judges rashly that he charges with uncharitableness, but him who despiseth his weak brother, and is at no pains to avoid giving offence: Rom. iv. 15. "But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died."

ward actions or expressions to bad motives or principles, without necessity. I say, without necessity; because it is allowed by every judicious and accurate writer upon rash judging, that a person cannot be chargeable with this sin, merely for thinking ill of another's temper or practice, upon clear and irresistible evidence. To do otherwise, in many cases, is either wholly impossible, or argues a weakness of understanding; which cannot be the object of approbation, nor consequently of imitation.

Let us therefore suppose, that this duty of forbearance, which indeed I take to be wholly distinct in its nature, is the charity so strongly recommended, and so highly applauded in scripture, and that it is to be exercised with regard to the opinions of others: In that case it must have certain bounds, for the following reasons.

1. If it were otherwise, we should then either want a meaning for many declarations and precepts in scripture; or, which is worse, should perceive them to be evidently absurd and ill founded. That I may not tire the reader, I shall not adduce the tenth part of what is said on this subject in scripture; but must beg of him to weigh the following passages, and to make some reflections on their manifest purpose: Jude, v. 3. 4. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the faints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condem-

nation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Here I think is plainly a duty with regard to opinions, altogether different from that of forbearance. The one requires us not so much as to judge our brethren; the other requires us to contend earnestly with them. The one supposes the trifling difference to be wholly buried; the other implies, that it should be kept clearly in view, and all possible pains taken to support the truth, and to refute the error. The one supposes entire peace and union; the other implies a firm and resolute opposition, so as to come to no terms which imply consent or approbation. The phraseology through the whole passage teaches us to interpret it as I have done: "There are certain men," says he, "crept in unawares;" plainly signifying, that if they had not crept in secretly, they would not, or ought not, to have been suffered to come in openly. Now, if charity and forbearance be the same thing, here are some persons described, whom we are not to forbear, and consequently for whom we are to have no charity: therefore it must have some limitation. Let it be as extensive as you will, it is not boundless.

Titus, i. 10. 11. 13. "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. Wherefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be found in the faith." Now, let me ask any unprejudiced reader, whether sharp rebuke be not a very diffe-

rent thing from forbearance? How can you rebuke those whom you may not so much as judge? or why should you attempt to make them found in the faith, if they are already received of God? as it is expressed, Rom. xiv. 3. Besides, what is the meaning of subverting whole houses? and of stopping the mouths of the false teachers, to prevent or remedy this subversion? In the same epistle, chap. iii. 10. the apostle says, "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." Does not this suppose, that it is possible for a man to be a heretic? Does not the apostle here ordain a sentence of expulsion to be passed against him, after the pains taken to reclaim him appear to be fruitless? It is plain, therefore, that if charity be the same with forbearance, it must have limits; for if every body must be forborne, then certainly nobody can be expelled.

I must not here pass by an astonishing interpretation put by some, and men of learning too, upon the following verse of the same chapter: "Knowing that he that is such, is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself;" that is, say some, no man is an heretic in the sense of this passage, but who is self-condemned, or is acting contrary to his own conviction; so that he must be rejected, not for the error of his judgement, but for the obstinacy and depravation of his heart. I do not remember to have seen any stronger instance of the power of prejudice, than giving such a sense to the word *self-condemned*. If any man can really conceive a case in his own mind, of a heretic obstinately persisting in his error, and suffering for it,

in opposition to his own inward conviction, and at the same time this circumstance clearly ascertained as the foundation of his sentence, I wish he would teach me how to conceive it: at present it seems to me utterly impossible. If any person thus speaks lies in hypocrisy, is it to be supposed, that he will confess it? and if he do not confess, how is it possible to prove it? The plain meaning of being condemned of himself, in this passage, is, that his errors are so contradictory to the other articles of his faith, such an abjuration of his former profession, and generally tend so much to immorality in practice, that he is condemned as it were out of his own mouth.

In the 2d epistle of John, the apostle says, ver. 9. 10. 11. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house; neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." I shall not stay to examine nicely the import of not receiving such a one into our house, and not bidding him God speed. It is sufficient for my purpose, that no sense can be put upon it low enough to make it agreeable to the treatment we ought to give to our brethren whom we are forbidden to judge. These we are to receive, as Christ hath received them, and to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To all these I only add, without any reflection upon it, the reproof of Christ to the church of

Pergamos : Rev. ii. 14. " But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

2. If charity be the same with forbearance, it must have limits, or it would be the strongest impeachment of divine wisdom and goodness, in not giving marks sufficiently clear to distinguish truth from falsehood. If we are to entertain a favourable opinion of the sentiments and state of others, it must be entirely founded on the supposition, that they have inquired with honesty and impartiality ; and that they are not blinded by prejudice or corrupt passions. This, I suppose, will be readily allowed, because it is the usual way of speaking or writing on the subject. ' They may be mistaken,' it is often said, ' but without their fault : they may have freely and impartially inquired, and yet may, after all, think differently with equal sincerity.' This, I contend, can only hold in matters of small moment, and in themselves of a doubtful nature ; and in these, the observation is just, and corresponds with reason, scripture, and experience. But in truths of the highest moment, if there are any such at all, to suppose that men equally sincere and impartial, may, notwithstanding, have sentiments directly opposite, seems to me an impeachment of divine wisdom. How can it be, unless the evidences for and against them, be pretty equally balanced ? How is the judgement determined at all, but by a sort of

compound *ratio*, to speak in the language of mathematicians, of the outward evidence, and the prepossession of the mind? Strong prepossessions will account for any opinion, however absurd; but if two persons of equal capacity, and equal integrity, draw opposite conclusions on any question, it must certainly arise from the doubtfulness of the question itself. Now, if there be any truths of moment not attended with sufficient evidence, how can we acquit or justify the conduct of providence? There does not seem to me to be any alternative; but we must lay the blame, either upon the evidence or the mind; that is to say, in other words, it must be put to the charge either of God or man.

3. If charity is the same thing with forbearance, it must have some limits; otherwise the value of truth itself is absolutely annihilated. If I am to believe a man in as safe a state, and as much accepted of God, in one opinion as another, upon all subjects, it is plain, not only that every truth is of equal moment with another, but that truth and error are of equal value. This, I think, is indisputable; for if it makes no difference, either in point of character or state, I see nothing else from which their value can be estimated. What, then, becomes of all the fine encomiums we have on the beauty, the excellence, the importance of truth? the necessity and benefit of freedom of inquiry? It would be much better to be satisfied with any opinions, be they what they will, than to give way to doubts and suspicions, to fatigue our minds, and waste our time in long and difficult researches. If it be said, that they may be the same as to the fin-

cerity of the inquirer, but different principles may have different effects in practice; this is yielding up the point in debate: for if one opinion leads to holiness, and another to wickedness in practice, they can never be in the same state of safety, nor equally acceptable to God, who hold these opposite sentiments. Besides, it is common with the advocates for this mistaken sort of charity, in order the better to support their opinion, to deny this difference in effect, and to say, 'It is no matter what a man's opinions are, if his life be good.' Now, it is evident, that this assertion is absurd; or rather the supposition is impossible, unless the influence of truth and falsehood upon the life be absolutely equal. Grant but the least superiority or advantage to one above the other, and the argument is destroyed; for if truth be better than falsehood, it must be some matter what a man's opinions are, in order to his life's being good. How weak and inconsistent creatures are we! The very same persons who make the greatest stir about a pretended search after truth, and freedom of inquiry, will needs have it, that Christian charity implies, that all opinions are alike, and ought to be treated with equal respect: and then, to crown all, they give us the more hideous picture of the terrible effects of superstition, and certain religious sentiments which they are pleased to condemn. Alas! where is the charity then? Are all opinions equal? Is it no matter what a man's opinions are, if his life be good? At last you have found out some, whose lives are ill by the impulse of their opinions.

Certainly, charity, in the sense of forbearance or approbation, is not due to them.

4. If charity is the same with forbearance, it must have some limits; because otherwise things would be carried to an extravagant length; and such cases might be supposed as very few would be willing to admit, and indeed I think no man can rationally admit. I might give a multitude of possible examples; but, for the greater satisfaction of the reader, shall only mention a few that are real.

(1.) Within the Christian church, there are not only different, but opposite opinions, and mutually destructive of each other. Those who hold them, on each side, not only say, but think, that their adversaries are guilty of impiety and blasphemy. Let us take for instance, the Calvinists and Socinians. Read the writings of the first, and you will see, that they consider their adversaries as taking away the very foundation of the gospel, denying the only Lord God that bought them, and as guilty of gross idolatry in giving divine worship to one whom they believe to be a creature. Again, if you read the writings of the last, you will find them charging their adversaries with blasphemy of the most horrible nature, and not only making a God different from the true God, but such a one as is more cruel and vindictive than the very devils. Now, I desire to know how the one of these sorts of persons can have a favourable opinion of the state and sentiments of the opposite, without renouncing their own? I do freely acknowledge, as I have formerly done, that I never did esteem the Soci-

nians to be Christians; and yet find nothing more easy, or indeed more necessary, than to have charity for them, in what I take to be the scripture sense of that word. But in the modern sense it appears to me utterly impossible. For the very same reason, if any who had embraced these principles, should pretend that he had such charity for me, as to esteem and receive me as a faithful minister of Christ, I would consider it as a profession altogether hypocritical, or that he did not believe a word of his own system. The truth is, I cannot help thinking, from the manner of conducting theological controversies, that it is very common for many to plead for that charity to themselves which they never give to their adversaries; while the power of prejudice hinders them from observing the inconsistency between their reasoning and practice*.

(2.) Those who deny and oppose the gospel altogether, have just the same title to our charity; and we are obliged to believe, that they are honest and impartial inquirers, and therefore accepted of God. Now, if there be any thing in the world

* I could give many instances of this surprising inadvertency in writers of the very first character: I shall only mention one, of the renowned Earl of Shaftesbury. His darling theme is, to shew, that every thing whatever is for the general good; that even the worst men are guided at bottom by a benevolent principle; yet even while expatiating on the goodness of the whole system of beings, he takes every opportunity of falling upon the clergy, whom he allows to be purely evil, without containing any good, or tendency to promote it: a defect in his own scheme, to which he does not seem to have attended.

clear from scripture, it is, that we are not to approve or receive such persons; that they are not the objects of forbearance; and, by consequence, not of that charity that consists in forbearance: on the contrary, the zeal and activity of the apostles was wholly employed in bringing unbelievers to the knowledge and confession of the truth; for which they deserve very little praise, if their state was safe, and their character unexceptionable, before. And as to persons among us denying the gospel, after examination, I do not see how any person can think them impartial in rejecting it, without a very poor opinion of the evidence for receiving it.

(3.) Even in point of morals, there have been, and are at this time, opinions so very gross, that few will look upon the state of those who hold them as safe; and yet, if forbearance is charity, and the charity is unlimited, they must also be taken in. There have been several, who certainly were sincerely of opinion, that fornication and other uncleanness, was lawful. So great a man as David Hume, Esq. has adopted a sentence from a French writer; "Female infidelity, when it is known, is a small matter; and when it is not known, it is nothing." The very same writer seems also either to defend, or greatly to alleviate, unnatural lust. And many highwaymen have actually reasoned themselves into an opinion of the lawfulness of robbery, by alledging, that God never made the world with this view, that some should have too much, and others should starve; and therefore they had a right to a share, and might levy it wherever they could find it. The truth is, there are more of these

grofs and erroneous opinions than many are aware of; for men are feldom at ease on the commiffion of fin, till they have found fome way to fatisfy their own minds, by wrong principles. Well, are we to think all thefe honeft and impartial inquirers, and to have charity for them in the fenfe fo often mentioned? I imagine fome will at laft flop fhort, and fay, there is a diftinction to be made; thefe opinions are formed by the influence of prejudice, and the bias of corrupt affections. Here, then, your charity fails, and you have fet limits to your forbearance; or rather you have given up the caufe; for all falfe opinions arife from the bias of corrupt affections. The fallacy of the whole arguments on this fubject lies in confounding two things very different, viz. a man's being truly of an opinion, and his being fo upon fair and unprejudiced inquiry; a train of reafoning carried on, which is built upon the laft of thefe fuppoftions, and applied to cafes where only the firft takes place. Perhaps fome may choofe to fay, as to the cafe of immoral opinions, that men are not to be difapproved or condemned for the opinion in itfelf, but for prefuming to act in confequence of it. To which I anfwer, That if any man will prove the innocence of forming fuch opinions, I will undertake to prove, with at leaft equal evidence, the obligation that lies upon every one fo perfuaded, to act according to his light.

5. In the *laft* place, to fuppofe that charity is the fame thing with forbearance, and yet that it is unlimited, is felf-contradictory, and impoffible, in many inftances, to be put in practice. True Chri-

stian charity being the indispensable duty of all, must at least be possible to all, and consistent with every other duty. Now, to believe the safety of the state, or the goodness of the character, of many persons for whom charity is pleaded, may be to some absolutely impossible. They may have a conviction of the contrary in their judgment. They may think, that the scripture clearly and explicitly commands them to separate from such people, to oppose and detest their errors; and surely there are many much more absurd and groundless opinions truly entertained. What then shall they do? The scripture commands them to contend with erroneous persons; and if they do not, they are guilty of a breach of charity, one of the most essential of all gospel-duties; for the apostle tells us, "Though I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

Thus, I hope, it has been proved, to the satisfaction of all impartial persons, that if charity, in scripture, is the same thing with that forbearance we owe to others who differ from us, it must have some bounds, and be praise or blame-worthy, according to the cases in which it is exercised. If it be asked, Who shall state the bounds beyond which it is not to extend? I answer, Every one for himself, according to the best of his own judgment. Some perhaps will contend with or judge others, for things in which they ought to forbear them; but many others will carry their forbearance too far, and retain erroneous or vicious persons in their society, when they ought to expel them. For this

there is no remedy, as it is the consequence of the weakness of human nature, and no way different from what happens as to every duty incumbent on us as men or Christians.

II. LET us now come to the second part of this discourse, and consider what reason there is to believe, that charity, in scripture, is a duty altogether distinct from forbearance, and founded on distinct principles.

One general consideration will go nigh to prove this of itself, viz. That forbearance, as has been shewn in the preceding pages, hath limits, beyond which it is culpable; whereas charity hath none, at least as to its object. There is no person or character that can be conceived, for which we are allowed to be without charity. With respect to forbearance, the object of it is clearly pointed out in the passages where it is spoken of, and is the difference of opinion as to smaller matters, viz. the lawfulness or unlawfulness of meats and drinks, and whether certain days were holy or common. But there is no passage in which charity is spoken of, that gives the least hint, or indeed that leaves room to suppose, that it hath any limits as to its object. Charity, we are told, is "the end," or sum "of the commandment." And indeed it is the same thing with love, which is the fulfilling of the law. And in the explication which our Lord gives us of the sum of the second table of the law, in answer to that question, Who is my neighbour? he plainly teaches us, by the parable of the Samaritan, that all men are our neighbours. There was a great

opposition, in point of religion, between the Jews and Samaritans; yet he shews plainly, that this ought not to obstruct the exercise of charity, in the true sense of that word. For this reason, I think it highly probable, that forbearance is different from charity; the one points out our duty to our fellow-Christians in certain circumstances, and the other includes our duty to our fellow-creatures at all times.

This will be confirmed, by reflecting that the word which, in some places, is translated *charity*, is the same, in all other passages, without variation in any one of them, with that which is translated *love*. *Αγαπη* is the New-Testament word for *charity*, which, as it is generally translated *love*, so I do not see the least reason for altering the translation, in those places where charity is substituted in its room. Charity, then, is *love*; that is to say, it is a sincere and fervent affection to others, and a desire of their welfare, temporal and eternal. This not only may consist with, but of itself naturally produces, the strongest abhorrence of their wicked principles, and the deepest concern for their dangerous state. There is a great affinity between the sentiments we ought to entertain with regard to error and vice. Our love to vicious persons ought not to carry in it any approbation or indulgence of their vices, and far less any belief of the safety of their state; but an earnest concern to bring about their reformation. In the same manner, a sincere and fervent charity for erroneous persons, does not imply any approbation of their opinions, or supposition of their consistency with soundness in the faith, but an

earnest desire to recover them, if possible, from their unhappy delusion. Nay, though a man be so narrow minded, as to judge those whom he ought to forbear, it may very possibly be attended with no breach of charity; because there may be as much love to his neighbour in that person's heart, and as much concern for his welfare, as if he had seen more clearly his own mistake. The apostle Paul calls these *weak* persons, and ascribes their conduct to the imperfections of their judgement. It was the strong, or those who had more knowledge, that he blamed, as not walking *charitably*, when they would not abstain from meat, to prevent their brethren's offence.

It will be an additional confirmation of this meaning of *charity*, that it makes the several duties of Christians at once clear and intelligible, and consistent one with another, by leaving to each its full scope, and its proper object. If we take *charity* in the sense which I have rejected, there will be a continual opposition between zeal and charity; and in proportion as you increase in any one of them, you must necessarily fail in the other. And indeed this seems to be verified in experience; for those who espouse this sort of charity, do frequently fall into so cool a state in point of zeal, that they give themselves little trouble, either in instructing the ignorant, or reproving the vicious; and are not backward in stigmatizing those, as narrow-minded and uncharitable, who do. But if we take charity for unfeigned love, then, instead of opposition, there is the most perfect harmony between one duty and another. So far from hindering, or

even limiting each other in their exercise, they strengthen each other in principle, and direct each other in their application. The more fervent love I have for my fellow-creatures and my fellow-Christians, it will but excite my zeal to promote their benefit, by endeavouring to convince them of any dangerous mistake, and deliver them from the dominion of every vicious practice. At the same time, this love will naturally produce forbearance, where it is lawful and proper; because, if I love any person sincerely, I will judge of him candidly, and not impute any bad sentiment or practice to him without necessity. It will prevent us from interfering with others where we ought not, and will urge us to activity and diligence where the case seems really to call for it.

This subject may be well illustrated by parental affection, when it is both strong in its principle, and well directed in its exercise. It will certainly prevent a parent from judging hardly of his children, or being easily incensed against them, on wrong or doubtful information: but it will be so far from making him think favourably of their mistakes, either in principle or practice, that the more tender his love, the greater his concern to prevent their being misled, or to recover them if they have gone astray. Examples, to be sure, there are many, of a sort of love in parents to their children, that operates like the false charity I am now pleading against, making them blind to their failings, and even partial to their crimes: but I think it must be allowed, that all such partiality and indulgence is a weakness, instead of a virtue, in the

parent, and is commonly a curse, instead of a blessing, to the child. To have just apprehensions of the several duties of the Christian life, we must always consider their relation to, and dependence upon one another. There are some sins opposite to, and destructive of each other; but there is no truly good disposition, that is not perfectly consistent with, or rather that does not improve and strengthen every other. It is remarkable, that in scripture the duties of reproof and correction are frequently attributed to love as their principle, not only in God, but in man: "Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes." "Thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thy heart; but shalt in any wise rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him."

Upon the whole, since this interpretation of charity is not only most agreeable to scripture, but most consistent with itself, and with every other branch of the Christian character, I hope it will be received, as least so as to lessen the cry of uncharitableness against those who, from the united principles of love to God and man, think themselves obliged to oppose the progress of gross error. I plead for this only when they make use of just and lawful means, and act in a manner becoming Christians, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. For though I have shewn, that true charity is as favourable to zeal as to forbearance, and to both alike in their proper place, I am sen-

sible that there may be zeal where there is little or no charity, and, in that case, it will shew itself in "wrath, strife, seditions, heresies." This happens chiefly when a weak person who judges rashly, is also of an envious or malicious disposition. The first of these may be sometimes without the other; they may, however, also be joined in the same person; and then it will certainly be attended with "confusion and every evil work." But when a deep sense of the evil of departing from the faith to the persons themselves, and the danger of corrupt doctrine infecting the whole lump, induces any to stand up in defence of the truth, to oppose the introduction of erroneous teachers, or to attempt the expulsion of those who have crept in unawares; let them be called unreasonable if you please, and let their mistake be pointed out, but I beg that they may not be abused and vilified as uncharitable. The reason of my request is, that it is more than probable they do this from a strong conviction, that they are obliged to it by the express command of Christ. I declare this to be my own persuasion, after the most impartial search of the scriptures of which I was capable; and certainly it is at least possible, that we may have, notwithstanding, a fervent love to our brethren, and a desire of their welfare. We may love them as men, even when we cannot judge them to be saints; and we may love them as Christians, even when we think they are in many things to be blamed; nay, I hope we may heartily forgive them as enemies, notwithstanding all their bitterness and rancour against us.

But if, after all, this request cannot be obtained; if we cannot alter our judgement, and they will still insist that we are therefore without charity, that is to say, without Christianity; they must confess, that here is one opinion which they will not tolerate, and to which, in their own sense, no charity is due.

SERMON XVI.

THE TRIAL OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH BY ITS MORAL INFLUENCE.

Preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr,
October 9. 1759.

MATTHEW, vii. 20.

Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.

EVERY one who hath any acquaintance with the writings of infidels, must know that there is no topic on which they insist at greater length, or with more plausibility, than the innumerable sects and parties into which the Christian world is divided. With what apparent triumph do they enlarge, on the contradictory tenets, which different persons profess to found upon the same scriptures, their violent opposition one to another, and the great difficulty, or rather impossibility, of discovering truth, among so many, who pretend each to have the entire and exclusive possession of it.

Having gone thus far, it is easy and natural to proceed one step farther, and affirm, that the great plurality of every denomination, do not embrace religion in general, or the tenets of their own sect in

particular, from rational or personal conviction, but from a blind imitation of others, or an attachment to one or a few distinguished leaders, whose authority is stronger than all other evidence whatever. Thus is religion, at once, supposed true, and yet destroyed; that is to say, it is at one stroke, as it were, annihilated, in almost all who profess it; their opinions, whatever they are in themselves, being no more than implicit faith and party-prejudice in those who embrace them.

The same visible state of the world, which gives occasion of triumph to the enemies of religion, gives often no small uneasiness and anxiety to its friends, particularly to the best and most dispassionate of every party. Serious and conscientious persons, when they reflect upon the divisions that prevail, when they are witnesses to the contention and mutual accusation of different parties, are ready to be overwhelmed with melancholy upon the prospect, as well as involved in doubt and perplexity, as to what course they themselves should hold. It is not uncommon to find persons of every rank in this situation; not only those of better education, who are able to take an extensive view of the state of things in this and in preceding ages, but also those of less knowledge and comprehension, when any violent debates happen to fall within the sphere of their own observation.

These reasons have induced me to make choice of the passage now read as the subject of discourse at this time. It contains the rule to which our Saviour appeals in his controversy with the Pharisees, and by which he, once and again, desires that their

pretensions may be judged. I apprehend from the context, that it is equally applicable to their characters and their principles, their integrity before God in their offices of teachers of others, and the soundness of their doctrine as to its effects upon those who should receive it. These two things are, indeed, in a great measure connected together, or rather they are mutually involved in one another, though it is possible, and in some few cases profitable, to make a distinction between them.

What is further proposed, through the assistance of divine grace, in the prosecution of this subject, is,

I. To shew that the rule here given by our Saviour is the best that could have been given, and that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error.

II. That this is in fact the rule by which all good men, and indeed mankind in general, so far as they are sincere, do judge of religious principles and pretensions.

III. To conclude with some reflections on the subject, for the benefit both of ministers and people.

IN the *first* place, then, it is proposed to shew, that the rule here given by our Saviour is the best that could have been given, and that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error. To lay a foundation for this, it will be necessary to begin by settling, in as precise a manner as possible, the meaning of the rule, and to what cases it can be justly applied. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," saith our Saviour. That is to say, when any person assumes the character of a divine teacher, and proposes any thing to your belief, as from God, see

whether its fruits be really fuitable to its pretensions: particularly you are to lay down this as a principle, that, as he is holy in his nature, every thing that proceeds from him must be holy in its tendency, and produce holiness as its fruit. In proportion as you see this effect in him who teaches it, and those who embrace it, so receive it as true, or reject it as false.

By laying down the rule in these terms, I do not mean to deny, that, when a revelation is first proposed as from God, or when the credit of such revelation in general is examined, miracles are a distinct and conclusive proof of a divine commission. I am persuaded that nothing is more vague and indeterminate, and at the same time a more manifest inverting the natural order of things, than to say with some, We must judge of the truth of a miracle by the nature of the doctrine in the support of which it is wrought; and, if this last is worthy of God, we may then admit the honorary testimony of the mighty work in its behalf.—They do not attend to the great ignorance of man in all spiritual and divine things without revelation, and to the boldness of human pride, who speak in this manner. I would rather include this as one of the proper fruits of a divine commission to teach any new doctrine, that signs be given of a superior power accompanying the prophet. Thus we see the Jews made this demand of our Saviour, John, vi. 30. “What sign shewest thou, then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?” It is true, in some instances, when, after many miracles, they persisted in asking new signs of their

own devising, he condemns their obstinacy, and refuses to gratify it. Notwithstanding this, we find him often appealing to his works as an attestation of the truth of his mission: thus he says, John, xvi. 11. "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very work's sake." And elsewhere, John, xv. 24. "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen, and hated both me and my Father." Agreeably to this, we find Nicodemus drawing the conclusion, John, iii. 2. "Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou dost, except God be with him."

There is no doubt, however, that this must be inseparably joined with a purity of character, and sanctity of purpose. When these are wanting, it gives the justest ground of suspicion, leads to the strictest examination of miraculous pretensions, and will certainly end in the discovery of such as are false. For this is the very excellence of the rule laid down by our Saviour, that, though reason may be very unfit to pass an independent judgement upon truth and error, conscience may, with little danger of mistake, reject what is evil, and yield its approbation to what is good.

But what I have chiefly in view is, that supposing the truth of the gospel in general, particular opinions and practices must be tried in this manner. As the gospel is allowed on all hands to be a doctrine according to godliness, when differences arise, and each opposite side pretends to have the letter of the law in his favour, the great rule of

decision is, Which doth most immediately and most certainly, promote piety and holiness in all manner of conversation? In this way every doctrinal opinion, every form of government, and every rite and practice in worship, may be brought to the test, and tried by its fruits.

As opinions, so characters, must be tried in the same manner. The truth of this, though deserving particular mention, is included in, or but a part or branch of the other. To pass a judgement on particular characters is of very small moment, or rather a peremptory decision of this kind is both unnecessary and improper, unless when it is of weight in a cause. It is only prophets and teachers that fall to be singly, or personally tried, because they are supposed to exhibit, in their own practice, an example of the force and influence of their principles. If on them they have no effect that is good, there is not the least pretence for insisting that others should embrace them.

Nothing farther seems necessary by way of explication of this rule, save to observe from the context, that fair and plausible pretences, either of opinions or characters, must be examined with particular care, as being most ready to deceive; and the trial must be more by facts than by reasoning, as is implied in the very language used in the text, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

The excellency of this rule may be comprehended under the two following particulars: 1. Its certainty; 2. Its perspicuity.

The first of these will admit of little dispute. As God is infinitely holy in his own nature, every

discovery that he has made to any of his creatures, must carry this impression upon it, and have a tendency to promote holiness in them. And as this is manifestly the design of the sacred oracles, and that system of divine truth which they contain, every thing by way of opinion, or practice, that pretends to derive its authority from them, may lawfully be tried by this rule, Will it make us more holy than before?

It is of moment here to observe, that this rule hath a deep and solid foundation. It proceeds upon the supposition, that all natural are inferior to moral qualities; that even the noblest intellectual abilities are only so far valuable, as they are subservient to moral perfection; or, in other words, that truth is in order to goodness. It is not (as has been often said) in his Almighty power, his infinite wisdom, or the immensity of being, that the glory of God chiefly consists, but in his immaculate holiness and spotless purity. Each part of the divine character, indeed, derives a lustre from the other. It is the union of greatness and goodness, that makes him truly God. His moral excellence becomes infinite in value and efficacy by residing in an infinite object. But if it were possible to separate his natural perfection from his moral excellence, or could we suppose them joined to malignity of disposition, he would be the proper object, (let us speak it with reverence), not of supreme love, but of infinite detestation.

This is more than sufficient to support the order in which things are represented above, and show, that its moral influence is the proper touchstone and trial of religious truth. These doctrines only come

from God, which tend to form us after the divine image. Thus far, perhaps, all will allow it to be true; at least the assertion is common. But be pleased to observe, that this necessarily supposes the sure and infallible efficacy of real truth in promoting holiness, and the insufficiency of error and falsehood for this purpose. If these were not both alike certain, the rule would be equivocal and absurd. If men by believing lies could attain to unfeigned goodness and true holiness, then their moral effect could not in the least serve to distinguish between truth and error. It is no less plain, that if so absurd a supposition is admitted but for a moment, the value of truth is wholly destroyed, and no wise man will employ his time and pains in endeavouring to discover, to communicate, or defend it.

The other particular comprehended under the excellence of this rule, is its perspicuity; that it is not only sure and infallible in itself, but capable of an easy application by those who have occasion to use it. Here, if any where, there is room for doubt and disputation. Here, it may be alledged, all the confusion and uncertainty returns, which was before complained of, and for which a remedy was required. Men will still differ in their opinions as to what is true goodness. Besides, they will still debate the sincerity of many pretensions, and the reality of many appearances; and as art and hypocrisy will always be used on the one hand, delusion must be the unavoidable consequence on the other.

This, however, is no more than the necessary consequence of human imperfection. It cannot be denied,

and it may without any hesitation be confessed, that men are liable to err, and that many have erred in the application of this rule. But, who can from thence justly infer, that it is not of sufficient clearness to direct those who will honestly make use of it, and to lay the error of those who are misled entirely at their own door?

It pleased God to write his law upon the heart of man at first. And the great lines of duty, however obscured by our original apostacy, are still so visible as to afford an opportunity of judging what conduct and practice is, or is not agreeable to its dictates. It will be found from experience, that men are able to determine on this point, with far greater certainty than on any other subject of religion; that is to say, they can perceive the excellency of the end, when they are in much doubt about the means, in themselves, or separately considered.

Such authority hath natural conscience still in man, that it renders those who, in their own conduct, despise its reproofs, inexcusable in the sight of God, Rom. i. 20.—ii. 14. But it is of importance in the present argument to observe, that every one is able to pass a far surer judgement on the moral character of another, than his own. The pollution of the heart brings a corrupt bias on the judgement, in a man's own case, and makes him palliate and defend those sins, to which he is strongly inclined, or of which he hath been already guilty: whereas, in determining the character of others, this bias is less sensibly felt. This is perhaps the true and only reason why any deference is paid to virtue as praise-worthy, by those who are

enemies to it in their hearts ; or any public honour and respect given to the service of God in the world, where so great a majority are evidently in the interests of another master.

One singular excellence of this rule is, its being the most universally intelligible. It is level to the capacity of men of all degrees of understanding. There is little difference, if any, in this respect, between the wise and the unwise, the learned and the ignorant. Perhaps this circumstance alone ought to give it, in justice, the preference to every other test of religious truth. Religion is the concern of all alike ; and therefore what relates to it should be open to all. It was the character, and the glory of the gospel, at its first publication, that it was preached to the poor. And by this it is still distinguished, not only from many or most false religions, but especially from those philosophical speculations, in which the enemies of all religion place their chief strength. When we peruse a system or theory of moral virtue, the principles of which are very refined, or the reasoning upon it abstracted, and above the comprehension of the vulgar, it may be ingenious, but it carries in it If a demonstration, that, because it is unfit, it could never be intended for general use.

Here, then, lies the great advantage of the rule laid down by our Saviour. The bulk of mankind, those of lower rank, and even those among them of weakest or least cultivated understanding, are able to judge of the effects of principles, or to see the beauty of an excellent character, when they are not able to examine a doctrine, or apprehend the

reasoning upon which it is founded. The dictates of conscience are often immediate and clear, when the deductions of reason are long and involved. To make intricate researches in theory, requires great natural abilities, which are the portion of very few: but to judge of a visible character requires only an impartial sense of right and wrong. Of this the plain man is as susceptible as the most acute by nature, or the most enlightened by education. In God Almighty infinite knowledge and infinite holiness are united; and we have reason to think that in their perfection they are inseparable. But we know, by experience, that they do not bear an exact proportion to one another in inferior natures, at least among sinful creatures. There may be, and there often is, great virtue and goodness in a mean capacity, and great depravity in persons of eminent abilities.

From these considerations it is plain, that this rule of trying a doctrine by its effects, as a tree by its fruits, may be applied by the meanest as well as the greatest, and with as little danger of mistake; perhaps it might have been safely affirmed, with less danger of mistake. Great intellectual abilities, and great natural advantages of every kind, are very ready to swell the mind with pride and self-conceit, than which no disposition is in itself more odious in the sight of God, or more unfavourable to the discovery of truth. This seems to be confirmed by experience; and it is plainly the view given us of our present state in the holy scriptures. Thus the apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. i. 26.—29. “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many

wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." For the very same thing we find our blessed Redeemer adoring the depth and sovereignty of divine Providence, in the following terms, Luke, x. 21. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Mistakes, however, after all, there will be, and some differences even among the best; but, from this very circumstance, I derive another great excellence of the above rule laid down, that it is not only the test of truth for a man's self, but the measure of forbearance with regard to others. By carefully examining their fruits, men may not only be directed what to embrace, and what capital and fundamental errors wholly to reject, but also in what particulars to exercise mutual forbearance, and, though smaller differences still subsist, to receive one another to the glory of God. If in any person or persons, of whatever party, you perceive the spirit of true and undefiled religion, they are accepted of God, and should not be condemned by you. This ought not, in justice, to induce you to approve

or embrace every one of their principles, or every part of their practice, of which perhaps you have seen or felt the bad tendency ; yet should it engage you to love them with unfeigned affection as sincere, though in some measure mistaken, servants of our common Lord.

- I hope it appears from the preceding observations, that this rule, of trying every principle or profession by its fruits, is the best that could have been given. It is certain and infallible in itself, and we are less liable to mistake in the use of it than of any other. There seems, indeed, to be an exact analogy between this rule in religious matters, and reason in our common and civil concerns. Reason is the best guide and director of human life. There is certainly an essential difference between wisdom and folly, in the nature of things. They are also sensibly opposite to one another in their extremes. Innumerable actions, however, there are, or modes of action, of a more doubtful and disputable nature, as to the wisdom or weakness of which hardly any two men would be entirely of the same opinion. Let the enemy of religion make the application, who denies its reality, because all good men are not of the same mind ; or because there are different parties and professions, who oppose one another in some opinions and practices. He acts just the same part, as he who seeing the differences of judgment among men, upon almost every subject that falls under their deliberation, should renounce the use of reason, or deny that there is in nature any such thing.

WE now proceed to the *second* thing proposed, to show, That the rule above explained and defended, is that by which, in fact, all serious persons, and indeed mankind in general, so far as they are sincere, do judge of religious principles and pretensions.

By serious persons, I understand all those who are truly religious, in opposition to those who have only a nominal and customary profession. If we would speak with precision, or reason in a just and conclusive manner, we must keep this distinction constantly in view. Nothing does more harm to any cause, than a treacherous friend, or bosom-enemy : and nothing does more hurt to the interest of religion, than its being loaded with a great number, who, for many obvious reasons, assume the form, while they are strangers to the power of it. The fallacy of almost all the reasonings of infidels lies here. They consider religion as answerable for all the hypocrisy of those who profess it, and all the wickedness of those who have not renounced the profession ; as if, in order to its being true, it must be impossible for any to counterfeit it. If that were the case, no thanks would be due to impartial inquiry. All colour of objection being taken away, the assent would not be yielded, but compelled. This, doubtless, the presumptuous wisdom of man ordinarily dictates ; but according to the superior wisdom of God, “offences must come” and “heresies also, that they that are approved may be made manifest.”

Supposing, therefore, the important distinction between real and nominal Christians, all of the first

character, of every age and of every party, are so far from being under the influence of implicit faith, that they try the truth by its fruits, and adhere to it for its effects. There is something more in the case of every good man, than barely a rational persuasion of the truth of religion in general, from the arguments adduced to support it. The truths of the gospel give him such a view of himself, and his own state, as experience shews him to be true. In the gospel he finds a remedy proposed for his guilt and misery, which, besides all the other evidences of its divine original, is exactly suited to his felt condition. Add to both these, that he immediately experiences its happy effect, not only in laying the best foundation for his peace, but in operating a thorough change in his heart and life. Thus hath every real Christian an inward and experimental proof of the truth of the gospel, not contrary, but superior to, stronger and more stable than any speculative reasoning. In this sense we are to understand the words of the apostle John, 1 John, v. 9. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." This is common to all real believers of whatever denomination, who not only are perfectly agreed in the essentials of religion, but much more agreed in every thing material, than they themselves either clearly apprehend or are willing to confess.

So far every good man must be acquitted from the charge of implicit faith; we may adopt concerning all such the words of our Saviour to Peter, Matth. xvi. 17. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,

but my Father which is in heaven." It is no less plain, that in every thing that is supposed to make a part of, or that hath any connection with religion, they may judge by the same rule. In all these modes of opinion in lesser matters, in all these circumstances which serve to distinguish one sect from another, though they may determine in different, nay in opposite ways, yet they all proceed upon the same general rule, viz. the influence which such disputed point has, as a means, upon the substance and end of all religion. This appears from the reasoning on each side, in all religious disputes. This principle, as common to both, is often expressly mentioned, and always manifestly implies, that those doctrines, or that way of expressing doctrines, and those practices, which are in fact most conducive to holiness, are, and for that very reason must be, most agreeable to the will of God.

But what I have chiefly in view is, to show, that this appears from the very fact usually brought to prove that the religion of almost all mankind is no better than implicit faith. The fact I mean is, that the bulk of mankind is greatly swayed in the choice of opinion by the authority and example of others. This, indeed, does not hold so generally as is commonly supposed. We have seen above, that it doth not hold, with regard to the substance of religion, in any good man; for in this he will call no man master on earth. But even when it does hold, it is, perhaps, not so blameable as many are apt to imagine. Let it be admitted, then, that in many instances it is the authority and example of men, more than any other reason, that deter-

mines the judgement. Let it be admitted, that this is the case with the bulk of mankind, and even in some measure with the best. I must be allowed to ask, What is it that procures these persons such authority? What is it that first begins, establishes, or perpetuates their influence? Nothing else but the real or apparent sanctity of their character. In vain will a profligate, or one manifestly destitute of personal worth, set himself at the head of a party, or attempt to draw disciples after him. It is the supposed piety and probity of the person, that gives weight to his example, and force to his precepts. This weighs more with the sober serious part of mankind, and indeed with mankind in general, than the greatest intellectual abilities, and otherwise most admired talents. Whoever has acquired a great reputation for piety and sincerity, will, with little art, or rather no art at all, nay, without so much as intending it, bring his principles and practice into repute. At the same time, one of a contrary character, with all the powers of eloquence, and every other outward advantage, shall fail in attempting to persuade.

Now, what is this, but that mankind proceed mainly in their judgement upon the very rule which I have endeavoured to shew is the best they could have chosen? They try principles by their effects, as a tree by its fruits. Wherever they see the best man, they conclude that he must be actuated by the most excellent as well as the most powerful principles. The multitude, or lower class of mankind, are usually the scorn of half-thinkers and superficial reasoners, for this attachment to persons.

But were a comparifon faithfully made between the feveral motives of choice in different claffes, there would be no great caufe of triumph. When we confider how unfit the plurality of mankind are to judge in an intricate debate, darkened, perhaps, by the art and fubtilty of thofe who handle it, we fhall find they are little, if at all, to blame. In the one view, no doubt, they may be faid to be aétuated by implicit faith; but in truth, and at bottom, they are following the wifeft and moft falutary of all moral maxims.

A furvey of the hiftory, either of religion in general, or of the Christian religion in particular, would fet this matter in the cleareft light. But little of this kind can come within the limits of a fingle difcourfe. I fhall not therefore ftay to mention the retired manner of life, and pretended fanctity of the inventors of the heathen idolatry, though it may be applied to this fubject; and would ferve to fhew the univerfal fenfe and general expectation of mankind. There is a faying of an eminent and violent enemy of the Christian faith, ‘That gravity is of the very effence of impofture.’ This is nothing elfe but a perverted view, and malicious representation of the general truth, that apparent fanctity is neceffary to eftablifh any facred authority. But is there any thing more unqueftionable, or that hath been more frequently obferved, than that the victory of truth over error, in the firft ages of Christianity, was much more owing to the fhining piety of the primitive Christians in general, together with the patience and conftancy of the martyrs, than to any other means. Reafon

may convince the understanding, but example seizes and keeps possession of the heart. It was the eminent piety and usefulness of the saints in former ages, which attracted such veneration and love from the multitude, as soon proceeded to a criminal excess. Not content with imitating the amiable example of those whom they held in such esteem, by a natural association they affixed a sanctity to relics, and this produced a variety of superstitious practices. I cannot also help being of opinion, that it was the severe and mortified lives of many of the retired devotees in the Romish church, that kept that corrupt body in credit for some ages longer than it could have otherwise continued.

On the other hand, who does not know, that the most formidable and successful attacks made by the reformers on that mother of abominations, were their exposing the corrupt and dissolute lives of her priests and members? This they were at no small pains to do, both in a grave and in an ironical strain. As the covetousness and ambition of many, and the licentious debauchery of others of the clergy, first brought the doctrines into suspicion; so those examples, when held up to light, made a far greater number of converts, than any absurdities in belief, how gross and palpable soever. The truth is, we find all parties greedily lay hold of this weapon whenever it is presented to them, and use it with great confidence against their adversaries; and in so doing they discover a conviction, that principles are never so powerfully supported as by the good, nor so effectually disparaged as by the bad characters of those who profess them.

If we leave the history of former ages, and examine the state of the present, the same truth will still be the result of our inquiry, and appear with increasing evidence. Different parties and denominations prevail in different places: and wherever any party or denomination greatly prevails, the effects may easily be traced up to its cause; and will appear, by no very distant tradition, to have been owing to the eminent piety of some one or more of that profession in a former period, or, which is much the same, to the comparatively odious and vicious characters of those who oppose them*.

* Our own country will afford us some sensible and striking proofs of the justice of this observation. There had been a struggle, from the very first dawn of the Reformation, between Presbytery and Episcopacy in Scotland. This contest, however, came to its greatest height about 100 years ago, when the Presbyterians were ejected, and Episcopacy was established by a tyrannical civil government, and continued by a severe and cruel persecution. We had by this means a trial of both: and it is very observable, that the odium which justly fell upon Episcopacy from the rage and inhumanity of those who had the chief direction, was the circumstance that determined the body of the nation to endeavour its subversion. Yet, wherever there happened to be a few ministers of that persuasion pious in their lives, and diligent in the duties of their office, there were many persons and families who joined with them in communion, and their posterity adhere to that opinion even to this day. This was the case in some places of the east and north country. But in the western parts of Scotland, where the Episcopal clergy were, almost to a man, ignorant, slothful, or vicious, they were universally deserted, and hardly a single adherent to that persuasion is now to be found. I

It is no just objection to the account here given, that we find instances in which principles seem to give a sanction to characters, instead of receiving support from them. There are, no doubt, cases in which a man's being known to embrace certain principles, will be alone sufficient to make him odious, however blameless or even praise-worthy his conduct be in every other respect. At the same time, perhaps, the failings of another shall be either wholly pardoned, or greatly extenuated, if he espouse, but especially if he is active in vindicating, the principles which are held sacred. But this is no more than the natural and necessary consequence of any set of principles being once firmly established. They acquire their credit at first, in the way I have already mentioned; but when that credit is high, it will bring a suspicion upon every thing that opposes it, however specious and promising in outward appearance. There is nothing surprising here, nor indeed any thing but what is perfectly natural; for, as one or a few instances commonly do not, so in reason they ought not to shake the reputation of truths, which have been established by long experience of their worth and efficacy. Neither must it be forgotten, that when

cannot omit mentioning here what was said by a lady of quality at that time to Dr Burnet, when he came to visit the west country. It was to the following purpose: "We of the laity cannot judge upon controversial points, but we see these men whom you persecute, grave in their deportment, strictly holy in their conversation, and very laborious in their functions, while many of your clergy are ignorant, slothful, and vicious." This is what determines the judgement of the people.

examples seem to stand in opposition one to another, and to lead to different conclusions, it is not from one or two that a judgement can be passed, but from many, and these compared and examined with great diligence and care.

I conclude the illustration of this head with remarking, that the principle above laid down will explain, in a clear and satisfying manner, two appearances in the moral world, which seem directly to contradict one another. By what happens sometimes in religion, we shall be apt to conclude, that there is in human nature a proneness to change, or a love of novelty purely on its own account. Accordingly we find this laid to the charge of mankind by several authors. And it cannot be denied, that some men, or sects, often introduce new practices, which acquire great reputation, and almost universal acceptance. By other examples, however, we are taught to ascribe to human nature a strong attachment to old opinions, and hatred of all innovation. What is remarkable is, that both these take place chiefly in little circumstances, and things of small moment; new inventions being sometimes gone into with a zeal, and old customs adhered to with an obstinacy, which the intrinsic value of the things contended for does not seem to merit on either side. To ascribe this to the different dispositions of individuals, will not be a satisfactory solution; for we see sometimes examples of both in the same persons. But, by searching a little deeper, we shall unravel this difficulty, and discover, that though the love of novelty, or a veneration for antiquity, may be sometimes the immediate principle

of action, there is another ultimate principle which is the cause of both, and in different circumstances produces either the one or the other. This principle is no other than that admiration of real or supposed worth, which has been illustrated above. Whoever hath acquired a great reputation for piety and holiness, may easily introduce any indifferent practice, though not common before, especially if it be considered as an evidence or expression of his piety. On this supposition, his differing from, or doing more than others, will be taken notice of to his praise*. But he may much more easily introduce a new than depart from an old custom. The reason is plain; for ancient customs having been established on the ground already assigned, men are usually very tenacious of them; and it requires no small degree of credit and character either to change or to abolish them.

WE now proceed to make some practical improvement of what has been said.

In the *first* place, From what has been said upon this subject, we may derive one of the plainest and most satisfying proofs of the truth of the gospel: A proof level to the meanest capacity, and there-

* There is great reason to think that it was in this very way that many different rites were brought into the Christian church, which in a long course of time grew into a mass of abominable superstition. They were at first, perhaps, but the modes or circumstances of the worship, or practice of pious persons, but from being voluntary and purely circumstantial, they came by degrees to be considered as parts of religious worship; and therefore sinful in the performers, but much more sinful in the proposers.

fore proper to preserve ordinary Christians from being shaken by the bold and insolent attacks now made on religion by some of the lowest rank: A proof, at the same time, not only deserving the attention of the most intelligent, but which of all others is certainly the most decisive. Let us try it by its fruits. Let us compare the temper and character of real Christians, with those of infidels, and see which of them best merits the approbation of an honest and impartial judge. Let us take in every circumstance that will contribute to make the comparison just and fair, and see what will be the result. I say this, because I can by no means allow, that great multitudes, though born in a country where Christianity is professed, ought to be considered as Christians, when they are open and violent enemies to the gospel in all its parts. They ought rather to be thrown into the scale of infidelity. But, since most of them have formed no fixed principles at all, because they have never thought upon the subject, we shall leave them entirely out of the question.

Is, then, the character and practice of infidels in general, once to be compared with that of such Christians as believe upon personal conviction? However much the natural sense of right and wrong may be obscured and perverted in some, I should think there are few who will not manifestly perceive to whom the preference is due. In which of the two do you find the most regular and fervent piety towards God? Here, perhaps, it will be said, This is what no man expects to find in unbelievers, it is no part of their plan, and therefore

ought not to be included in the comparison. But as the general sense of mankind does not require it, so I can never suffer that our duty to God should be erased out of the moral law. Besides, the general pretence now, is not atheism, but theism. The question is therefore altogether pertinent; and persons of this character are self-condemned, who, by their total neglect of all religious worship, are as much chargeable with impiety as infidelity. In which of the two is to be found the greatest integrity and uprightness in their conduct between man and man, the most unfeigned good-will, and most active beneficence to others? Is it the unbeliever, or the Christian, who clothes the naked, and deals his bread to the hungry? Ask the many and noble ancient structures raised for the relief of the diseased and the poor, to whom they owe their establishment and support? Which of these two classes of men are most remarkable for self-government? How often is the unexperienced youth initiated in debauchery of all kinds, by these very friends of mankind, who charitably declaim against priestcraft and delusion, and happily eradicate the prejudices of education, by treating religion and all religious persons with derision and scorn! With what fatal success has the infidel often seduced the unwary virgin into the destructive paths of lust, by first loosening the obligation of religion, and then justifying the indulgence of every natural desire? We shall carry the comparison no farther in this place; but I must beg of every one who has had the happiness to be acquainted with an eminently pious, humble, active, useful Christian, to say,

whether he can admit it as possible, under the administration of a wise and good God, that such a person is governed by a fable invented by designing villains, while the infidel alone is in possession of the truth, which is pure in its nature, and must be proved by its fruits*.

In the *second* place, Since not only religion in general, but every particular doctrine of religion, ought to be tried by its fruits, let neither ministers nor people ever lose view of this great rule in the doctrines which they teach on the one hand, or embrace on the other. Let us also particularly remember, that no credit is to be given to any

* I am sensible it is often pretended, that several infidels have been men of unblemished morals. Collins was a good man, say some, and Shaftesbury was yet a better man. Perhaps, these individuals might not be chargeable with the most open dissoluteness, and grossest sensuality, which would have been inconsistent with their giving themselves to close study and application. Besides, they who assaulted, with so much boldness, established opinions, must have been under a considerable restraint, from a regard to their character and cause. This ought not to be rejected as an improbable supposition, or uncharitable allegation against them, who so liberally reproach others, with insincere, hypocritical, and saint-like pretences. But after all, making even the largest allowances, there is one piece of conduct, of which both the above-named persons were habitually guilty, which it is impossible for me to reconcile with good morals, even upon the laxest principles that have ever yet been avowed. What I mean was, their solemnly receiving the holy sacrament, to qualify themselves for bearing office in their country, though they believed it to be altogether imposture and deceit. This was such a piece of gross and aggravated dissimulation, as it is impossible either to defend in itself, or to suppose consistent with integrity upon the whole.

high professions or bold pretences, but as they are confirmed by the fact. I observe here, with much pleasure, what advantage the fundamental scripture-doctrines, which have been long the glory and happiness of this church, will derive from a fair and full inquiry into their influence and effects. The doctrines I mean are, the lost state of man by nature; salvation by the free grace of God; justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; and sanctification by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit. These were the doctrines of the Reformation, when their excellence was put beyond all doubt or question, by their powerful and valuable effects. Many adversaries, indeed, soon rose up to contradict or corrupt them; and it is much to be lamented that they are, at present, by many, so boldly and so violently opposed in this once happy island. But we may venture to affirm, that when the doctrine of the cross retained its purity and simplicity, then was true religion, including every moral virtue, seen to grow from it as its fruit. On the other hand, when and wherever it has been run down, and a pretended moral doctrine has been introduced, to the prejudice and subversion of the grace of God, it hath been always followed by a deluge of profaneness and immorality in practice. It is easy and common to disguise the truth by misrepresentation, or to vilify it by opprobrious titles. It is easy to pretend a warm zeal for the great doctrines of morality, and frequently to repeat, in a pulpit, the necessity of holiness in general; but all impartial persons ought, and the world in general will, judge more by works than by words. Let

us suppose, for example, the old objection revived against a minister who preaches the doctrine of grace, that it loosens the obligations to holiness of life. The objection is, of all others, the most specious: yet, if that minister discharges his duty with zeal and diligence, watches over his people's souls, reproof, rebuking, exhorting with all long-suffering and doctrine; is strict and holy in his own conversation, abhorring and flying from the society of the ungodly; and if the effects of his ministry be to turn many sinners from the error of their ways, and to make an intelligent, serious, regular people; the accusation will not be received: and who will say that it ought? On the other hand, is any minister more covetous of the fleece, than diligent for the welfare of the flock; cold and heartless in his sacred work, but loud and noisy in promiscuous and foolish conversation; careless or partial in the exercise of discipline; covering or palliating the sins of the great, because they may promote him; making friends and companions of profane persons; though this man's zeal should burn like a flame against Antinomianism, and though his own unvaried strain should be the necessity of holiness, I would never take him to be any of its real friends.

Let us not, my brethren, deceive ourselves, or attempt to deceive others, by plausible pretences. Let us all be zealous for good works; not the name, but the thing. Let us not expect to promote them by a little cold reasoning, or affected flowery declamation; but by the simplicity of the gospel, by the doctrine of the cross, which will not only tell men that they ought to be holy, but effectually

bring them to that happy state. The leading principle of true holiness, according to the gospel, is a deep and grateful sense of redeeming love. 2 Cor. v. 14. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

In the *third* place, From what has been said on this subject, you may see, in a very strong light, how necessary it is that ministers should be, not only really, but visibly and eminently holy; and with how much care they are bound to avoid every appearance of evil. There are some ministers who strongly plead for liberty and freedom, and loudly complain of the malice, uncharitableness, and censoriousness of the world. They seem as if they desired, nay, which is still more foolish, expected, that no part of their conduct should be attended to, or any inference drawn from it with respect to their character. This will never be the case till they are invisible. It appears, from what hath been said in the preceding discourse, that it is the right and the duty of every man to try a minister by his fruits. Ignorance, indeed, may sometimes be guilty of mistakes to our prejudice, and malice or envy may go too far; yet this is only what we ought to lay our account with; and it should excite us, not to a contempt of the judgement of others, but to greater strictness and circumspection, that "they may be ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ."

It is very hurtful in this as in many other cases, when a man views things only on one side. Some are apt to impute so much to the malice and uncharitableness of the world, that they seldom or never think themselves truly guilty of any offence or miscarriage. I am persuaded many are in a manner blinded to the errors of their own conduct by this very circumstance. Or, if they cannot but be sensible that they have been guilty of something that was wrong, when the fault is aggravated by report, they seem to think that this atones for any thing really blame-worthy, and so are hardened both against confession and repentance. To speak without prejudice, it is more than probable, that we are as much chargeable with unguarded and offensive conduct on the one hand, as the world with precipitate or partial judgement on the other. It hath been sometimes observed, that the multitude of common people are but poor judges of a man's ability or learning, but they are very good judges of his life. There is a great deal of truth in this observation; and to support it I add, that even a hypocritical pretence is extremely hard to maintain, and so often betrays itself by little circumstances, that there are very few whose real character is not better understood by the world than by themselves. The chief exception I know to this is the case of violent party-disputes. The injustice done to characters on each side there, is very great. If you take a man's character from one to whom he stands in party-opposition, you must conceive him not a man, but a monster. But, (setting this aside, which does not fall within the compass of our present sub-

ject), in general, it is surely much more becoming, and it is infinitely more safe, for us to suspect ourselves, than to complain of hard measure from the world. Let us, therefore, by doubling our diligence in every personal and ministerial duty, endeavour to “make our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven,” Matth. v. 16.

In the *fourth* place, I must now take the liberty, in fidelity to the trust committed to me, to be a little more particular in the application of this subject, and to inquire, whether ministers are not, in good measure, chargeable with the low state to which religion is at present reduced. May I not say without offence, that an eminently holy, diligent, and successful gospel-ministry, was once the glory and blessing of this part of the united kingdom? But how are we since fallen asleep! “How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!” That there is a difference is plain; and that this difference does not lie in inferior abilities or a less proportion of learning, is equally certain. I am sensible, that this is a part of my subject which would require to be touched with a very tender and delicate hand, and that, perhaps, I run as great a hazard to inflame and exasperate the sore, as to bring any effectual cure. This is, indeed; itself, one strong symptom of our disease, that we cannot endure plain dealing; and there is not a single circumstance in which there is a greater difference between this and the preceding age. What in former times would have been reckoned (to speak in their language) no more than plainness

and ministerial freedom, would now be called the most slanderous invective and unpardonable abuse. Instead, therefore, of taking upon me to say who are chiefly to be blamed as the criminal causes of it, I shall only affirm, and lament the melancholy effect, that we have in many places of this church, a despised, forsaken, useless ministry; that many of the people have gone from mountain to mountain, and forgotten their resting-place, while a still greater number is fast asleep in ignorance, security, and sloth. Where is that union, that mutual esteem and affection, which once subsisted between ministers and their people? It must be acknowledged, that their influence and authority is now in a great measure lost; and therefore I may safely conclude that their usefulness is gone. That the fault is all on one side, is neither a modest nor a probable supposition. Should we throw the blame off ourselves, what a terrible load must we thereby lay upon others! we must suppose and say, that under a blameless ministry, under the best and purest of instruction, one part of the nation is sunk in brutality and sloth, and the other rent in pieces by division, and religion lost in the fury of contending parties.

We may say so, my brethren, and some do say what amounts to the same thing; but it is not credible. I do, therefore, in the most earnest manner, beseech every minister in this audience, seriously to think, how far he hath given just cause to his people to despise his person, or desert his ministrations. Let us not so insist upon the ignorance, prejudices,

and weakness of the giddy multitude, as if a failure on our part was impossible. We may be sometimes blamed in the wrong place; but we have, perhaps, as much respect in general as we really deserve. Do not think it is sufficient that you are free from gross crimes, such as blasphemy, riot, and unclean lust. Blessed be God, nothing of this kind would yet be suffered among us without censure. But there are many things, which, either separately or together, render a minister justly contemptible, on which no law, either civil or ecclesiastic, can lay hold. If one set apart to the service of Christ in the gospel, manifestly shews his duty to be a burden, and does no more work than is barely sufficient to screen him from censure; if he reckons it a piece of improvement, how seldom or how short he can preach, and makes his boast how many omissions he has brought a patient and an injured people to endure without complaint; while, at the same time, he cannot speak with temper of those who are willing to do more than himself; however impossible it may be to ascertain his faults by a libel, he justly merits the detestation of every faithful minister, and every real Christian.

The things here in view, though they are easily seen, are difficult to describe; and therefore I shall not attempt to be more particular. But I cannot forbear warning you against, and pointing out the evil of two pieces of dishonesty, which may possibly be found united to gravity and decency in other respects. One of them is common in our

neighbour kingdom, and may possibly have taken place among us, though I cannot affirm it. The other, I am certain, hath many times taken place in the church of Scotland. The first is a minister's subscribing articles of doctrine, which he does not believe. This is so direct a violation of sincerity, that it is astonishing to think, how men can set their minds at ease in the prospect, or keep them in peace after the deliberate commission of it. The very excuses and evasions that are offered in defence of it, are a disgrace to reason, as well as a scandal to religion. What success can be expected from that man's ministry, who begins it with an act of such complicated guilt? How can he take upon him to reprove others for sin, or to train them up in virtue and true goodness, while himself is chargeable with direct, premeditated, and perpetual perjury? I know nothing so nearly resembling it, as those cases in trade, in which men make false entries, and at once screen and aggravate their fraud, by swearing, or causing others to swear, contrary to truth. This is justly reputed scandalous even in the world, and yet I know no circumstance in which they differ, that does not tend to shew it to be less criminal than the other. We are not yet so much hardened in this sin as many in our neighbour church; for I have never found any among us so bold as to profess and defend it. But, if no such thing is at all admitted among us, why is there such a suspicion of it? why do so many complain, that the great and operative doctrines of the gospel are withdrawn, and an unsubstantial

theory of virtue substituted in their place? or why are such complaints put to silence, since it may be so easily done? Appearances are certainly such as will warrant me in mentioning it upon this occasion: and I have particularly chosen to introduce it upon this subject, that I may attack it, not as an error, but as a fraud; not as a mistake in judgement, but an instance of gross dishonesty and insincerity of heart. Supposing, therefore, that there may possibly be truth in the charge against some of us, I must beg every minister, but especially those young persons who have an eye to that sacred office, to remember, that God will not be mocked, though the world may be deceived. In his sight, no gravity of deportment, no pretence to freedom of inquiry, a thing excellent in itself, no regular exercise of the right of private judgement, will warrant or excuse such a lie for gain, as solemnly to subscribe what they do not believe.

The other particular I proposed to mention, is the solemn attestation of men's characters, not only in general, but in particular qualities, without any satisfying knowledge whether the thing affirmed is true or false. This hath been often done in the church of Scotland, not by particular persons, with whom we might renounce relation, but by consent of many, gravely and deliberately, in constituted courts. Can we avoid making the following obvious, but melancholy reflection? How great is the blindness of men to those sins, which are introduced by degrees, and countenanced by prevailing passion! Should we be told by an historian of cre-

dit, that in one of the dark and corrupt ages of Popery, it was common for a body of ministers, when desired, to give a signed attestation to particular persons, that they were strict observers of the Sabbath, and worshipped God regularly in their families, while the persons attesting knew nothing of the matter, and, in fact, with regard to some of them it was absolutely false : Would there be a dissenting voice in affirming, that such men must have been lost to all sense of integrity, and utterly unworthy of regard? What shall we say, if the same thing is done among us every day, and defended by no better argument than the judgement of charity, which believeth all things? Charity teaches us to believe no ill of another without satisfying evidence, and forbids us to spread it although it be true, without apparent necessity. But will charity either justify or excuse us, in solemnly affirming a positive fact, the existence of which is uncertain in itself, and to us unknown? I do not take upon me to say that all are bad men who are guilty, by act or consent, of this practice, because I do not know how far the plea of ignorance or mistake may go ; but this may be safely said, that they do in a public capacity, what if they were to do in a private capacity, between man and man, would render them contemptible, or infamous, or both.

These two particulars have often brought reproach upon the church of Scotland, to which it is very difficult to make a proper reply. Would to God the occasion given for it were wholly taken away ! In the mean time, every one who has a just

regard to the glory of God, or the success of his own work, will endeavour to maintain such an uniformity of character, as will bear that examination, to which it ought in justice, and must of necessity be exposed.

In the *last* place, I must beg leave to speak a few words to the people in general, on the subject of this discourse. You may learn, my brethren, from the preceding discourse, by what rule you ought to judge, in all religious controversies, where a determination is necessary. Try all principles by their effects, and every person's pretences by his conduct. Examine, as far as you have proper evidence, who have real and vital religion most at heart, and what means do effectually promote it. Believe not every profession, but see which is most consistent in all its parts. Have patience, in difficult cases, till the tree have time to bring its fruits to maturity. Time will often write a clear and legible character, on what was very dark and dubious at first.

It is probable that some will be ready to say, 'There is no small doubtfulness in this rule itself. There may be found good men of many different parties, how then shall we judge between them?' I answer, Wherever there is true religion, these persons are to be considered as the servants of God, and his grace in them is to be confessed without reluctance, and adored with thankfulness. There will, nevertheless, be still sufficient means to distinguish between one profession and another, which hath the greatest influence in making men truly good. There may be, here and there, a good man under

very great disadvantages. This may serve to keep us from a bigotted narrowness of mind, and uncharitable condemnation of others. But it will never occasion, in any prudent person, a departure from those principles, and that dispensation of ordinances, which he sees to be best for building him up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation. The truth is, one great design of this discourse was to teach men to distinguish between the upright and the worthless of all sects. Turn your zeal from parties to persons. Do not reproach or oppose men merely because they are of this or the other persuasion. But wherever there is a wicked or a worldly man in the office of a minister, avoid the wolf in sheep's clothing, for your own sake, and, if possible, drag off his disguise, that others may not be his prey. What doth it signify what party a man is of, if the foundations are destroyed, and truth and holiness, these inseparable companions, are trampled under foot? When shall the time come, when the sincere lovers of Christ, of every denomination, shall join together in opposition to his open enemies and treacherous friends? There is a wonderful, though a natural union, among all worldly men, against the spirit and power of true religion wherever it appears. I am sorry to add, that this is one of the instances in which the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. Many will not meet together on earth for the worship of God, who shall have but one temple at last, where all from the east and from the west, from the north and from

the fourth, shall meet, and join in their Creator's and Redeemer's praise. The terms of admission into, and of exclusion from this happy dwelling, are recorded in the following remarkable terms, with which I shall conclude this discourse, as indeed they are the sum of all that has been said in it: Rev. xxi. 27. "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

END OF VOLUME IV.

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