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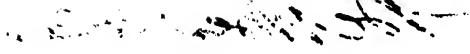
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The New Column.

THE

WORKS

OF THE

Rev. John Witherspoon,

D. D. L. L. D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE, AT PRINCETON NEW-JERSEY.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

An Account of the Author's Life, in a Sermon occasioned
by his Death, by the

REV. DR. JOHN RODGERS,

OF NEW YORK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE FOLLOWING

P R E F A C E

Was Published in the European, which makes but a part
of the American Edition.

THE following Treatises were originally published at different times, and some of them on particular occasions; but the attentive reader will easily perceive one leading design running through the whole. The author hath long been of opinion, that the great decay of religion in all parts of this kingdom, is chiefly owing to a departure from the truth as it is in JESUS, from those doctrines which chiefly constitute the substance of the gospel. It may perhaps be justly imputed to other general causes in part, and in some measure to less universal causes in particular places; but as all more action must arise from principle, otherwise it ought not to be called by that name, the immediate and most powerful cause of degeneracy in practice, must always be a corruption in principle.

I am sensible that many will be ready to cry out on this occasion, "Such notions arise from narrowness of mind and uncharitable sentiments." I answer, that it is surprising to think how easily the fashionable or cant phrases of the age, will pass among superficial thinkers and readers, without the least attention either to their meaning, or to the evidence on which they are founded.

Thus at present, if a man shall write or speak against certain principles, and stile them pernicious, it will be thought a sufficient vindication of them to make a beaten common-place encomium on liberty of conscience and freedom of enquiry. Blessed be God, this great and sacred privilege is well secured to us in this nation: But pray, is it not mine as well as yours? And is it not the very exercise of this liberty, for every man to endeavor to support those principles which appear to him to be founded on Reason and Scripture, as well as to attack without scruple every thing which he believes to be contrary to either.

Let it also be observed, that if freedom of inquiry be a blessing at all, it can be so for no other reason than the excellence and salutary influence of real truth, when it can be discovered. If truth and error are equally safe, nothing can be more foolish than for a man to waste his time in endeavoring to distinguish the one from the other. What a view does

it give us of the weakness of human nature, that the same persons so frequently hold inconsistent principles? How many will say the strongest things in favor of an impartial search after truth, and with the very same breath tell you, "It is of no consequence at all, either for time or "eternity, whether you hold one opinion or another."

These reflections are only designed to procure a candid unprejudiced hearing to what is offered in the following pages, in defence of what appears to me the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, which are now so greatly neglected, or so openly despised. I am encouraged to this republication by the great demand there has been for some of the pieces, particularly The Essay on Justification.

I must observe here, that I have received several letters on this subject, desiring that the phrase imputed righteousness might be changed, as liable to great exceptions; a request which I would readily have complied with, if it could be made appear to be either unscriptural or dangerous. But as I apprehend it is fully warranted by Rom. iv. 6. and many other passages; so I do not see what can be understood by it, different from or more dangerous than forgiveness of sin and acceptance with GOD, not for our own but for CHRIST'S sake. As the case stands, therefore it is to be feared, that a studied endeavor to avoid the expression would do more harm on the one hand than it could do service on the other.

In the Treatise on Regeneration, now first published, the same general design is pursued, but in a way more directly practical; and indeed I am fully convinced, that it is not only of much greater moment to make experimental than speculative Christians, but that to explain and enforce the doctrines of the gospel is a better way to produce an unshaken persuasion of their truth, than to collect and refute the cavils of adversaries, which, though they are often trifling, are notwithstanding innumerable. I hope this will excuse the introducing several passages of Scripture in the last mentioned Treatise, and applying them on what appears to me to be their obvious meaning, without taking the least notice of the unwearied pains frequently taken by wire drawing critics to interpret them in a contrary sense.

London, June, 1764.

J. W.

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THE
FAITHFUL SERVANT REWARDED :

A
S E R M O N,

Delivered at Princeton, before the Board of Trustees of the College of New-Jersey, May 6, 1795, occasioned by the death of the Rev. JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. L. L. D. President of said College, by JOHN RODGERS, D. D. Senior Minister of the United Presbyterian Churches, in the city of New-York.

PUBLISHED BY PARTICULAR REQUEST OF THE BOARD.

MATTHEW, XXV. 21.

“ His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful Servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

THE doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, lies deep at the foundation of our holy religion : It is a doctrine perfectly consonant to reason, and supported by it ; and is either asserted, or justly taken for granted, in every page of the sacred oracles. This is the immortality, for the blessedness of which we became incapacitated, by our apostacy from God ; and that, for the enjoyment of which, it is one great design of the religion of Jesus Christ to prepare us. The whole frame of this religion is wisely calculated for this end. Among the many evidences of these truths, we may appeal to the discourses of our Divine Master ; and particularly to this, of which our text is a part.

In the preceding chapter, he had given his disciples an instructive discourse on the certainty and solemnity of his second coming. He continues the subject in this chapter, and enforces the great duty of preparation for it, by the parable of the ten virgins, from the first verse to the thirteenth; by the parable of the talents, from thence to the thirtieth verse; and by a more particular account of the process of the judgment of the great day, from thence to the end of the chapter.

The more immediate design of the parable of the talents, of which our text is a part, is to enforce the duty, and illustrate the happiness of being prepared for *giving up our account*, when he shall come to judge the world in righteousness. You may read it at your leisure. The "man travelling into a far country," in this parable means our Lord himself; who is the great head of his church, which is his family. The "servants," of whom we here read, mean all professing Christians; all who call themselves the servants of Christ, whatever their nation or denomination may be; though some suppose, the Ministers of the Gospel are more particularly intended.

By the *talents*, we are to understand the various gifts of Heaven, whether of a common or of a special nature. They include the bounties of Providence, such as health, strength, reason, genius, riches, honor, power, learning, reputation, the several advantages arising from our stations in life; and, together with these, those graces of the spirit that constitute the Christian temper. These are all so many talents put into our hands, to be improved for God, and the best interests of our fellow-creatures; and they are different to different persons. To one God gives more of these gifts or graces, and to another less; which is designed in the parable by the master's giving to one servant *five* talents, and to another *two*, and to another *one*.

By "the Lord of those servants coming, after a long time, to reckon with them," we are to understand that particular judgment which every one passes under at death, when their final states are determined: and also, and principally, our Lord's coming to judge the world in

righteousness, at the last day, “When every one shall receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” At both these solemn periods, the faithful servant of Christ, whatever his character and station in life may have been, shall be received with a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

There are two things in these words that particularly deserve our notice. The *character of those* who shall meet with the approbation of their Lord, in the great day of final awards; they have been *good* and *faithful* servants. And the *reward* such shall receive, on that solemn occasion, from the judge of quick and dead—They shall be each one received with a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Agreeably to this view of my text, I shall,

I. Briefly consider the character of the good and faithful servant of Christ.

II. The nature of that reward here promised to all such in the great day of the Lord.

Let us enquire,

I. What is the character of the good and faithful servant of Christ?

I have already said, this may be applied either to the disciples of Christ in general, of whatever nation, denomination, or character in life they may be; or to the ministers of the Gospel in particular. I shall consider the phrase as including both. And it implies,

I. *Love to Christ and his service.*—A good servant always loves a good master. But it is necessary to observe here, that this love to Christ and his service is not found in the heart of depraved man, in his natural state. We are by nature alienated from God: destitute of every principle of love to him and his son Christ, in their true character. The apostolic description of depraved human

nature is, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts."^a Hence arises the necessity of being "renewed in the spirit of our mind; and of putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."^b But one of the principal constituents of this new man is, love to God and his son Christ Jesus. Love to God for his own divine excellence, as well as for the beneficence of his hand, to us—and love to Christ, as being the "brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person."^c The sincere servant of Christ loves both his person and his character. His soul is pleased with him, as he is exhibited in the oracles of truth. "He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely in his esteem."^d He loves also his *service*: He esteems his laws to be altogether equal and just.—This is the native effect of his love to his person and his government: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."^e The love we bear to the person of Christ, in proportion to its prevalence, will not only induce us to obedience, but render that obedience easy and delightful—We delight to oblige those whom we love.

2. The good and faithful servant of Christ *loves his fellow servants*—He considers them as children of the same common father with himself: and we read, that "every one that loveth him who begat, loveth him also who is begotten of him."^f He considers them as redeemed by the same precious blood of Christ; and as the subjects of the same sanctifying and comforting influences of the spirit of grace, which are the common privilege of every true Christian; for "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."^g He considers them as engaged in the same common cause with himself; the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and the illustration of the honor of God in our world. These are the great ends the good and faithful servants of Christ have in view, however they may

Eph. iv. 18. b ver. 23, 24. c Heb. i. 3. d Song. v. 10, 16.

e 1 John v. 3. f 1 John v. 1. g Rom. viii. 9.

differ in some of the modes of pursuing them. Yet this difference does not forfeit their love, or destroy their charity for each other. If the person whose character I describe, cannot agree to agree with his brethren, in denomination, or mode of worship, he will agree to differ with them—He will agree they should think and act for themselves, in matters of such infinite concern; a privilege he justly claims to himself. And in how many things soever the disciples of Christ may differ in matters of lesser moment, they will all agree in loving their Master, his honor, his truth, and his service—They will agree in adorning their profession in all godliness of conversation.

Again—The good and faithful servant considers his fellow-disciples as in the same vale of tears, and in the same state of imperfection and trial with himself; and, therefore, that both they and he stand in need of mutual sympathy, charity, and forbearance, one towards another. In a word, he considers them as heirs of the same future glory with himself; as “travelling to the same city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God;” and that, therefore, they ought not to differ by the way.

Of such importance is this brotherly love, in the estimation of our Lord, that he not only enjoins it upon his disciples as their duty, but as their distinguishing and characteristic duty; that duty which more strongly marks their character as his disciples than almost any other; and that by which they are especially to distinguish themselves from the men of the world. You, therefore, hear him say, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”^a

3. *Diligence in his Lord's work*, is another ingredient in the character of the good and faithful servant. You will easily perceive the absurdity of a good, and at the same time a *slothful* servant, in common life; and it is still more so in the case before us. We all have our work in life assigned us, in the course of a wise Providence: and

^a John xiii. 34, 35.

this is two fold, our general business as men and Christians, and the special business of our respective stations. Both these are fruitful of a variety of duties, too numerous to be recited in this place—They embrace the whole compass of duty, both moral and positive, that we owe to our God, our neighbour, or ourselves. Nor is there a single character we sustain, or relation we bear, in either of those views, but what is the source of important duties. And if you consider the variety and multiplicity of these relations and connexions, you will readily perceive these duties must be numerous, as well as important. But all these are so many claims on the diligence of the servants of Christ; so many obligations on them to be “not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”^a We must be diligent too, that one duty may not interfere with another, for every thing is beautiful in its season.

Again—Diligence is implied in the idea of *faithfulness*; for the servant cannot be faithful who is not diligent. No man ever employed a servant to run idle; nor can any thing be more contrary to the design for which Heaven has made us, than a life of sloth and idleness, unless it be a life of open and undisguised prophaneness. The author of our lives has sufficiently marked the great end for which he made us, upon the active powers with which he has endowed us—And this diligence is to be particularly employed in the discharge of the duties of our several stations in life. This is one way, among others, by which we are to bring forth fruit to the honor of our Lord. “And herein,” saith our Saviour, “is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”^b

4. The good and faithful servant *has a sincere regard to his master's honor*. This is the end at which he wishes and studies to aim in all his actions: agreeably to the Divine command, “Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”^c And in this the servant of Christ accords with his master: the great end of whose incarnation, atonement, and intercession, on the behalf of sinners, was, the illustration of God's declarative glory. He

^a Romans xii. 11. ^b John xv. 8. ^c 1 Cor. x. 31.

undertook the vindication of the character and government of God, from the contempt sin had cast upon them; and in this he fully succeeded, and appeals to his father, that so he had done—"I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."^a You will perceive, then, that to aim at the honor of God, as the highest end of all our actions, is, in a capital instance, to have the "same mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus, our Lord."^b The true servant of Christ regards the honor both of his character and of his person. By the honor of Christ's character, I mean his honor as mediator; particularly as the great atonement for sin, and as our intercessor at his father's right hand. But to honor Christ under this character, in a proper manner, is not only to profess our firm faith in these doctrines, but to accept him as the Lord our righteousness; it is to trust in the merit of his atonement, as the sole ground of our acceptance in the sight of God—Thus the good and faithful servant of Christ puts the highest honor in his power upon him, in the character of a Saviour. He practically risks his very salvation on his ability, suitability, and willingness to save him.

I shall mention but one ingredient more in the character I am at present illustrating, and that is,

5. *Faithfulness* in the discharge of the duties of life. The character under which our text represents the servants of Christ, is that of *stewards*, with whom their Lord had entrusted his goods; to some he gave more, and to others less, to trade withal. But the Apostle tells us, "That it is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful*."^c And you will please to observe, our text expressly styles the true disciple of Christ, "a good and *faithful* servant."

This faithfulness consists, principally, in a conscientious sincerity and diligence in filling up the duties of our several stations and characters in life. And the great rule by which we are to act, is the will of our Lord and Master.

Thus much for the character of the good and faithful servant.

^a Joba xvii. 4. ^b Phil. ii. 5. ^c Cor. iv. 2.

Let us now proceed to enquire,

II. What is the nature of that reward promised in our text to all such good and faithful servants?

And, as it is here described, it implies, principally, the four following things:

1. The *acceptance of their persons* with God.—This is implied in the character here given them, and represented in the parable, as given them by their Lord, when he calls them to give an account of their stewardship, *good and faithful servants*. And you will please farther to observe, they are not only acknowledged as good and faithful, but received with a “Well done, ye good and faithful servants.” This, indeed, chiefly imports an approbation of their conduct; but it is no less expressive of the acceptance of their persons.

But to estimate this blessing in a proper manner, it is necessary to recollect, that as sinners, we had forfeited all right to this acceptance with God, and justly merited his severe displeasure. That we deserve nothing but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, from him, throughout an immortality of woe. Yea, that such is the nature of the forfeiture we have made of the Divine favor; and such the justice of the sentence that binds us down to suffer his displeasure, that it appears not to have been compatible with the honor of God, to reverse the sentence, and restore the sinner to favor, without an adequate satisfaction. And the price paid for this blessing, the precious blood of the Son of God greatly contributes to enhance its value. But how rich the mercy, for an heir of Hell to become, in this way, “an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ Jesus!”

2. It implies the *approbation and acceptance of their services for God*, and his cause in the world. Every individual among them shall be received with a “Well done, a thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things.” Language cannot express the approbation of the great Judge of quick and dead, in stronger terms.

a The original word *Ev*, here rendered “well done,” has a force that cannot be fully expressed in our language.

But did our time admit of considering the many imperfections that attend the very best services performed, by the holiest of our Lord's servants, for him, how deeply stained they are with guilt, it would serve, not a little, to illustrate the riches of that reward conferred upon them, in this acceptance of their services for him. And this farther suggests, what it is of importance to attend to, that this acceptance of our persons and services, when we come to stand before unblemished purity, is not of merit, but of grace, through the atonement and intercession of the Divine Mediator. "It is to the praise of the glory of his *grace*, that he makes us accepted in the beloved."^a But it is nevertheless certain, for its being of grace.

This acceptance of our persons and services, is of itself a high reward, for all we have ever done, or can do, for God, while in this life, were there none other: but this is not all—for,

3. This reward implies *actual and superadded honours*, conferred upon the faithful servants of Christ, in the great day of God. This is the import of "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." What the nature of these honors shall be, we are not so clearly taught. Two things, however, seem to be plain respecting them, in the sacred oracles, namely, That they shall bear some proportion to our faithfulness and diligence in our Lord's service here—and, that they shall be great.

They shall bear some proportion to our diligence and faithfulness in our Lord's service in this life. We read, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another in glory—So also is the resurrection of the dead."^b These words plainly point us to a difference in the degrees of that glory which shall be conferred on the several servants of Christ, in the day when he shall finish the mediatorial system, by raising the dead, and judging the world in righteousness. They shall differ as the sun differs from the moon, and the moon from the stars,

^a Ephesians i. 6. ^b 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42.

and the stars one from another. But the ground of this difference will be, the zeal, the diligence, and the faithfulness with which his servants have served him in this life. I may not say their success will have no influence on this difference of reward: for we read, "That they who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars, forever and ever."^a But when we consider that it is an act of mere sovereignty in God, whether he will succeed the faithful labors of his servants, yea, or not, it is not so consonant to our ideas of equity, to make it an equal ground of distinguished honors, with those things that are voluntary in us, as our faithfulness and diligence, in a great measure are. Besides, this would be to weaken, if not to destroy, the encouragement to diligence and faithfulness, arising from those promises of reward to them, so frequent in the oracles of truth; especially as the most diligent and faithful servants of Christ, are not always the most successful. And it farther deserves our notice that the reward conferred, in our text, on the good servant, is founded, not on his *success* but on his faithfulness; "Thou hast been *faithful* over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

I shall only add, under this particular, that the parable of the ten pounds, entrusted by their Lord to the ten servants, which you have in the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel by Luke, sufficiently demonstrates, that the rewards that shall be conferred on the servants of Christ at last, will not only differ in their degrees of honor, but that this honor shall bear a proportion to their diligence and faithfulness for him in this life. They each one receive done pound a piece, as you may perceive by reading the parable. Of these, one, by his diligence and faithfulness, had gained ten pounds, and he is made ruler over ten cities.—Another by his diligence, had gained five pounds, and he is made ruler over five cities.

You will please to observe, the sums entrusted to these servants were the same; but the improvement is repre-

^a Daniel xii. 3. ^b Ephesians i. 6.

presented as different, and that the difference in the reward is proportioned to the difference in the improvement.

The lowest degree, however, of this reward shall be very great to those who receive it. This appears, from the images used in Scripture, to illustrate its nature. It is compared to, it is illustrated by, all the glories of royalty. Hence we read of “a *crown* of righteousness,”^a and of “a *crown of glory*, that fadeth not away,”^b that shall be conferred upon all the sincere disciples of Christ. Of a *throne*, and their *sitting upon* that throne; “To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”^c We also read of a *kingdom*, and their entering on the possession of that kingdom: “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”^d Agreeably to this, the good and faithful servants of Christ are said to be made *kings* and *priests* unto God.^e But a throne, a crown, and a kingdom, are the summit of earthly grandeur, the utmost reach of human achievement. And yet these, all these, fall infinitely short of the blessedness and honors in sure reserve for those whose character I have described: for it is written, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”^f

4. The reward in our text includes the *most consummate happiness, in the immediate presence and fruition of a God in Christ*. This is imported in that phrase, “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,” These are literally, “Joys unspeakable, and full of glory.” They include all that happiness that is derived to the spirits of just men made perfect, from the clearest knowledge of a God in Christ; from the most perfect conformity to him, and the fullest enjoyment of him. By the *clearest* knowledge of a God in Christ, I do not mean a *perfect* knowledge of him; for “Who, by searching, can find out God, or know the Almighty to perfection?”^g But I mean the fullest know-

^a 2 Tim. iv. 8. ^b 1 Pet. v. 4. ^c Rev. iii. 21. ^d Matt. xv. 31.
^e Rev. i. 6. ^f 1 Cor. ii. 9. ^g Job xi. 7.

ledge of him, that the then enlarged, and daily enlarging capacity can possibly receive; and which, when compared with our present knowledge, will be in a sense perfect. The clearness, precision, extent, and satisfactory nature of this knowledge, are expressed, in Scripture, by “seeing no more darkly through a glass, but face to face; and knowing even as also we are known.”^a And by the strong expressive phrase of “seeing God’s face.”^b

This knowledge of God, especially as shining in the face of Christ, is one principal source of that consummate happiness, enjoyed by glorified spirits. They know him as *their* God and portion, and as such their delightful experience recognizes and realizes him. That is an instructive and emphatical phrase, as it lies in the original, Rev. xxi. 3. last clause—which literally rendered, runs thus, “And God himself shall be with them, their God;” that is, exhibiting and manifesting himself to them, as their God, in all the ways that their souls, now arrived at the maturity of their existence, both in a natural and moral view, can possibly admit. Every power of the matured mind shall be an avenue, through which blessedness shall flow into it, from God, the fountain of blessedness, throughout an unwaiving immortality.

I may not, I dare not undertake to describe the nature of this happiness. I shall only observe respecting it, that our text stiles it “the joy of our Lord”—“Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord”—This, no doubt, means the joy of our Lord Christ.

It is the joy of our Lord, *because it has been purchased by him*. This reflects a peculiar glory upon it, in the estimation of the spirits of just men made perfect; it infuses a divine and exquisite relish into it—to this accords their song to him, “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.”^c

Again—It is the joy of our Lord, *because Christ, our Lord, has taken possession of it in the name of his people*—

Some of his last words to his disciples were. "I go to prepare a place for you."^a He rose from the dead, and ascended to glory, not in the character of a private person, but as the covenant head and representative of his people—This is the character in which "he has entered into Heaven, as the forerunner for us."^b

It is also the joy of our Lord, because it is *derived from God, to the happy subjects thereof, through Jesus Christ, as the bond of their union with him, and the medium of their intercourse with him*—And this will continue to be the case throughout a blessed immortality.

And, lastly, it is the joy of our Lord, because it is a joy *of the same kind with that which the glorified human nature of our Lord himself shares*; so far as they shall be capable of it—What less than this can be the import of that strong phrase, "Heirs of God, and *joint heirs* with Christ."^c Nor is this all, they shall enjoy it in the same mansions of blessedness, which he himself inhabits. This is his promise to them, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that *where I am, there ye may be also*."^d And his availing prayer for them is, "Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, *be with me where I am*, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me."^e Agreeably to which, we read, "They shall ever be *with the Lord*."^f

And now from all this, you will not hesitate to conclude, that this joy must be a compleat and an everlasting joy. And, what can it be more?

My brethren, you will easily perceivethis subject teaches, us the nature of the religion of Jesus Christ. It forms its happy subjects to a proper temper and a proper conduct towards God and their neighbors. It makes them good and faithful servants to their Master, who is in Heaven. It teaches them their duty, and inclines and enables them to comply with it. Its doctrines and precepts, its promises and threatenings, are powerful principles of action.

^a John xiv. 2. ^b Heb. vi. 20. ^c Rom. viii. 17. ^d John xiv. 3.
^e John xvii. 24. ^f 1. Theff. iv. 17.

Thus it is that divine truth sanctifies the human heart, agreeably to our Lord's prayer, "Sanctify them through the truth; thy word is truth."^a

You will farther observe, this religion not only teaches us our duty, and forms us to it, but rewards us, in the most glorious manner, for this our very duty—Rewards us with an immortality of blessedness, in the full enjoyment of the Father of our Spirits. How grand, interesting, and dignified the scenes it opens beyond the grave!

Do any of those systems of morality, which the sons of infidelity wish to establish, independent of the sacred Scriptures, furnish such motives to virtue? Motives so rational and so calculated to influence? It is revelation alone that pushes its incentives beyond the grave; that pushes them home to the inmost feelings of the human heart; that embraces every spring of action, even the most secret; and touches them in the most tender, just, and energetic manner.

Again—This subject suggests matter of great encouragement to the people of God, and especially to the ministers of Christ, to be faithful and diligent in the work assigned them in life. Our Lord marks, with an omniscient eye, all our conduct towards him; and while he reprehends our sloth and unfaithfulness, he encourages and rewards our meanest services for him. "A cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple," he assures us, "shall in no wise lose its reward."^b Let us, then, shake off our sloth: let us up and be doing: Our work is great; our time is short, and our reward glorious. Nor is there a single Christian, however private his station, or obscure his character, but what may, some how or other, serve the interests of his Lord in the world. This he may do by a conscientious discharge of the duties of the devout, but especially of the duties of the social life. This will exhibit religion in a just point of light to the surrounding world, and glorify our Father, who is in Heaven.

They may also be useful in and by the duty of prayer; secret and family prayer. Our God is a God who hears

^a John xvii. 17. ^b Matt. x. 40.

prayer ; and he, no doubt, sheds many a blessing on his ministers, on his church, on the commonwealth, and on the world, in answer to the prayers of his humble, though obscure friends. “ Therefore, my beloved brethren, seeing God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love”—“ Let us be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know our labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

But it is time I should hasten to observe, that this subject strongly applies to the occasion of my addressing you this day—The death of that venerable man of God, who presided, with so much dignity, over this institution for twenty-six years.

This great man was descended from a respectable parentage ; which had long possessed a considerable landed property in the east of Scotland. His father was minister of the parish of Yester, a few miles from Edinburgh, where he was born on the fifth day of February, 1722.^a This worthy man was eminent for his piety, his literature and for a habit of extreme accuracy in all his writings and discourses. This example contributed not a little to form in his son that taste and that love of accuracy, united with a noble simplicity, for which he was so distinguished through his whole life. He was sent, very young to the

^a Dr. Wither Spoon was lineally descended from that eminent man of God, the Rev. Mr. John Knox, whom Dr. Robertson styles, “ The prime instrument of spreading and establishing the reformed religion in Scotland.” The genius, learning, piety, zeal, and intrepidity of this great man, rendered him singularly qualified for the distinguished part he bore in that interesting event. It is recorded of Mary, Queen of Scots, that she said, “ She was more afraid of John Knox’s prayers, than of an army of ten thousand men.” Worn out by incessant labors, he died on the 27th day of November, 1572, in the 67th year of his age. The Earl of Morton, then Regent of Scotland, who attended his funeral, pronounced his eulogium in a few words ; the more honorable for Mr. Knox, says the above historian, as they came from one whom he had often censured, with peculiar severity, “ Here lies HE who never feared the face of man.” Mr. Knox’s daughter Elizabeth married the famous Mr. John Welsh, who strongly resembled his father in law in genius, character, and usefulness in the church : And in this line Dr. Wither Spoon descended from this honorable ancestry.

public school at Haddington : His father spared neither expence nor pains in his education. There he soon acquired reputation for his assiduity in his studies, and for a native soundness of judgment, and clearness and quickness of conception among his school-fellows : many of whom have since filled the highest stations in the literary and political world.

At the age of fourteen he was removed to the university of Edinburgh. Here he continued, attending the different professors, with a high degree of credit, in all the branches of learning, until the age of twenty-one, when he was licensed to preach the gospel. In the theological hall, particularly, he was remarked for a most judicious taste in sacred criticism, and for a precision of idea and perspicuity of expression rarely attained at that early period.

Immediately on his leaving the university, he was invited to be assistant minister with his father, with the right of succession to the charge. But he chose rather to accept an invitation from the parish of Beith, in the west of Scotland. Here he was ordained to the work of the gospel ministry, and settled with the universal acquiescence, and even with the fervent attachment of the people : A circumstance which, under the patronage that unhappily exists in that church, is but too rarely the case in the settlement of their clergy. His character as a preacher, which rendered him so acceptable and popular, will come more naturally before us in another place. Let it suffice to remark here, that always interesting and instructive in the pulpit, he was assiduous in the discharge of every parochial duty when out of it. And his preaching generally turned on those great, distinguishing and practical truths of the gospel, which, in every Christian country, most affect and attach the hearts of the great body of the people.

From Beith he was, after a few years, translated to the large and flourishing town of Paisly, so celebrated for its various and fine manufactures.—Here he resided in the height of reputation and usefulness ; and riveted in the affections of his people, and his fellow citizens when he was called to the presidency of this college.

During his residence at Paisly, he was invited to Dublin, in Ireland, to assume the charge of a numerous and respectable congregation in that city. He was also called to Rotterdam, in the Republic of the United Provinces—and to the town of Dundee, in his own country. But he could not be induced to quit a sphere of such respectability, comfort, and usefulness. He rejected also, in the first instance, the invitation of the trustees of this college. He thought it almost impossible for him to break connections at home, that had been so long endeared to him—to violate all the attachments and habits of the female part of his family—to leave the scene of his happiness and honor—and in his middle career, to bury himself, as he apprehended, in a new and distant country.

But warmly urged by all those friends whose judgment he most respected, and whose friendship he most esteemed—and hoping that he might repay his sacrifices, by greater usefulness to the cause of the Redeemer, and to the interests of learning, in this new world—and knowing that this institution had been consecrated, from its foundation, to those great objects to which he had devoted his life, he finally consented, on a second application, to wave every other consideration, to cross the ocean, and to take among us that important charge to which he had been called, with the concurrent wishes, and the highest expectations of all the friends of the college.^a Their expectations have not been disappointed. Its reputation and success, under his administration, have been equal to our most sanguine hopes.

^a Dr. Witherspoon arrived with his family at Princeton in the month of August, 1768. He was the sixth President of the College, since its foundation in the year 1746. His predecessors were, the Rev. Messrs. Jonathan Dickenson, Aaron Burr, Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, and Dr. Samuel Finley—Men deservedly celebrated for genius, learning, and piety. Mr. Dickenson and Mr. Edwards were advanced in life when chosen to the presidency.

Not long before Dr. Witherspoon left Scotland, and while in suspense respecting his duty, a gentleman, possessed of a considerable property, an old bachelor, and a relation of the family, promised to make him his heir, if he would not go to America.

Almost the first benefit which it received, besides the eclat, and the accessions of students, procured to it by the fame of his literary character, was the augmentation of its funds. The college has never enjoyed any resources from the state. *a* It was founded, and has been supported wholly by private liberality and zeal. And its finances, from a variety of causes, were in a low and declining condition, at the period when Dr. Witherpoon arrived in America. But his reputation excited an uncommon liberality in the public; and his personal exertions, extended from Massachusetts to Virginia, soon raised its funds to a flourishing state. The war of the revolution, indeed, afterwards, prostrated every thing, and almost annihilated its resources; yet we cannot but with gratitude recollect, how much the institution owed, at that time, to his enterprize and his talents.

But the principal advantages it derived, were from his literature; his superintendancy; his example as a happy model of good writing; and from the tone and taste which he gave to the literary pursuits of the college.

In giving the outlines of the character of this great man, for I attempt no more, I shall begin with observing, that perhaps his principal merit appeared in the pulpit. He was, in many respects, one of the best models on which a young preacher could form himself. It was a singular felicity to the whole college, but especially to those who had the profession of the ministry in view, to have such an example constantly before them. Religion, by the manner in which it was treated by him, always commanded the respect of those who heard him, even when it was not able to engage their hearts. An admirable textuary, a profound theologian, perspicuous and simple in his manner; an universal scholar, acquainted deeply with human nature; a grave, dignified, and solemn speaker, he brought all the advantages derived from these sources to the illustration and enforcement of divine truth. Though not a fervent

a Since this sermon was delivered, the college has been favored with a handsome donation from the Legislature of New-Jersey.

and animated orator, *a* he was always a solemn, affecting, and instructive preacher. It was impossible to hear him without attention, or to attend to him without improvement. He had a happy talent at unfolding the strict and proper meaning of the sacred writer, in any text from which he chose to discourse : at concentrating and giving perfect unity to every subject which he treated ; and presenting to the hearer the most clear and comprehensive views of it. His sermons were distinguished for their judicious and perspicuous divisions—for mingling profound remarks on human life, along with the illustration of divine truth—and for the lucid order that reigned through the whole. In his discourses, he loved to dwell chiefly on the great doctrines of divine grace, and on the distinguishing truths of the gospel. These he brought, as far as possible, to the level of every understanding, and the feeling of every heart. He seldom chose to lead his hearers into speculative discussions, and never to entertain them by a mere display of talents. All ostentation in the pulpit, he viewed with the utmost aversion and contempt. During the whole of his presidency, he was extremely solicitous to train those studious youths, who had the ministry of the gospel in view, in such a manner, as to secure the greatest respectability, as well as usefulness, in that holy profession. It was his constant advice to young preachers, never to enter the pulpit without the most careful preparation. It was his ambition and his hope, to render the sacred minis-

a A peculiar affection of his nerves, which always overcame him when he allowed himself to feel very fervently on any subject, obliged him, from his earliest entrance on public life, to impose a strict restraint and guard upon his sensibility. He was, therefore, under the necessity of substituting gravity and seriousness of manner, in public speaking, in the room of that fire and warmth, of which he was well capable, by nature ; and which he so much admired in others, when managed with prudence.

He never read his sermons, nor used so much as short notes, in the pulpit. His practice was, to write his sermons at full length, and commit them to memory ; but not confine himself to the precise words he had penned. He often took great liberties, in the delivery of his discourses, to alter, add to, or abridge what he had written ; but this never infringed upon the strictest accuracy.

try the most learned, as well as the most pious and exemplary body of men in the Republic.

As a writer, his stile is simple and comprehensive—his remarks judicious, and often refined—his information, on every subject which he treats, accurate and extensive—his matter always weighty and important—closely condensed, and yet well arranged and clear. Simplicity, perspicuity, precision, comprehension of thought, and knowledge of the world, and of the human heart, reign in every part of his writings. Three volumes of essays, and two of sermons, besides several detached discourses, already published—and treating chiefly on the most important and practical subjects in religion—have deservedly extended his reputation, not only through Britain, Ireland and America, but through most of the protestant countries of Europe. His remarks on the nature and effects of the stage, enter deeply into the human heart. We find there many refined observations, after the example of the Messieurs de Port-Royal in France, not obvious to ordinary minds, but perfectly founded in the history of man, and the state of society. The pernicious influence of that amusement on the public taste and morals, was, perhaps, never more clearly elucidated. On the following interesting subjects, the *nature and necessity of regeneration—Justification by free grace, through Jesus Christ*; and *the importance of truth in religion, or, the connection that subsists between sound principles and a holy practice*, there is, perhaps, nothing superior in the English language. But Dr. Wither Spoon's talents were various. He was not only a serious writer, but he possessed a fund of refined humor, and delicate satire. A happy specimen of this is seen in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. The edge of his wit, in that performance, was directed against certain corruptions in principle and practice prevalent in the Church of Scotland. And no attack that was ever made upon them, gave them so deep a wound, or was so severely felt. Dr. Warburton, the celebrated Bishop of Gloucester, mentions the *Characteristics* with particular approbation, and expresses his wish, that the English church, as she needed one too, had likewise such a corrector.

This may be the proper place to mention his general character, as a member of the councils and courts of the church, and the part particularly that he took in the ecclesiastical politics of his native country. The church of Scotland was divided into two parties, with respect to their ideas of ecclesiastical discipline. The one was willing to confirm, and even extend the rights of *patronage*—the other wished, if possible, to abrogate, or at least limit them, and to extend the rights and influence of the people, in the settlement and removal of ministers. The latter were zealous for the doctrines of grace, and the articles of religion, in all their strictness, as contained in their national confession of faith. The former were willing to allow a greater latitude of opinion; and they preached in a style that seemed to the people less evangelical, and less affecting to the heart and conscience, than that of their opponents. In their concern, likewise, to exempt the clergy of their party from the unreasonable effects of popular caprice, they too frequently protected them against the just complaints of the people. These were styled *moderate men*, while their antagonists were distinguished by the name of the *orthodox*. Dr. Witherspoon, in his church politics, early and warmly embraced the side of the orthodox. This he did from conviction and a sense of duty; and, by degrees, acquired such an influence in their councils; that he was considered at length as their head and leader. Before he had acquired this influence, their councils were managed without union and address, while the measures of the moderate party had, for a long time, been conducted by some of the greatest literary characters in the nation. It had happened among the orthodox, as it often does among scrupulous and conscientious men, who are not versed in the affairs of the world, that each pursued inflexibly his own opinion, as the dictate of an honest conscience. He could not be induced to make any modification of it, in order to accommodate it to the views of others. He thought that all address and policy, was using too much management with conscience. Hence resulted disunion of measures, and consequent defeat—But Dr. Withers-

spoon's enlarged mind did not refuse to combine *the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove*. He had, probably, the principal merit of creating among them union, and harmony of design; of concentrating their views, and giving system to their operations. One day after carrying some important questions in the general assembly, against the celebrated Dr. Robertson, who was at that time considered as the leader of the opposite party, the latter said to him, in a pleasant and easy manner, "I think you have your men better disciplined than formerly." "Yes, replied Dr. Witherspoon, by urging your politics too far, you have compelled us to beat you with your own weapons."

We have seen him in our own church judicatories in America, always upright in his views—remarkable for his punctuality in attending upon them—and able to seize at once, the right point of view on every question—able to disentangle the most embarrassed subjects—clear and conclusive in his reasonings—and from habit in business, as well as from a peculiar soundness of judgment, always conducting every discussion to the most speedy and decisive termination. The church has certainly lost in him, one of her greatest lights; and, if I may use the term in ecclesiastical affairs, one of her greatest *politicians*.

Before entering on his talents as a president, suffer me, in a sentence or two, to call to your mind his social qualities. When not engaged in the great and serious businesses of life, he was one of the most companionable of men. Furnished with a rich fund of anecdote, both amusing and instructive, his moments of relaxation were as entertaining, as his serious ones were fraught with improvement. One quality remarkable, and highly deserving imitation in him was, *his attention to young persons*. He never suffered an opportunity to escape him of imparting the most useful advice to them, according to their circumstances, when they happened to be in his company. And this was always done in so agreeable a way, that they could neither be inattentive to it, nor was it possible to forget it.

On his domestic virtues I shall only say, he was an affectionate husband, a tender parent, and a kind master ; to which I may add, he was a sincere and a warm friend.— But, I hasten to consider him as a scholar, and a director of the system of education in the college.

An universal scholar himself, he endeavored to establish the system of education in this institution, upon the most extensive and respectable basis, that its situation and its finances would admit. Formerly, the course of instruction had been too superficial : and its metaphysics and philosophy were too much tinged with the dry and uninformative forms of the schools. This, however, was by no means to be imputed as a defect, to those great and excellent men, who had presided over the institution before him ; but rather to the recent origin of the country—the imperfection of its state of society—and to the state of literature in it. Since his presidency mathematical science has received an extension, that was not known before in the American seminaries. He introduced into philosophy, all the most liberal and modern improvements of Europe. He extended the philosophical course to embrace the general principles of policy and public law : he incorporated with it sound and rational metaphysics—equally remote from the doctrines of fatality and contingency—from the barrenness and dogmatism of the schools—and from the excessive refinements of those contradictory, but equally impious sects of scepticism, who wholly deny the existence of matter, or maintain that nothing but matter exists in the universe.

He laid the foundation of a course of history in the college—and the principles of taste, and the rules of good writing, were both happily explained by him, and exemplified in his *manner*. The *style of learning*, if you will allow me the phrase, has been changed by him. Literary inquiries and improvements have become more liberal, more extensive, and more profound. An admirable faculty for governing, and exciting the emulation of the young gentlemen under his care, contributed to give success to all his designs, for perfecting the course of instruc-

tion. The numbers of men of distinguished talents, in the different liberal professions, in this country, who have received the elements of their education under him, testify his services to the college. Under his auspices have been formed a large proportion of the clergy of our church; and to his instructions, America owes many of her most distinguished patriots and legislators. *a*

Thus he proceeded, guiding with uncommon reputation and success the course of education in this institution, until the war of the American revolution suspended his functions and dispersed the college.

Here he entered upon a new scene, and appeared in a new character; widely differing from any, in which he had been heretofore presented to the public. Yet, here also, he shone with equal lustre; and his talents as a legislator and senator shewed the extent and the variety of the powers of his mind. There are few foreigners who can, with such facility as he did, lay aside their prejudices, and enter into the ideas and habits of a new country, and a new state of society. He became almost at once an American, on his landing among us, and in the unjust war which Great-Britain waged against us, he immediately adopted the views, and participated in the councils of the Americans. His distinguished abilities soon pointed him out to the citizens of New-Jersey, as one of the most proper delegates to that convention which formed their republican constitution. In this respectable assembly he appeared, to the astonishment of all the professors of the law, as profound a *civilian*, as he had before been known to be a *philosopher* and *divine*.

From the revolutionary committees and conventions of the state, he was sent, early in the year 1776, as a representative of the people of New-Jersey to the congress of United America; he was seven years a member of that illustrious body, which, under Providence, in the face of in-

a More than thirty members of the congress of United America, since the formation of that illustrious body, have been sons of the college of New-Jersey; and among these, some of their first characters for reputation and usefulness. Their sons have also filled, and now fill, some of the highest offices in different states of the union.

numerable difficulties and dangers, led us on to the establishment of our independence. Always firm in the most gloomy and formidable aspects of public affairs, and always discovering the greatest reach and presence of mind, in the most embarrassing situations.

It is impossible here to enter into all his political ideas. It is but justice however to observe, that on almost all subjects on which he differed from the majority of his brethren in congress, his principles have been justified by the result. I shall select only one or two examples. He constantly opposed the expensive mode of supplying the army *by commission*, which was originally adopted; and combated it, until after long experience of its ill effects, he, in conjunction with a few firm and judicious associates, prevailed to have it done by contract. *a*

He opposed, at every emission after the first or second, and even hazarded his popularity for a time by the strenuousness of his opposition, that paper currency which gave such a wound to public credit, and which would have defeated the revolution, if any thing could. *b*

In the formation of the original confederation, he complained of the jealousy and ambition of the individual states, which were not willing to entrust the general government, with adequate powers for the common interest. He then pronounced inefficacy upon it. But he complained and remonstrated in vain. *c*

a Congress at first supplied the army by allowing a certain commission per cent. on the monies that the commissioners expended. This invited expence. At length they were induced to agree to the mode by contract; or allowing to the purchaser a certain sum per ration.

b Instead of emissions of an unfunded paper, beyond a certain quantum, Dr. Witherspoon urged the propriety of making loans, and establishing funds for the payment of the interest; which in the temper of the public mind, he thought could then have been easily effected. America has since regretted that she had not pursued that policy. The doctor afterwards, at the instance of some of the very gentlemen who opposed him in congress, published his ideas on the nature, value and uses of money, in one of the most clear and judicious essays that, perhaps, was ever written on the subject.

c He particularly remonstrated against the tardy, inefficient and faithless manner of providing for the public exigencies and debts by

Over-ruled however, at that time, in these and in other objects of importance, he had the satisfaction of living to see America revert, in almost every instance, to his original ideas—Ideas founded on a sound and penetrating judgment, and matured by deep reflection, and an extensive observation of men and things. But I forbear to trace his political career farther; and shall only add here, that while he was thus engaged in serving his country in the character of a *civilian*, he did NOT lay aside his *ministry*. He gladly embraced every opportunity of preaching, and of discharging the other duties of his office, as a gospel minister. This he considered as his highest character, and honor in life.

The college having been collected as soon as possible after its dispersion, instruction was recommenced under the immediate care of the vice-president. *a* Dr. Witherspoon's name, however, continued to add celebrity to the institution; and it has fully recovered its former reputation.

The glorious struggle for our liberties drawing to an honorable period, and the doctor feeling age advancing^o upon him, was desirous of resigning his place in congress; and would have fain retired, in a measure from the burdens of the college.

requisition on the several states. He insisted on the propriety and necessity, of the government of the union holding in its own hands the entire regulation of commerce, and the revenues that might be derived from that source. These he contended would be adequate to all the wants of the United States, in a season of peace.

a The reverend Dr. Samuel S. Smith, who was unanimously chosen Dr. Witherspoon's successor, on the sixth day of May, 1795. This gentleman's character needs no eulogium in this place. His several publications, and particularly his ingenious essay on "The causes of the variety of complexion and figure of the human species," delivered before the Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia, February 28th, 1787, afford sufficient testimony of his genius and learning. The last mentioned work has distinguished him in the estimation of the literati, both in Europe and America. As soon as it made its appearance in Europe, it was read with avidity—it shortly passed under more editions than one in Great-Britain—it was translated into the French language, and published, with great eclat, at Paris—and has been since translated into the German language, and published with annotations, by a professor of moral philosophy, in one of the universities of that empire.

But notwithstanding his wish for repose, he was induced, through his attachment to the institution, over which he had so long presided, once more to cross the ocean to promote its benefit. The fruit of that voyage was not indeed answerable to our wishes; but we are not the less indebted to his enterprize and zeal.

After his return to this country, finding nothing to obstruct his entering on that retirement, which was now become more dear to him; he withdrew, in a great measure, except on some important occasions, from the exercise of those public functions that were not immediately connected with the duties of his office, as president of the college, or his character as a minister of the gospel.

Accustomed to order and regularity in business from his youth, he persevered in his attention to them through his whole life. And I may add, there was nothing in which his punctuality and exactness were more sacredly observed, than in the devotional exercises of the christian life. Besides the daily devotions of the closet, and the family, it was his stated practice to observe the last day of every year, with his family, as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer: and it was also his practice, to set a-part days for secret fasting and prayer, as occasion suggested.

Bodily infirmities began at length to come upon him. For more than two years before his death, he was afflicted with the loss of sight; which contributed to hasten the progress of his other disorders. These he bore with a patience, and even a cheerfulness, rarely to be met with, in the most eminent for wisdom and piety. Nor would his active mind, and his desire of usefulness to the end, permit him, even in this situation, to desist from the exercise of his ministry, and his duties in the college, as far as his health and strength would admit. He was frequently led into the pulpit, both at home and abroad, during his blindness; and always acquitted himself with his usual accuracy, and frequently, with more than his usual solemnity and animation. And we all recollect the propriety and dignity with which he presided at the last commencement. He was blest with the use of his reasoning powers to the very last.

Discourse on the death, &c.

At length, however, he sunk under the accumulated pressure of his infirmities; and on the 15th day of November, 1794, in the seventy third year of his age, he retired to his eternal rest, full of honor and full of days—there to receive the plaudit of his Lord, “well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, be thou ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

E S S A Y

ON THE

C O N N E C T I O N

BETWEEN THE

D O C T R I N E OF *J U S T I F I C A T I O N*

BY THE

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST,

AND

HOLINESS OF LIFE :

With some Reflections upon the Reception which that
Doctrine hath generally met with in the World.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A LETTER to the Rev. Mr. *JAMES HERVEY*, Rector of Weston-
Favell, Northamptonshire, Author of *THERON AND ASPASIO*.

ALSO, A

TREATISE ON *REGENERATION*, &c.

L E T T E R

TO THE

Rev. Mr. JAMES HERVEY, &c.

SIR,

WHEN Christ our Saviour was about to go to his Father, he told his disciples, If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. I am persuaded, that by this, he did not only intend to forewarn the twelve of the offence which that generation would take at the ignominy of the cross, but also to intimate, that the case would be the same in all ages; that his doctrine would meet with great resistance and opposition, and that the temper and character of his real disciples would be very different from the spirit that would generally prevail in the world. This hath been continually verified in experience. For as many in the highest stations, and of highest repute for wisdom in the world, did set themselves against the gospel at its first publication, so even where there is a nominal profession of it, there is still an opposition to its doctrines, in their simplicity and purity, by the world, that is to say, those who have most sway in it, who are the most passionate admirers of its fashions, and the most assiduous prosecutors of its honors and pleasures.

It may be also observed, that there is sometimes, perhaps even generally, a sovereignty of divine providence in the choice of the instruments employed in spreading the gospel. As, at first, twelve illiterate fishermen were chosen; so, often since that time, the weakest and most unlikely have been pitched upon, that our faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Hence it frequently happens, that it is not only difficult to make men believe the gospel, but even to persuade them to hear it. They are apt to despise and deride the message, because of the meanness of the messenger, or the homeliness of the terms in which it is delivered. This is particularly the case with the present age. From a certain love of ease, and luxury of mind, they despise and trample upon all instructions, which have not something pleasing and insinuating in their dress and form.

You, Sir, are one of those happy few, who have been willing to consecrate the finest natural talents to the service of Christ in the gospel, and are not ashamed of his cross. You have been able to procure attention upon some subjects, from many who would hardly have given it to any other writer. This hath made me observe with particular attention, the effect of your last performance, The Iron and Asphax, the character given to it, and the objections

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raised against it. And I have always found, that the most specious and plausible objection, and that most frequently made against the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness, has been in this case, as indeed usually before, that it loosens the obligations to practice. This is what I have particularly applied myself to refute in the following essay, because I have rarely observed it done distinctly, and at full length, in any writer. And I have addressed it to you, as a testimony of my esteem of your excellent and useful writings, as a public declaration of my espousing the same sentiments as to the terms of our acceptance with God, and my ambition of contributing some small assistance to the support of the same glorious cause. It was also no small inducement to it, that thereby it might appear to all, that no external distinctions, or smaller differences, ought to be any hindrance to a cordial esteem and affection among the sincere servants of our common Master.

The greatest part of what follows was first delivered in two sermons; but it is now thrown into the form of an essay, lest the despised title of a sermon should offend some, and that it might the better admit of several additions, both in the body of the piece, and in the notes, which could not have been so properly delivered from a pulpit. Some of these regard the philosophical principles, which have of late been published among us, of which I propose, in a short time, a much fuller discussion, as there is no way in which the truths of the gospel are more perverted than by what the apostle Paul calls Philosophy and vain deceit, and oppositions of science falsely so called.

That your useful life may be prolonged, and that you may have the honor of contributing more and more to the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of believers, is the earnest prayer of,

SIR,

Your most obedient

humble servant,

J. W.

A N E S S A Y O N

JUSTIFICATION.

ALL the works and ways of God have something in them mysterious, above the comprehension of any finite understanding. As this is the case with his works of creation and providence, there is no reason to expect it should be otherwise in the astonishing method of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. From this their mysterious nature, or rather from the imperfect measure and degree in which they are revealed to us, they are admirably fitted for the trial of our ingenuity, humility and subjection. They are all of them, when seriously and impartially enquired into, holy, just and good; but at the same time, not beyond the cavils and objections of men of prejudiced, perverse and corrupt minds.

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, among whom he had never been in person, at great length establishes the fundamental doctrine of the gospel, that sinners are justified by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of a Redeemer. To this doctrine men do by nature make the strongest opposition, and are, with the utmost difficulty, brought to receive and apply it. We may well say of it in particular, what the same apostle says of the truths of God in general, that "the natural man doth not receive them*." It is therefore highly necessary to prevent or remove, as far as possible, the objections that may be brought against it by the art or malice of Satan,

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

who will, no doubt, bend the chief force of all his engines against this truth, knowing that the cordial reception of it is a sure and effectual, and indeed the only sure and effectual means of destroying his power and influence in the heart. Accordingly we find the apostle, in the sixth chapter of the above-named epistle, and first verse, supposes an objection made against this doctrine in the following terms, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" To which he answers, by rejecting the consequence with the utmost abhorrence, and in the strongest manner affirming it to be without any foundation.

From the introduction of this objection by the apostle, we may either infer, that there were, even in these early days, some who branded the doctrine of redemption by the free grace of God with this odious consequence; or that he, by the inspiration of the Almighty, did foresee that there should arise, in some future periods of the Christian church, adversaries who would attempt to load it with this imputation; or that the doctrine is indeed liable, on a superficial view, to be abused to this unhappy purpose, by the deceitful hearts of men, who are wedded to their lusts. It is probable that all the three observations are just; and the two last render it a peculiarly proper subject for our attention and consideration at this time, and in this age.

It is well known that there are many enemies of this doctrine, of different characters, and of different principles who all agree in assailing it with this objection, That it weakens the obligations to holiness of life, by making our justification before God depend entirely upon the righteousness and merit of another. And so far, I think, we must join with the adversaries of this doctrine, as to lay it down for a principle. That whatever belief or persuasion by its native and genuine tendency, weakens the obligations to practice, must be false. And I will also assert, in opposition to some modern infidels, (though some may think that my cause might avail itself of the contrary opinion) that a man's inward principle, or the persuasion of his mind, hath a necessary and unavoidable influence

upon his practice.* So that, if I am not able to shew, that justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ, is so far from weakening the obligations to holiness, that on the contrary, the belief and reception of it, as its necessary consequence, must make men greater lovers of purity and holiness, and fill them with a greater abhorrence of sin, than any other persuasion on the same subject, I am content to give up the cause.

I hope we may be indulged a candid hearing on this subject, as experience does not seem to be unfavorable to the doctrine I am assaying to defend. If it appeared in fact that its friends, upon a fair and just comparison, were more loose in their practice than their adversaries of any of the opposite opinions, it would be a strong prejudice against it; or rather, if this were always the case, it would be an unquestionable evidence of its falsehood. But doth not the contrary appear on the very face of the world? Are not the persons who profess to deny their own righteousness, and hope for justification through Christ, ordinarily the most tender and fearful of sinning themselves, and the most faithful and diligent in promoting the reformation of others? And do not all careless, profane and sensual livers, almost to a man, profess themselves enemies to this doctrine? I could almost appeal to any one who hath the least experience of, or commerce with the world, whether he would expect to find, upon a strict search and enquiry, the worship of God more constantly attended, the name of God more regularly called upon in families, children and servants more carefully instructed, and more dutifully governed, a greater freedom from levity, profanity, unchast-

* That is to say, So far as it can be applied to practice, and so far as it is real or prevalent above its opposite; for there are many truths of a religious nature which men think they believe sometimes, but which yet their corrupt passions often make them doubt of; and these doubts are nine parts in ten of their lives observant to their minds, as a vindication of their licentious practice: in some sense, such may be said to act in contradiction to their principles; but they are principles either not really believed, or, which is the same thing, not habitually recollected; and none can expect that men will act upon a principle, though once ever so firmly believed, if it be forgotten, or at the time of action entirely out of view.

tity, pride, malice, or insincerity of conversation, amongst the friends or enemies of this doctrine? So true is this, that they commonly have the appellation of the stricter sort given them, by which is certainly understood, at least an apparent strictness of life and manners *.

As therefore experience doth not hinder, or rather warrants us to affirm, that those who expect justification by free grace are, of all others, the most holy in their lives; I propose to shew, that it must be so, and that this is but the native fruit, and necessary consequence of their principles. What has induced me to this attempt, is not only the calumnies of enemies, but the weakness or treachery of professed friends. These last injure the truth often, in two different ways. Some speak in such a manner as to confirm and harden enemies in their opposition to it; they use such rash and uncautious expressions, as do indeed justify the objection which the apostle rejects with so great abhorrence; and, in the heat of their zeal against the self-righteous legalist, seem to state themselves as enemies, in every respect, to the law of God, which is holy, just and good. Others, on the contrary, defend it in such a manner, as to destroy the doctrine itself, and give such interpretations of the word of God, as, if they were just, and known to be so, the objection would never have been made, because there would not have been so much an occasion given to it †.

* I am not ignorant, that it is the usual refuge of those who are evidently dissolute in their own lives, to alledge, that there is indeed an appearance of this, but that it is no more than appearance, being all hypocrisy. It would be going out of the way to enter upon a large refutation of this slander. Therefore acknowledging, that, no doubt, whatever number of hypocrites there are in the world, and there are too many, they must herd amongst, or attach themselves to the society of the best part of it: I observe, that the general charge of hypocrisy is only thrown out at a venture, is a judging of the heart, and by the very supposition, contrary to appearances, justified, for the most part, by a steady perseverance. Whereas, usually the whole merit of those who bring the accusation, is that of being uniformly wicked, and not so much as professing what it was their indispensable duty both to have professed and practised.

† I have often thought, that there cannot be a stronger argument, than the explication commonly given by Calvinists, of the passages of

But of all the pretended Christians, one sort are worthy of the highest contempt, who, acknowledging the truth of this doctrine, call it dangerous, and are backward to teach or publish it, lest it should be abused. Would such weak, half-thinking mortals, be wiser than God? Hath he published it, and shall we throw a veil over it, to remedy the rashness of his proceeding? Do the Scriptures reveal, and are we backward to “to testify the gospel of the grace of God?” All the works of God are capable of being abused; that this may be so likewise the apostle supposes. It is, however, not the less useful or important; only let us endeavor to vindicate it from the false charge of favoring or encouraging licentiousness of life. This I would willingly do in such a manner, as to assert while I defend it; to maintain the doctrine itself, while I shew not only its innocence, but its usefulness in practice.

The words of the inspired apostle are, “God forbid, how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” In which he affirms, that the grace of God abounding in the gospel, is so far from being an encouragement to sin, that it destroys the power of sin, and removes the inclination to it, so far as it prevails. The language is very strong, “We that are dead to sin.”—It seems to put us in mind of the total effectual breach of relation between a dead man, and the objects with which he was formerly connected in life: they are nothing to him, nor he to them; he neither loves them, needs them, nor uses them. So in proportion as the grace of God offered through Christ in the gospel is received and applied, sin is mortified in the heart; thus says the apostle Paul elsewhere, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me,

scripture on this subject, is just, than the apostle’s supposition of an objection of this nature arising from it. For if the explication of some others, were supposed to be the obvious meaning of the text, and were substituted in its room, as all just definitions may be without inconvenience, the apostle’s words, “What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” would be quite unnatural and absurd.

and I unto the world*.” This, which is indeed the language of the Scripture throughout, is not merely denying the accusation, but establishing the contrary truth, the influence of this doctrine upon purity of heart and life, which we find the apostle also asserting in the middle of his reasoning upon the point, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law†.”

In the prosecution of this subject, it will be necessary, first, in a few words, to state that doctrine against which the objection is made. It may be delivered in Scripture-language thus, “That all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.—That every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.—Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight.—But we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:—Whom God hath set forth as a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.—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.—Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The doctrine asserted in the above and other passages of scripture may be thus paraphrased: that every intelligent creature is under an unchangeable and unalienable obligation, perfectly to obey the whole law of God: that all men proceeding from Adam by ordinary generation, are the children of polluted parents, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his holy law, inexcusable in this transgression, and therefore exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure; that it was not agreeable to the dictates of his wisdom, holiness and justice, to forgive their sins without an atonement or satisfaction: and therefore

* Gal. vi. 14. † Rom. iii. 31.

he raised up for them a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, as the second Adam, perfectly fulfilled the whole law, and offered himself up a sacrifice upon the cross in their stead : that this his righteousness is imputed to them, as the sole foundation of their justification in the sight of a holy God, and their reception into his favor ; that the means of their being interested in this salvation, is a deep humiliation of mind, confession of guilt and wretchedness, denial of themselves, and acceptance of pardon and peace through Christ Jesus, which they neither have contributed to the procuring, nor can contribute to the continuance of, by their own merit ; but expect the renovation of their natures, to be inclined and enabled to keep the commandments of God, as the work of the Spirit, and a part of the purchase of their Redeemer. *

This short account of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness will be further illustrated and explained in the progress of this discourse, intended to shew, that in those who do cordially embrace it, the obligations to holiness are not weakened, but strengthened and confirmed. For this purpose be pleased to attend to the following observations ; in all of which I desire it may be remembered, even where not expressly mentioned, an opposition is intended between the principles and views of a believer in Christ, who rests his hope on his imputed righteousness, and those who act on any contrary principle.

* The intelligent reader will probably perceive, that I have expressed the above doctrine in such general terms, as not distinctly to take a part in the differences that are to be found among some authors, as to the way of explaining it, and particularly as to the nature of faith. The reason of my doing so is, that I would willingly rather reconcile, than widen these differences ; and because it is my firm persuasion, that however some think it justest, or wisest, or safest, to express themselves one way, and some another, yet all who have a deep and real conviction, that they are by nature in a lost state, and under the wrath of God, and that there is no salvation in any other but in Christ, are, if they understood one another, at bottom, or at least in all things any way material, entirely of the same opinion. Accordingly the reader will, I hope, find that the reasoning in the following pages may easily be applied by them all without exception.

In the first place, he who expects justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, hath the clearest and strongest conviction of the obligation of the holy law of God upon every reasonable creature, and of its extent and purity. This will appear very evidently, if we consider what it is that brings any person to a belief or relish of this doctrine. It must be a sense of sin, and fear of deserved wrath. Let us search out the cause by tracing the effects. Whence arises the fear of wrath, or apprehension of God's displeasure? Only from a conviction of guilt. And what can produce a conviction of guilt, but a sense of obligation? This is manifestly the doctrine of Scripture, which teaches us, that "by the law is the knowledge of sin"—and that "the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Those who have none at all, or a very imperfect sense of the obligation of the divine law, will never have the least esteem of the righteousness of Christ, which atones for their transgression of it; it must appear to them to be foolishness: whereas those who have a strong conviction of the justice of the demand of the law, both esteem and use the plea of their Saviour's merit. Such also have a strong sense of the extent and purity of the law of God, as well as its obligation in general. Whilst others consider nothing as sin, but the grossest and most notorious crimes, they are deeply sensible of the alienation of their hearts from God, whom they are bound supremely to love, and to whose glory they are obliged to be habitually and universally subservient.

This conviction of the obligation of the divine law, so essentially connected with, or rather so necessarily previous to, an acceptance of the imputed righteousness of Christ, is evidently founded upon the relation of man to God, as a creature to his Creator. This relation then continues, and must continue, unchangeable; therefore the obligation founded upon it must be unalienable; and all those who have once been sensible of it, must continue to be so, unless we suppose them blinded to the knowledge of God as Creator, by the discovery of his mercy in Christ the Redeemer. But this is absurd; for the subsequent relation of a sinner to God, as forgiven and reconciled through Christ,

never can take away, nay, never can alter his natural relation as a creature, nor the obligation founded upon it. Neither can it be conceived as consistent with the perfections of God, to abate the demands of his law; that is to say, a perfect conformity to his holy will.* Every the least deviation from it, by transgression, or neglect of duty, must still be evil in itself, and must still be seen, and esteemed to be so by the God of truth, who cannot lie. Now, is there any thing in the gospel that hath the least tendency to lessen the sense of this obligation, after it hath been once discovered? Very far from it: on the contrary, all that Christ hath done for the salvation of sinners, as its immediate consequence, magnifies the law, and makes it honorable.

Perhaps it may be thought, that the releasing a sinner from the sanction of the law, or the punishment incurred

* Since mention has been made of perfect conformity to the will of God, or perfect obedience to his law, as the duty of man, which is indeed the foundation of this whole doctrine, I think it necessary to observe, that some deny this to be properly required of man, as his duty in the present fallen state, because he is not able to perform it. But such do not seem to attend either to the meaning of perfect obedience, or to the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience is obedience by any creature, to the utmost extent of his natural powers. Even in a state of innocence, the holy dispositions of Adam would not have been equal in strength and activity to those of creatures of an higher rank: but surely to love God, who is infinitely amiable, with all the heart, and above all, to consecrate all his powers and faculties, without exception, and without intermission, to God's service, must be undeniably the duty of every intelligent creature. And what sort of inability are we under to pay this? Our natural faculties are surely as fit for the service of God as for any baser purpose: the inability is only moral, and lies wholly in the aversion of our hearts from such employment. Does this then take away the guilt? Must God relax his law because we are not willing to obey it? Consult even modern philosophers; and such of them as allow there is any such thing as vice, will tell you, that it lies in evil or misplaced affections. Will then that which is ill in itself excuse its fruits in any degree from guilt or blame? The truth is, notwithstanding the loud charge of licentiousness upon the truths of the gospel, there is no other system that ever I perused, which preserves the obligation of the law of God in its strength: the most part of them, when thoroughly examined, just amount to this, that men are bound, and that it is RIGHT and MEET and FIT that they should be as good and as holy as they themselves incline.

by pardon purchased and bestowed, has this effect: and here it is, to be sure, that men by their partial views, are apt to suppose the objection lies.

But let us only reflect, that the obligation to duty and obedience to the Creator, hath been seen by a believer in the strongest light, and must continue to be sensible. Will he then be induced to act in the face of a perceived obligation, by an instance of unspeakable mercy? Is this reasonable to suppose? or rather, is it not self-contradictory and absurd? It is so far from being true, that this mercy disposes to obedience, as a peculiar and additional motive, as I shall afterwards shew more fully in its proper place. In the mean time, it is self-evident, that it can be no hinderance. What leads us into error in this matter, is what happens sometimes in human affairs. In a human government, mercy or a promise of impunity for past crimes, may enable, though even in that case, not incline a rebellious traitor to renew his wickedness. But this is a most unjust and partial view of the case, in which the very circumstance is wanting upon which the chief stress ought to be laid. Human laws reach only outward actions, because human knowledge is so imperfect, that it cannot discover the disposition of the heart: and as all professions are not sincere, so kindness is often bestowed on improper objects. This kindness, however, though it may discover the impropriety, it cannot cause it.

But make the similitude complete, and see how it will lead us to determine. Suppose one who hath been in rebellion, deeply and inwardly convinced of the evil of rebellion, and his obligation to submission; suppose this conviction so strong, that he confesseth the justice of the sentence condemning him to die, which is very consistent with a desire of life: will a pardon offered or intimated to such a person make him disloyal? Is this its natural, nay, is it its possible effect? If it could be supposed to have any such consequence at all, it could only be in this distant way, that pardon seems to lessen the sense of a judge's displeasure at the crime. But even this can have no place here, because sufficient care is taken to prevent any such abuse of it, by the substitution and vicarious sufferings of a Mediator.

I cannot help observing here, that the similitude above used will lead us to the discovery of one great cause of the objection against which I am reasoning. It arises from that corruption of heart, and inward opposition to the law of God in its extent and purity, which is in all men by nature, and continues in all who are not renewed in the spirit of their minds. As they have a strong tendency and inclination to transgress the law where they dare, they are ready to think, that the hopes of impunity must encourage every one to a bold violation of it. And no doubt this would be true, if there could be any real esteem or cordial acceptance of the gospel, without a previous conviction of the obligation of the law, and the guilt and demerit of every transgressor.* But supposing what is in truth the case with every believer, that there is a real and strong conviction of the obligation of the law of God upon every rational creature, which cannot be taken away; to imagine that the mercy of God in pardoning sinners for Christ's sake will lessen or weaken the sense of this obligation, is a most manifest contradiction. On the contrary, sin must needs have received a mortal blow, the love of it must necessarily have been destroyed, before pardon in this way could be sought or obtained: so that the apostle might well say, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

In the second place, he who believes in Christ, and expects justification through his imputed righteousness, must have the deepest and strongest sense of the evil of sin in itself. This is in a good measure included in, or an immediate consequence of, what has been already mentioned. For the obligation of the law, as hinted above, is but very

* But this is impossible; for though there may be some sort of fear of punishment, occasioned by displays of divine power, where there is no true humiliation of mind, or genuine conviction of sin; this is but like the impatient struggles of a chained slave, instead of the willing subjection of a patient child. There is still in all such an inward murmuring against the sentence, as that of an unjust and rigorous tyrant, and not of a righteous judge. Therefore, though such should pretend to rely on the merits of Christ for pardon and deliverance, it is plainly not from their hearts, and therefore neither to the saving of their souls, nor to the reformation of their lives.

imperfect, if we consider it only as founded on the power of God, and the dependence of the creature, and not also on the holiness, justice, and goodness of the law itself. In the first sense, perhaps, it may be felt by the wicked in this world, at least, we are sure, it is felt by devils and damned spirits in a separate state. They know that they must suffer, because they will not obey. But where there is a complete sense of obligation, it implies a belief of the righteousness of the law, as well as the power of the law-giver, of the equity, nay, the excellence of the command, as well as the severity of the sanction. All such not only believe that God will punish for sin, but that it is most just that he should do so, and that sin has richly deserved it.

It may therefore seem unnecessary to add any thing on this subject more than has been already said: but I have mentioned it by itself, because besides that sense of the obligation and purity of the law of God, which must pave the way to a sinner's acceptance of the righteousness of Christ, there is a discovery of the evil of sin, and its abominable nature, in every part of this "mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh," and the truths founded upon it; so that the more these are believed, and the more they are attended to and recollected, the more must the believer be determined to hate and abhor every wicked and false way; every new view which he takes of the gospel of his salvation, every act of trust and confidence exerted upon it, must increase his horror of sin, and excite him to fly from it.

Let us consider a little what views are presented us of the evil of sin in the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Here we see that a holy and just God would not forgive sin without an atonement. What a demonstration is this of its malignity, if carefully attended to, and kept constantly in our eye, as a part of our very idea of the Divine Nature! The difficulty in this case, is our partiality in our own cause; we are unwilling to think sin so very blame-worthy, because this is condemning ourselves; but, let us consider what views an all-wise and impartial God hath of it, and form ours upon his. And that we may not so much as once blasphemously imagine, that he

also is partial on his own side, let us remember that he is the God of love, who, by this very salvation, hath magnified his love in a manner that passeth knowledge. He shews his sense of the evil of the crime, even whilst he is contriving, nay, in the very contrivance of a proper way for the criminal's escape. He is not, so to speak, setting forth the malignity of the offence, in order to justify the severity of his own vengeance, but he is exerting his amiable attribute of mercy, and yet here must the evil of sin appear.

Consider, in a particular manner, upon this subject, the dignity and glory of the person who made this atonement. The value of the purchase may be seen in the greatness of the price; the evil of sin in the worth of the propitiation. "For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot."* It was no less a person than the eternal and only begotten Son of God, who was before all worlds, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, who suffered in our stead. Whoever considers the frequent mention in the sacred oracles, of the glory and dignity of the person of Christ, must be satisfied that it is not without design; and none can truly relish or improve these truths, but such as thence learn the evil of sin, the immenseness of that debt which required one of so great, nay, of infinite and inexhaustible riches, to be able to pay it. A creature indeed behoved to suffer; and therefore he became the son of man, but intimately united to the Creator, God blessed for ever. It was one of the first and earliest confessions of faith, That Jesus Christ was the Son of God; and this belief must have the strongest influence in shewing us the evil of sin, which none else was able to expiate.

In many passages of Scripture, God's sending his own Son into the world to save sinners, is represented as the strongest proof possible of his compassion and love. The nearness of the relation teaches us, as it were, to sup-

* 1 Pet. i. 18.

pose some reluctance in bestowing him; in allusion to which there is a beautiful expression of the apostle Paul, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* The very same thing shews, with equal clearness, his abhorrence of sin. However strongly disposed to save sinners, he would have sin to be expiated, though his own Son should be the victim: if any thing could have made him dispense with it, this should surely have had the effect: and therefore the condemning of sin † seems to have been as much in view, as the salvation of the sinner.

Every light in which we can view this subject, contributes to set before us the evil of sin. I shall only mention further, the greatness and severity of the sufferings of our Redeemer, as they are represented both prophetically, to shew how much was exacted, and historically, to shew what was paid. As the whole of his life was to be a state of humiliation and sorrow, it is said, "As many were astonished at thee, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form than the sons of men." Again, "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." Once more, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."† In the history of his life in the New Testament, we see all this verified, in the meanness of his birth, and the continued insults and reproaches thrown upon him during the course of his life. There is one remarkable passage, John viii. 57. "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" The meaning of this is hardly obvious, unless we suppose that his natural beauty and bloom was so wasted and decayed by sorrow, that he seemed to strangers near twenty years older than he really was.

* Rom. viii. 32. † Isa. lii. 14. liii. 3, 5.

In the close of the gospel, we have an account of the last scene of his sufferings, in the garden and on the cross. "He was fore amazed, and very heavy.—His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.—His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." He was at last stretched on an accursed tree, where the pain of a tortured body was but small to the anguish of an overwhelmed spirit, which constrained him to utter this heavy complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let the Christian stand at the foot of the cross, and there see the evil of sin, which required so costly an expiation. Let him there see the holiness and justice of God in its punishment. Let him hear the most High, saying, "Awake, O sword, against the man who is my fellow." And let him thence learn, how much sin is the object of divine detestation.

Hath a believer then a firm persuasion of all these truths? Are they the frequent theme of his meditations? And must they not necessarily fill him with an abhorrence of sin, inflame him with a hatred of it, and excite in him a self-loathing on its account? Thus it is said in the prophetic writings, "They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."* And must not a repetition of the same views still strengthen the impression, so that, as the apostle Paul tells us of himself, "The world will be crucified unto him, and he unto the world."†

I am sensible, that these things will have no such effect upon the enemies of the gospel, who disbelieve them, or upon those Christians, if they deserve the name, who disguise, explain away, or give up the satisfaction of Christ; or even those who have a strong tincture of a legal spirit, and are for contributing somewhat toward their acceptance with God, by their own merit, and defective obedience. Such cannot relish these sentiments; and therefore it may

* Zech. xii. 10. † Gal. vi. 14.

seem improper, in reasoning against enemies to bring them at all in view. But let it be remembered, that however little many believe such things, they may yet perceive, if they will attend to it, their natural operation upon those who do believe them. And let any modern adept in the science of morals shew in his account of the foundation of morality, and the nature of obligation, any thing that hath a force or influence equal to this: or, will the nominal self-righteous Christian, who thinks Christ only made up some little wants which he finds in himself, or that his death had only some general expediency in it, ever be equally tender in his practice, with him who sees so much of the purity of the law of God, and his detestation of sin, as to esteem all his own righteousnesses but as filthy rags, and bottoms his hope of acceptance wholly upon the perfect righteousness of his Redeemer?

In the third place, He who expects justification only through the imputed righteousness of Christ, has the most awful views of the danger of sin. He not only sees the obligation and purity of the law, but the severity of its sanction. It is a fear of wrath from the avenger of blood, that persuades him to fly to the city of refuge. And if we compare the sentiments of others with his, either the generality of a careless and blinded world, or those who act upon contrary principles, and a different system from that which we are now defending, we shall find, that not one of them hath such apprehensions of the wrath and vengeance of God due on the account of sin, as the convinced sinner, who flies to the propitiation of Christ for deliverance and rescue.

I am very sensible, that many readers will be ready to challenge this argument as pressed into the service, and wholly improper upon my scheme: they will suppose, that every believer, in consequence of his faith in Christ, is screened from the penalty of the law, and sheltered from the stroke of divine justice; he is therefore no more under this fear; and its being no more a motive of action, in the future part of his conduct, is the very ground of the objection I am attempting to remove. This is no doubt

plausible; but let it be remembered, in what way it is that believers are freed from their apprehensions of the wrath of God; it is by their acceptance of his mercy through faith in Christ. Before the application of this remedy, they saw themselves the children of wrath, and heirs of hell; and they still believe, that every sin deserves the wrath of God, both in this life, and that which is to come. Will they therefore re-incur the danger from which they have so lately escaped, and of which they had so terrible a view? will they do so voluntarily, even although they know the remedy to be still at hand, still ready to be applied, and certainly effectual? Suppose any person had been upon the very point of perishing in a violent and rapid stream, and saved when his strength was well nigh exhausted, by the happy intervention of a tender-hearted passenger, would he voluntarily plunge himself again into the flood, even although he knew his deliverer were standing by, ready for his relief. The supposition is quite unnatural; and it is equally so to imagine, that one saved from divine wrath will immediately repeat the provocation, even whilst he trembles at the thoughts of the misery of that state from which he had been so lately delivered.

Let us only consider the strong sense which a believer usually shews of the danger of others in an unconverted state, from a persuasion of their being under the wrath of God. He warns them, intreats them, pities them, and prays for them. He would not exchange with any one of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. How then should he be supposed to follow them in their practice, and thereby to return to their state?

But perhaps, here again it will be urged, that this is improper; because, according to the principles of the assertors of imputed righteousness, a believer, being once in a justified state, cannot fall from grace; and therefore his sins do not deserve wrath; and he himself must have, from this persuasion, a strong confidence that, be what they will, they cannot have such an effect: and accordingly, some have expressly affirmed, that the future sins of the elect are forgiven, as well as their past, at their conversion; nay, some, that they are justified from all eternity, that God

doth not see sin in a believer, that his afflictions are not punishments, and other things of the like nature. Now, though I must confess I look upon these expressions, and many more to be found in certain writers, whatever glosses they may put upon them, as unguarded and anti-scriptural; yet not to enter into the controversy at all, I suppose it will be acknowledged by all without exception, that a believer's security, and the impossibility of his falling from grace, is a security of not sinning, that is, of not being under the dominion of sin, as much as, or rather in order to his security of deliverance from the wrath of God. His pardon is sure; but this security is only hypothetical, because his faith and holiness are secured by the promise of God: so that, to suppose a person to sin without restraint, by means of this persuasion, that his salvation is secured by his first acceptance of Christ, is a supposition self-contradictory. However strongly any man may assert that a believer's salvation is secure, he will not scruple, at the same time to acknowledge, that if such believer should sin wilfully and habitually, and continue to do so, he would be damned; but he will deny, that any such case ever did, or ever can possibly happen.*

The objection must surely appear strongest upon the principles of those who make the nature of faith to consist in a belief, that Christ died for themselves in particular, or of their own personal interest in him, and the pardon and life which he hath purchased, making assurance essential to its daily exercise. Yet even these will not deny, that their faith is not always equally strong, and that their assurance is sometimes interrupted with doubts and fears. Now, what is the cause of these doubts, and this uncertainty? Is it not always sin more directly, or by con-

* Indeed there can be nothing more unfair, than to take one part of a man's belief, and thence argue against another part, upon which the first is expressly founded. If I should say, I am confident I shall never be drowned in a certain river, because I am resolved never to cross it at all; would it not be absurd to reason thus: here is a man who hath a persuasion he will never be drowned in this river; therefore he will be surely very head-strong and fool-hardy in fording it when it overflows its banks, which is contrary to the very foundation of my security?

sequence? So that sin renders their faith doubtful, which is the very same thing with putting them in fear concerning their future state. Indeed it is not more sure that our Redeemer invites all weary heavy-laden sinners to come unto him, that they may find rest, than it is that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. So that every instance of voluntary sin, must throw back the believer (at least as to his own sentiments) into his former state, till he be again restored by faith and repentance.

From this I think it evidently appears, that the motive of the danger of sin is not weakened, but hath its full force upon those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. And, if it is not weakened, it must be strengthened by this persuasion, since, as I have shewn above, none have so deep a sense of the obligation of the law, and the evil of sin, and by consequence none can have so great a fear of its awful sanction. That this is agreeable to Scripture, might be shewn at great length, where the putting their right to the favor of God and eternal life more and more beyond all doubt and question, is recommended to believers as an object of their care and diligence. Thus says the apostle to the Hebrews, "And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."* And the apostle Peter, after a long enumeration of the graces of the Christian life, says, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."† Nay, the fear of wrath, and of finally perishing, is represented by the apostle Paul himself, as one view at least, which habitually influenced his own conduct; "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."‡

In the fourth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, have the highest sense of the purity and holiness of the divine nature; and therefore must be under an habitual conviction of the necessity of purity, in order to fit them for his presence and

* Heb. vi. 11. † 2 Pet. i. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

enjoyment. If this doctrine in its main design, or by any of its essential parts, had a tendency to represent God, (I will not say as delighting in sin,) but as easy to be pacified towards it, passing it by with little notice, and punishing it but very slightly, there might be some pretence for drawing the conclusion complained of from it. For I think it may be allowed as a maxim, that as is the God, so are his worshippers, if they serve him in earnest. Whatever views they have of the object of their esteem and worship, they will endeavor to form themselves to the same character. But if, on the contrary, this doctrine preserves the purity of God entire; nay, if it gives us still more strong, awful and striking views of it; it can never encourage such as believe it, in the practice of sin.

But that this is the case with all such as believe and understand the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, may be demonstrated in the clearest manner. It might indeed be shewn, from a great variety of arguments founded upon the mediation of Christ: at present I shall mention but two, the propriety of which, and their relation to the subject in hand, every one must immediately perceive. In the first place, That Christ behoved to suffer by divine appointment for the expiation of sin, is not only equal with, but stronger than all other evidences of the purity of God, and his abhorrence of sin. It is an event of the most striking and astonishing nature, every reflection upon which overwhelms the mind, that the eternal and only-begotten son of God should assume the likeness of sinful flesh, and stand in the room of sinners: even though the merited punishment had been inflicted upon the offenders themselves, it would not have been such a proof of the purity of God. Here, even when he is inclined to mercy, its exercise is obstructed till justice is satisfied. Can any one consider this without being deeply convinced, that he is a God "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and with whom unrighteousness can have no communion? Will any, after such views, hope for his favor, while they retain the love of sin, or expect to dwell in his presence, while they continue stained with its pollution?

The same thing must also carry convincing evidence with it, that to suppose Christ to have bought an impunity for sinners, and procured them a licence to offend, is self-contradictory, and altogether inconsistent with the wisdom and uniformity of the divine government: that he never could hate sin so much before, and love it after the sufferings of Christ: that he could not find it necessary to punish it so severely in the surety, and yet afterwards love and bear with it in those for whom that surety satisfied. Not only may this be clearly established by reason and argument, but it must be immediately felt by every one who sees the necessity of the atonement of their Redeemer. They will be so far from taking a liberty to sin, that, on the contrary, they will be ready to cry out, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God?" * Accordingly we shall find in experience, that none are more ready to call in question the integrity of their own character; none more ready to fear the effects of the sins that cleave to them, as unfitting them for the divine presence, than such as trust solely in the merits of Christ for their acceptance with God.

The second thing I proposed to mention in the doctrine of Christ's mediation, which shews the purity of the divine nature, is our continued approach to God by him as an intercessor and advocate. It contributes to keep continually upon our minds a sense of the divine holiness and purity, and of our own unworthiness, that we are not permitted to approach him but by the intercession of another. Such a conduct in human affairs, properly serves to shew

* It is a certain fact, that the number of persons under distress of mind by perplexing doubts, or anxious fears, concerning their future state, is incomparably greater amongst the friends than the enemies of this doctrine. By this I do not at all mean that either their doubts are dutiful, or their fears desirable. Such a state is to be looked upon as the fruit of their own weakness and imperfection, and as a chastisement from a wise and gracious God, either more immediately for correcting their sins, or for the trial, illustration and perfecting of their grace and virtue; but its being more common among those who believe in Christ's imputed righteousness, than others, is a plain proof that this doctrine doth not naturally tend to inspire any with an unbecoming boldness, or a secure and slothful presumption.

dignity and greatness on the one part, distance and unworthiness on the other. The same conduct then in God towards us, doth it not convince us, that he must be sanctified of all them that draw near to him? And, whilst it makes imputed righteousness the condition, plainly shows the necessity of inherent holiness, as a qualification in our approaches to his throne. Suppose an earthly prince were to be addressed by two different persons, one who thought he had a title upon his own merit to make an immediate application, and another who could not approach him without one nearly related to him, and in high favor at court, to procure his admission, and to back his request; which of these would probably be most respectful to his sovereign, and most solicitous to avoid giving offence by his conduct? Surely the latter; and so it is always with the humble, mortified believer, who "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus."*

In the fifth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be induced to obedience, in the strongest manner, by the liberal and ingenuous motive of gratitude and thankfulness to God. That it is the native and genuine expression of gratitude to God, to live a pure and holy life, I suppose will hardly be denied: at least, this the Scriptures represent as pleasing him, serving him, doing his will, honoring him. It is indeed extremely difficult to conceive, how God all-mighty, and all-sufficient, should be at all affected with our conduct, either good or bad: it seems to be improper to say, that he can be pleased or displeased with our actions, or that he hath any interest at stake. Nothing, to be sure, can be more weak and impotent, than the injuries offered, or the assaults made upon him by created beings. As his nature is without variableness or shadow of turning, so his happiness is such, as can neither be increased nor impaired. And yet, in this way, he himself hath taught us to conceive of the matter, that holiness is not only an imitation of his character, but obedience to his will; and its contra-

* Phil. iii. 8.

ry a transgression of his law. These have been the sentiments of all nations without exception; and after the utmost efforts we can make to exempt him in our minds from all human passions or affections, of joy, anger, or displeasure, we cannot help considering it still as proper to say, such a course of life is agreeable, and such another is displeasing to God, and will provoke his wrath.

Is not gratitude then a principle of action that will be powerful and operative? Mankind in general bear witness to this as they have agreed in all ages; to brand ingratitude with the blackest mark of infamy, and to reckon it among the most atrocious of crimes. And indeed we find by experience, that it is comparatively stronger, for the most part, than the opposite motives of force or fear. There is a sort of natural tendency in man to resist violence, and refuse submission to authority, whilst they may be won by favors, and melted to thankfulness and gratitude by kindness and love: at least, this may be applied perfectly to the present case, where the bare outward performance (which may indeed be the effect of fear) will not be accepted without the inclination of the will. A slavish dread both lessens the degree, and debases the nature of that obedience we might assay to perform. This is an universal principle; and, in particular, while the law of God stands in its force and rigor, as a covenant of works, threatening death without hope of mercy, against every transgression, it begets a despondent sloth, and, at best serves only to discover our sin and misery; nay, as the apostle Paul, strongly and justly reasons, it renders our corrupt affections more inflamed and violent by restraint; * “Nay, “I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not “known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not “covet, &c.”

But let us now complete this argument, by shewing, that a believer in Christ is under the strongest obligations, from gratitude, to do the will of God. And how many considerations concur in shewing this? The unspeakable greatness of the blessings he receives, no less than deliverance

from everlasting misery and anguish, and a right to everlasting glory and happiness.—The infinite and affecting condescension of the great and glorious Giver, who, in mercy to those who could not profit him at all, but on the contrary, had highly provoked him, laid help for them upon one who is mighty to save.—The astonishing means employed in this design, viz. God's "not sparing even his own Son, but delivering him up for us all." Well might the apostle John say, "† God SO loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—But, above all, the sense which he himself hath of his misery and wretchedness. Nothing can be more dreadful than the apprehensions which a convinced sinner hath of his own state: what, and how strong then must his sense of gratitude be, to him who hath given his Son, and him who was given himself, for the purchase of his pardon? With what earnestness will he seek after, and with what cheerfulness will he embrace every opportunity of testifying his thankfulness? Will not the name of his Redeemer be precious, even "as ointment poured forth?" his laws delightful to him, and his honor dear?

It is proper to observe here, that the single view of the blessings of divine goodness, which must have the strongest influence in leading us to a grateful repentment of them, is peculiar to such as expect justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ; viz. their being of free unmerited grace and mercy. For, though there are classes of Christians who pretend to disclaim the belief of any merit in man, it would be no difficult matter to shew, that there are none who do not, by their professed principles, or their usual language, suppose it, excepting those described in the beginning of this discourse. And such not only believe his mercy to be unmerited, but that they have justly deserved his wrath and indignation, nay, and that they continually do so, even in their best state; their purest and holiest actions having such sins attending them, or such a mixture and alloy of unholiness and impurity in them, as, if

they were weighed in the exact balance of justice, would be sufficient to procure their total rejection.

In how strong a light is this represented by the sacred writers; and how powerful does its operation appear to be upon themselves? They seem penetrated and possessed with a sense of the love of Christ, and of God in him, as having sinners for its object. Thus the apostle Paul reasons; "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* And again, "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."†—What a sense of the love of Christ is discovered by the two following passages of the same apostle! "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."‡ The other is, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, Maranatha;"§ than which nothing could more strongly express his own sense of the obligation. It deserves notice also, that the inspired writers do often represent it as one of the strongest arguments against sin, that it is a reproach and dishonor brought upon our Redeemer and Lord, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.* Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."†

I must again here, as on a former branch of the subject, observe, That, no doubt, such arguments as these, will have little or no effect upon those who have but an imperfect belief of them, which it is to be feared, is the case with not a few who go under the name of Christian. But, is it not very evident, that they must have the strongest imaginable influence upon all such as are actuated by a

* Rom. v. 7, 8. † Rom. v. 10. ‡ Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19.

|| 1 Cor. xvi. 22. * Phil. iii. 18. † Heb. vi. 6.

lively faith in the doctrine of redemption? They must see themselves indebted to the undeserved mercy and love of God for favors of infinite value, and therefore must certainly endeavor to express their gratitude by an entire consecration of their lives to their benefactor's service.

This leads me to observe in the 6th and last place, That those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possessed of a supreme or superlative love to God, which is not only the source and principle, but the very sum and substance, nay, the perfection of holiness. That those who believe in and hope to be accepted and finally saved, through the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possessed of a supreme love to God, appears from what hath been already said upon the subject of gratitude. Love is the most powerful means of begetting love. Thus says the apostle John, "We have known and believed the love that God hath unto us; God is love."* And a little after, "We love him, because he first loved us"†. The infinite and unspeakable mercies which he hath bestowed on us, with all the circumstances attending them, the means and manner of their conveyance, which have been hinted at above, must necessarily excite the most ardent love in return, and every proper expression of it. This is their immediate and natural, nay, this is their necessary and unavoidable effect. "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."‡

If any shall think proper to assert, That favors bestowed are not to be considered as the true and formal causes of love, but the excellence and amiable qualities of the object. Thus, for example, supposing any person of a character justly hateful in itself, from caprice, self-interest or any other sinister motive, to bestow many signal favors upon another, the beneficiary might receive, and delight in the favors, without esteeming, nay, even when he could

* 1 John iv. 16. † 1 John iv. 19. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 14.

not esteem the giver. If this is considered as an objection against what I have just now said, and the conclusiveness of the argument to be founded upon it; I offer the two following answers to it. 1st, That in the account given in Scripture of the redemption of the world by the substitution of a Saviour, and the justification of sinners by the imputed righteousness of Christ, there is the brightest display of all the divine perfections. The almighty power, the unsearchable wisdom, the boundless goodness, the inflexible justice, and inviolable truth of God, shine in this great design, with united splendor. Every attribute, that can in reason claim our veneration and esteem, as well as our thankfulness and gratitude, is here to be seen. Even the perfections of justice and mercy (which I will not call jarring attributes, as some too harshly do, but) which seem to restrain and limit each other in their exercise, are jointly illustrated, and shine more brightly by their union, than they could have done separately; and, at the same time, the purity and holiness of the Divine Nature, which is the sum of them all, is deeply impressed upon the mind. So that here is every thing that can produce love; worth and excellence to merit it, love and kindness to excite and raise it. From this it evidently appears, that he who believes in the imputed righteousness of Christ, must have a superlative love of God.

But 2dly, Lest it should be said, that many have not this view of the doctrine in question, as honorable to God, and representing him in an amiable light, but the contrary; I observe, that there must have been a discovery of the glory of God, as shining in this plan of salvation, to all who cordially embrace it. Nothing else could induce them to do so. If its enemies do not see this, and therefore set themselves against it; this confirms the different and honorable sentiments entertained by its friends; so that even supposing (what we will never grant) that this view of the amiableness of the Divine Nature, as represented in the gospel, were not well founded; yet, doubtless it is the view of those "who count all things
"but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,"*
and glory in nothing but his cross.

* Phil. iii. 8.

The truth is, notwithstanding any cavilling objections that may be raised against it, many favors received by one to whom they are absolutely necessary, and by whom they are infinitely prized, must naturally and necessarily produce love. This will be reckoned a first principle, by every unprejudiced mind; and it is always supposed in the Holy Scriptures, where the saints are represented as under the habitual and powerful impression of love to God, for his love to them manifested in their redemption. Thus says the apostle Paul, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, is there any thing more necessary to show, that those who believe and trust in the imputed righteousness of Christ must be holy in their lives, than their being under the influence of a supreme love to God? Is not this the first and great commandment of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind?"* Is not this a never-failing source of universal obedience? as they love God, will they not love their brethren also: the very worst of men, because they are the creatures of God; and the righteous more especially, because they are his saints, his chosen ones? Can they love God supremely, and yet voluntarily displease him, breaking his commandments, or resisting his designs? We know that love hath a quite different effect, in every other and inferior instance, endearing to us every thing related to the person who possesses our esteem and affection; how then can it be supposed so preposterous in this single case, when it is fixed on the greatest and the best of objects?

It is a received maxim, That there can be no true love where there is not some likeness and conformity of nature and disposition to the object beloved, and an endeavor after more. And this is a maxim that will in no case

* Matth. xxii. 37.

hold more infallibly, than in moral subjects. It is impossible that we can love purity, if ourselves are impure; nay, it is even impossible that we can understand it. Though an unholy person may have a very penetrating genius and capacity, may think acutely, and perhaps reason justly upon many, or most of the natural attributes of God, he can neither perceive nor admire his moral excellence. Instead of perceiving the glory of God as infinitely holy, he hates, and sets himself to oppose this part of his character, or to substitute something quite different in its room.* Or, if we can suppose him able, or from any particular reason inclined, to tell the truth, as to what God is, he can never discern or feel his glory or beauty in being such. For why, he himself is unholy; that is to say, in other words, he supremely loves, and hath his affections habitually fixed upon something that is not God, something that is contrary to God's nature, and a breach of his law.

Let us continue to reflect a few moments upon this subject, which is of great importance, varying a little the light in which it is viewed. Let us consider what is meant by a supreme and superlative love to God. These words must have a meaning. It is not a supreme love of a certain nature, or person, called God, whom no man hath seen, and of whom we know no more but the name. In this case the old maxim would hold, "*Ignoti nulla cupido;*" there can be no affection, of either love or hatred, towards an object wholly unknown. A supreme love of God therefore, where it really hath place in any heart, must

* This is the true reason why many so warmly oppose God's vindictive justice, and that in the face of many awful examples of it, even in the present partial and imperfect dispensation. That there are many marks of God's displeasure against sin, even in that part of his government which is at present subjected to our view, and also distinct warnings of a stricter reckoning to come, I should think, might be, to an impartial person, past all doubt; and yet, this is derided and denied by many, merely because they can never think that a perfection in the Divine Nature, for which they have no love or esteem in their own hearts. All who love God, then, must be like him; and even those who will not be what he really is, are always strongly inclined, at least, to suppose him what they themselves are.

mean the love of a character in some measure understood, though not fully comprehended. In short, according to the Scriptures, it is a supreme love of the source and pattern of moral excellence, of a Being of infinite holiness and purity, with whom "evil cannot dwell." Is not this, in truth and reality, the love of holiness itself, the supreme love of it? Can we love holiness then, and not aspire after it? can we love it and not endeavor to practise it? nay, can we love it, and not possess it? can we love holiness supremely, and live in sin habitually? it is the grossest contradiction, the most absolute impossibility. There is then a diametrical opposition between the love of God, and the service of sin. To suppose them consistent, would be supposing, that the tendency of the heart and affections might be opposite to the course of the life, or supremely fixed upon two things mutually destructive to each other; on the contrary, our Saviour justly affirms, that "no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."*

Once more, Is not the love of God, I mean, the supreme love of God, precisely what is meant by holiness? It is not only an evidence of it, not only a source of it, not only an important branch, but the sum and perfection of it. For what is sin in the heart, of which all evil actions are but the fruits and expressions, and from which they derive their malignity and contrariety to the divine will? Is it not the love and pursuit of inferior objects on their own account, and giving them that place in our affections which is due only to God? All sins, of whatever kind, may be easily reduced to this, and shown to be nothing else, but the alienation and estrangement of our heart and affections from God, to whom alone they are due; which so far as it prevails, necessarily occasions a misapplication of every faculty of our minds, and of every member of our bodies, and thus a rebellion of the whole man. But whoever loves God above all, and places his chief happiness and delight in him, is truly holy; not only will be

* Matth. vi. 24.

so as the effect, but really is so, by the possession of this disposition. In proportion as this love is increased and strengthened, his sanctification is carried on; and when it is compleat and triumphant, entirely free from the mixture of any baser passion, he is perfect in holiness.

It may probably occur to some readers, that this reasoning will not accord with the accounts given by many moderns of the nature and foundation of virtue. Some found it upon the present prevailing tendency of our own dispositions, and make it point directly and immediately at our own happiness; others found it upon our connections with our fellow-creatures in this state, and make it consist in benevolence of heart, and beneficence of action; others again, who approach nearer the truth, but without precision, stile it an acting towards every object, according to reason and the nature of things. Upon any of these schemes, the connection, or rather coincidence, above-alledged, between the love of God, and virtue, or moral excellence, does not so clearly appear. This indeed seems to me the great defect of these accounts of the nature and foundation of virtue, that they keep our relation and obligations to God at a distance at least, and much out of view. But as this is the first commandment of the law which God hath revealed to man for his obedience, "Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." So, upon a fair and just examination, the supreme love of God will be found the most consistent and rational account of the nature of virtue, and the true source from which all other virtues, that are not spurious, must take their rise, and from which they derive their force and obligation: it is founded not only upon the relation of creatures to their Creator, but on the inherent excellence of the Divine Nature. For supposing (what will scarcely be denied) that God may be at all the object of our esteem and love, it is plain, that we ought to have the highest esteem for the highest excellence, a supreme love for what is infinitely amiable; and if our affections do in any measure prefer what is less to what is more worthy, they must be, in that proportion, wrong and misplaced.

As to some of the phrases (for they are no more) which come into repute together, or in succession one after another, to express the rise and foundation of virtue, such as a sense of beauty, of harmony, of order and proportion: this is no explication of the matter at all; it is only transferring the language used with respect to sensible objects, to ethics or morality, in which it must be understood figuratively. That there is some analogy between those subjects and morality, may be easily confessed; but there are few different subjects in nature, between which as strong, or a stronger analogy may not be traced. For example, how easy would it be to reduce all notions of morality, nay, indeed all notions of beauty in painting, or harmony in music, to truth and reality, in opposition to falsehood? Wollaston's *Religion of Nature Delineated* is an example of this, in which he resolves the morality, or immorality, of every action, into the truth or falsehood of a proposition. And, whoever reads the book will, I dare say, be sensible, that it is just as natural and proper, as a certain noble author's rhapsodies upon beauty and harmony. In short, it were easy to shew, that none of the accounts given of the nature of virtue, have any meaning, truth or force in them, but so far as they are founded upon, or coincident with, that which I have above given from the word of God.*

* There is one late writer, David Hume, Esq. who, it must be confessed, hath excelled all that went before him in an extraordinary account of the nature of virtue. I have taken no notice above of his principles, if they may be called so, because I think both him and them worthy of the highest contempt; and would have disdain'd to have made mention of his name, but that it affords me an opportunity of expressing my sense of the wrong measures taken by many worthy and able men, who, in sermons and other discourses, give grave and serious answers to his writings. As to himself, that man must be beyond the reach of conviction by reasoning, who is capable of such an insult upon reason itself, and human nature, as to rank all natural advantages, mental and corporeal, among the virtues, and their contraries among the vices. Thus he hath expressly named wit, genius, health, cleanliness, taper legs, and broad shoulders among his virtues; diseases he also makes vices; and consistently enough, indeed, takes notice of the infectious nature of some diseases, which, I suppose, he reckons an aggravation of the crime. And, as to mankind in general, if they were at that pass as to need a refutation of such nonsense, as well as impiety, it

Thus I have shewn, that those who believe the doctrine of imputed righteousness must be most holy in their lives; that the obligations to obedience are not weakened, but strengthened and confirmed by it. This any impartial person may be convinced of, who will reflect, that it is hardly possible to conceive an obligation to duty, of any kind, which may not be reduced to one or other of those above-named: and, if I am not mistaken, none of them can operate so strongly upon any other scheme, as that which is here espoused, and which is so evidently founded on the Scriptures of truth.

There is, however, one general consideration, which it would be wrong to omit, in shewing the friendly influence of this doctrine upon holiness of life, although it doth not so properly fall under the notion of a direct obligation; that is, the great encouragement given in it to the study of purity and holiness by the prospect of success. Despair of success cuts the sinews of diligence in every enterprize. And particularly upon the subject of religion, nothing more effectually enervates our resolutions, and leads to a sullen, despondent neglect of duty, than an opinion that we shall not succeed in attempting it, or shall not be accepted in our endeavors after it, or our imperfect attainments in it. But the doctrine of justification by the free grace of God,

would be in vain to reason with them at all. If I were to contrive an answer to this writer, it would be a visible, instead of a legible answer: it would be to employ a painter to make a portrait of him from the life; to encompass him with a few hieroglyphics, which it would not be difficult to devise; to inscribe upon his breast these words, **HEALTH, CLEANLINESS, and BROAD SHOULDERS**; and put the following sentence in his mouth, which he hath adopted from a French author, "**FEMALE INFIDELITY** when it is known is a small matter, and when it is not known, is nothing." This would be very proper when applied to his writings, who, as well as his friend and coadjutor without a name, makes "our most important reasonings upon many subjects to rest ultimately upon sense and feeling." It is probable some over delicate persons will think this is not treating him with sufficient decency; but till there be a plan agreed upon, of the measures of decency due from infidels to Christians, and from Christians to infidels, whether he does not deserve far worse treatment from any who believe the gospel, I leave to the judgment of those who will read his writings:

“ through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” gives the greatest encouragement to all who will return to their duty. This encouragement naturally divides itself into two branches; 1st, The sure hope of acceptance through Christ. 2dly, The powerful and effectual aid provided for them in the Holy Spirit, which he hath purchased, and bestows for their sanctification.

1st, The sure hope of acceptance through Christ Jesus. Although sin hath greatly blinded the minds of men, there is still so much of “ the work of the law written in their hearts,” as must make them sensible that in many things they offend, and must give them ground of solicitude and fear, while they expect to be justified by their own merits. Accordingly we find, that except the grossest and boldest infidels, of which sort this age has furnished some examples,* all classes of men confess themselves guilty of many sins, faults, or failings; some expressing themselves in a stronger, and some in a softer style, according to the greater or lesser degree of the depravation of natural conscience. If there is any meaning then in these words, they must be liable to the displeasure of God in some respects, for which they cannot themselves atone; and must therefore labor under, at least, much uncertainty as to their acceptance. This must weaken their hands, and slacken their diligence, in an attempt so precarious in its issue.

Perhaps some may say, that this is only levelled against those who deny all satisfaction, or all use of the merit of Christ, but not against those who expect to be justified by their own merit so far as it goes, and trust in their Saviour for making up what is wanting in themselves. But of such I would ask, how they shall be satisfied, that they have gone as far with their own merit as is requisite, if there is any stress to be laid upon it at all? Will they say, as some foolishly do, that they do all in their power, and trust in Christ for supplying what may be still deficient?

* Vide *Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion.* These essays conclude with an address to the Supreme Being which contains the following words; “ What mortals term sin, thou pro-
“ nounced to be only error; for mortal evil vanishes, in some measure,
“ from before thy more perfect sight.”

If they dare resolutely stand to this plea at the last day, when God shall judge the secrets of all hearts, that they have done all in their power, there is really nothing wanting to them; they need no Saviour, they need no pardon. But this is what no mere man that ever lived can say with truth. So that upon any scheme, but an entire reliance on the merits of Christ for justification before God, there must still be a dreadful uncertainty, inconsistent with that liberal and ingenuous freedom with which the children of God love and serve him. These, strongly penetrated with a sense of duty and obligation, deeply humbled under a sense of sin, and resting on the perfect atonement made by their Saviour and substitute, serve him with alacrity and pleasure, wearing the bonds of love. And, knowing the weakness of their best services while here, they long for that blessed time when they shall be made perfectly holy, and yet shall forever acknowledge themselves indebted, for their place in heaven, and their continuance there, to the grace of God, and the love of their Redeemer.

The other branch of the encouragement which believers in Christ have to diligence in duty, is the promise of the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, and guide them to all duty. This promise is expressly made to believers, and their seed after them, in every age of the church, to the end of the world. Thus says the apostle Peter, "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."* And it is to this plentiful effusion of the Spirit, that the prophets ascribe the purity and prosperity of the church in the latter days. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring, and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."†

I am sensible, that the nature and form of the argument doth not permit me at once to suppose the truth of this, and to make use of the direct agency and effectual opera-

* Acts ii. 38, 39. † If. xlv. 3, 4.

tion of the Spirit of God to prove the holiness of saints. But it may be easily made appear, that the belief and persuasion of this must have the strongest influence in animating their own endeavors. What more proper for such a purpose than the belief of an almighty aid, certainly to be exerted in their behalf? Must not this invigorate their powers, and preserve them from sinking through fear of the number and strength of their adversaries? Nothing but ignorance of themselves can make them boast of their own strength. The result of experience in the study of holiness, must be a humbling conviction of the force of temptation, and strength of passion on the one hand, and the weakness and feebleness of human reason and resolution on the other. Must it not then be of the greatest advantage to believers, to be under an habitual persuasion of the presence and operation of the Spirit of God to sanctify them wholly? Without this the attempt would be altogether vain; but this makes the exhortation come with peculiar force and energy, "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 will be a support to the present argument to observe, that some sense of the weakness of human nature, and its inequality to any thing arduous and difficult, seems to have been pretty universal in every country and in every age of the world. Thus among the ancient Heathens, of whom we have the fullest account, all great enterprizes were supposed to be undertaken at the instigation, and executed by the assistance of some superior power. Their poets always gave out, that themselves were inspired, and their hero directed by some deity; and moderns generally suppose, that the very imagination of this had no small influence on the success of the attempt. The interposition of deities was, indeed, so remarkable in the most eminent ancient poets, that it has been reckoned a branch of their art, distinguished by a particular name, called the machinery, and is now inseparably joined, at least, to one species of poetry. Nay, it was a pretty general belief among

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

some nations, that every particular person had an angel, spirit, or genius, to whose care he was committed, who assisted him in difficulty, and protected him in danger. Does not all this then evidently prove, that a persuasion of superior aid must have the most happy influence on our activity and diligence in duty, and our progress in holiness? Doth it not make it reasonable to expect, that those who trust to nothing better than their own strength, will be proportionably low in their attempts, and deficient in their success; but that those whose eyes are fixed for direction upon God, and who live in a continual dependence on his grace, will become truly partakers of a divine nature?

Now, is not this the distinguishing characteristic of the scheme of redemption by free grace, that it gives less to man, and more to God, than any other plan? It seems indeed particularly to point at this very design in every part of it, to abate the pride of man, and to exalt the grace of God. Self-denial is the first condition of the gospel, and a renunciation of all self-dependence is the lesson continued through the whole. "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength," may be called the motto of every Christian, is a short and comprehensive summary of his faith, and the great foundation of his hope and trust. As then it has been shewn, that he is habitually inclined to obedience, with what alacrity and vigor will he apply himself to his duty, since he believes that Almighty power is constantly engaged in his behalf; and that however unable he may be of himself, for any thing that is good, yet a thorough and effectual change will be wrought in him by divine power? What a firmness and fortitude must be inspired by the following passage of the prophet Isaiah, and other promises in the same strain? "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.

“ But they that wait on 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.”*

But now, perhaps, after all the advantages of this doctrine pointed out in the preceding discourse, some will be ready to ask me, if it cannot possibly be applied to the encouragement of impiety, or serve to foster a supine sloth and negligence? To this I am ready to answer, By some who profess it, it may; but by those who really believe it, it never can. There is no part of the word, or providence of God, that may not be, or that hath not frequently in fact been, abused to bad purposes, by wicked men under the dominion of their lusts. But, in order to remove ambiguity, it is proper to observe, that wherever there is a national profession of any religious principles, there must be many who are not believers, in any other sense than that they have been accustomed to hear such and such things asserted, have never enquired into nor doubted, seldom even thought of them, and so do not disbelieve them. But there is a great difference between such a traditionary belief as may produce a customary profession, and such a real and inward persuasion as will change the heart, and influence the practice. That there may be some of the first sort of believers in the doctrine of imputed righteousness, who are not holy, or perhaps abuse it, ill understood, to unholiness, I am willing to allow; but that all those who believe it upon real and personal conviction, must be most conscientious in the practice of every moral duty, I hope hath been clearly made appear in the preceding pages.

The above is all that was first intended, in the prosecution of this argument: but, perhaps, it will not be improper before dismissing the subject, to make a few reflections upon the reception which it hath met with, and must still expect to meet with in the world; upon its importance and proper application.

It is very certain, being neither denied by friends nor enemies, that this doctrine hath, in all ages, not only been attacked with the weapons of human wisdom, but gene-

* II. xl. 28—37.

rally also loaded with much reproach and contempt. After therefore it hath been so far defended, as may satisfy every impartial mind, and its influence upon practice demonstrated, I observe, that whatever impression this fact may make upon others, it seems to me no small confirmation of its truth, as coming from God, that it is contrary to the spirit of the world. This is both agreeable to scripture and to sound reason. The doctrine of "Christ crucified," the apostle Paul tells us, "was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." * And, speaking of the effect of the publication of this doctrine, he says, "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." † This we are not to understand, as if the apostle yielded, that the gospel was not agreeable to true wisdom, or that the proper and legitimate use of human wisdom would not lead us to embrace it: but it contains a strong intimation of a truth not commonly attended to, that great natural abilities have pretty much the same influence on the moral character with great wealth or temporal prosperity. They are both apt to intoxicate the mind, and lead to pride, arrogance, and self-conceit: and perhaps intellectual pride is as great an obstruction to the discovery of truth, as any bad disposition whatsoever. We are also taught, that God ordered and disposed of things in this manner, for the wise ends of his providence, for the subjection of the arrogance and boasted wisdom of men; or in the words of the apostle, "That no flesh should glory in his presence." The reception then which this doctrine usually meets with, should be so far from remaining as a prejudice or objection against its truth or utility, that, on the contrary, it should contribute to satisfy us, that it is the real and genuine doctrine

* 1 Cor. i. 23. † 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

of Christ, since it meets with the same sort of opposition, and from the same quarter, with which this was encountered at its first publication.

And indeed, besides this exact correspondence between the event, and what the Scripture gives us reason to expect, as to the reception of the gospel in the world, I apprehend it ought to be a general prejudice in favor of its truth, considering the original it claims, that it doth not carry on it any of the marks of human wisdom. It seems to lie (if I may so speak) quite out of the way of human imagination and contrivance, and is diametrically opposite in its whole tendency, to the most prevailing human inclination, viz. self-esteem, pride, and vain-glory. This indeed is the true reason why this doctrine is so unacceptable to the world, especially the ambitious part of it, that it is directly levelled against their corrupt affections. It gives a view of the holiness, purity and justice of God, which is intolerable to all those who are not willing to break their league with sin and vanity. And when it is truly complied with, it not only divorces men from their former attachment to sin and sensuality, but will not suffer them to glory, even in their new character. All who submit unfeignedly to the gospel, both feel and confess themselves wholly indebted for forgiveness and acceptance, for their present holiness and their future happiness, to the free, unmerited grace of God. How hard such a sacrifice is, none can conceive who have not some acquaintance with vital, experimental religion. Now, what is the most natural inference from this? Is it not, that we have not the smallest reason to suspect this doctrine to be a "cunningly devised fable," but may rest assured, that it is "the wisdom and the power of God for salvation, to every one that believeth."*

This leads me to observe, That if the reasoning which the reader hath perused upon this subject be just and conclusive, there is one circumstance in which this "doctrine according to godliness" essentially differs from all other schemes or systems of morality. It is, that any of these

* Rom. i. 16.

systems a man may understand, embrace and defend, without having his heart made better, or his morals secured or improved by it at all; whereas it is impossible, that any man can really, and from the heart, embrace the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness, without being sanctified by it, "dead to sin, and alive to God." That the first of these assertions is true, the lives and characters of some noted writers on the foundation of morality, have been, and are an undeniable proof: some of them do indeed expressly yield it; and it is evidently yielded, by implication, in all the late writings, where there is so frequent mention of the small influence that speculation has upon practice. On this is founded what a late acute and eminent writer* justly calls the master prejudice of this age, viz. "The innocence of error." This may as well be expressed by its counterpart, the unprofitableness or inefficacy of truth, which surely ought to be but a weak recommendation of what is called truth by those who hold such an opinion.

That the other assertion is just, hath been the point undertaken to be made out in this essay: and whoever will but consider how unacceptable this doctrine is to mankind in general, may be satisfied that there can be no effectual inducement to embrace it, till there be such a discovery and sense of the evil and danger of sin, as is utterly inconsistent with a voluntary continuance in it. The apparent state of the visible church, in which vice and wickedness so shamefully abound, will be no objection to this, if what I hinted above be recollected,† that there is a great difference between a nominal or customary profession, and real belief. As to the few more zealous and eminent assertors of this doctrine, who sometimes greatly dishonor their profession, the answer is easy. They are hypocrites by whom indeed great "offences do come;" and the weak and unstable fall over the stumbling block, and are tempted to doubt the reality of religion, by this discovery of the falshood of its professors. But such can never be fairly ranked among believers, whose garb and habit they

* Mr. Warburton. † See page 73.

only treacherously wore, for some time, while they were in the interest of another master.* We may say of them as the apostle John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."†

But this is not all; for the reception of the doctrine of imputed righteousness is not merely to be considered as the best means, comparatively, of producing, preserving and increasing our sanctification and purity, as sure and effectual, while others are precarious, but it is the only way, and all others are absolutely insufficient for the pur-

* Perhaps some may think the late accounts published of the Moravians an objection to the justness of this representation. They are said to be great assertors of the doctrine of imputed righteousness; and yet there have not only appeared some bad men amongst them, but they are universally charged as a sect with most impious and scandalous practices. Perhaps candor and charity might have led us to suppose, that most, or all those accusations, were calumnious, if they had been affirmed by none but avowed enemies to the doctrines which they espouse; as the first Christians were charged by their enemies with eating human sacrifices, when they met in private to celebrate the Lord's supper. But the case it seems is otherwise here; for some unsuspected accusers have appeared, whom none can imagine prejudiced against them for embracing the doctrine of imputed righteousness. I confess myself to have but little acquaintance with those Heinhutters, as they are called, either as to their principles or practices, that I cannot very fully handle the subject; but, if there is no other objection to what is affirmed above, no doubt, an acquaintance with the true state of the case would enable us easily to remove this. Perhaps, after all, the bad practices charged against them, may be only the consequence of some delinquent persons getting in among them, and a great plurality may be innocent, or, at least, comparatively so. But however this be, it is not certain (at least to me) that they really embrace the same doctrine with us: they do indeed talk much of the Lamb, speak of hiding themselves in his wounds, &c. but I think their language is peculiar to themselves, and by no means the phraseology either of Scripture, or of any other sect of Christians. Besides, as Count Zinzendorf, their leader, takes upon him to be a prophet, it is probable, they are just a set of deluded people, drawn away by his art, who may much more properly be said to believe in him, than in Christ.

† 1 John ii. 19.

pose. If this be indeed the doctrine of Christ, the scripture-method of salvation, then it is not only true, but a fundamental truth. Of this we are frequently and solemnly assured in the word of God. "I am the way," (says our Saviour) and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."* So say the apostles Peter and John, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."† It is therefore in vain for any to expect an effectual change of life, but by an acquaintance with Christ, and him crucified. We have indeed the clearest evidence from experience, that no human reason, no argument whatever, drawn from worldly conveniency, is at all sufficient to contend with violent and sinful habits. We see many examples of persons of excellent understanding and knowledge in other matters, nay, who can reason strongly and justly upon the bad consequences of vice in others, sometimes even in themselves, who will yet go on to ruin their name, family, fortune and health, while they are slaves to evil habits: nothing will change them but the grace of God.

And as we have seen above, that our own righteousness in its best state is wholly ineffectual for our acceptance with God, so all who have any expectations of this kind from it plainly show, that they have such defective views of the extent and obligation of the divine law, as are inconsistent with an unfeigned universal submission to it. This is a matter of the last importance, and ought to be particularly recommended to the serious consideration of such as may have, at sometimes, some imperfect convictions; such as from a weariness and satiety of sinning may give a temporary preference to a life of religion, and raise a feeble and ineffectual wish with Balaam, that they might "die the death of the righteous." They ought to be told that no endeavors to be a little better than before, no abstinence from some sins as a kind of atonement for others retained, no resolutions taken in their own strength, no righteousness of their own offered or trusted in as a matter

* John xiv. 6. † Acts iv. 12.

of their justification, will be accepted, or is worthy of being so; that nothing will be truly effectual, till they see their lost condition, and believe in Christ, first for pardon, and then for sanctification, “to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”* If they have any other plea, any other ground of hope and trust, it shall undoubtedly fail them; they must remain under a sentence of just and legal condemnation, and shall finally perish; for “he that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him, John iii. 36.”†

* Eph. i. 6.

† The application of these passages of Scripture, to the particular principles above maintained, will, perhaps, be thought to include in it a very severe and uncharitable condemnation of many Christians, who differ in judgment upon the point of justification. And indeed I pretend no great friendship to the sentiments so frequently expressed of late, “That it is a small matter what a man believes, if his life be good.” The assertion might perhaps be allowed, if it did not contain a foolish and unreasonable supposition, that a man may believe wrong, and yet lead as good a life as he that believes right; the contrary to which will always be expected by him who gives credit to the word of God, that his people are “sanctified through the truth.” As to Socinians and Pelagians, who are the greatest opposers of the truths above defended, I never did esteem them to be Christians at all; so the consequence, with regard to them, may be easily admitted. But it will be thought hard to say the same thing of the Arminians. However, if the righteousness of Christ is the only ground of our justification, and the reception of him in this character the true principle of sanctification, I do not see how we can avoid concluding the danger of those who act upon any other plan. And yet I am persuaded there have been, and are many good men among them: which may be accounted for in this manner, that their hearts are better than their understandings; and they are habitually under the government of principles, which, through some mistaken views, and groundless fears of their abuse, they speak of more sparingly, or rather seem to establish the contrary positions. The proof of this assertion I take from their own writings, particularly from the difference between their sermons and other discourses, and those forms of prayer which they have drawn up, and not only recommended to others, but themselves held them as a witness of their own exercise in their closets. If they be supposed to feel the sentiments which they express in their prayer, it can easily be made appear that these sentiments can only

I am naturally led to conclude this subject, by observing, that the importance, efficacy and necessity of the imputed righteousness of Christ, shews how much it is the duty of all ministers of the gospel, to make it the main and leading theme of their sermons. The preaching of the gospel is by the apostle Paul, in a very just and expressive manner, filled preaching "the unfathomable riches of Christ." In him every prophecy, precept, promise and truth is centred. His character and work as a Saviour is held forth in a variety of lights in the sacred oracles, and in every opening or view that is given us, so to speak, of the dispensations of Divine Providence and grace, he is the chief figure, or the termination of the prospect. If therefore we would know what esteem is due to our Redeemer in our hearts, and how high a place he ought to hold in our views of religion, let us observe the regard paid to him by the sacred writers. They derive almost all their motives to every moral duty, from what he hath done, and is still doing for us, and seem to delight even in the repetition of his name. I am persuaded those who are accustomed to the devout and serious perusal of the word of God will not reckon it "enthusiasm," when I say that these writers appear to be warmed and elevated above their ordinary measure, when they celebrate his salvation; and that both in the Old and New Testament, wherever we meet with any passage singularly lofty and sublime, there we may be sure that Christ the Redeemer is the immediate theme.

Justification by the free grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, was the doctrine taught among Christians, in the earliest and purest ages of the church. And their departure from it was the prelude to that universal corruption of faith and worship, that relaxation of discipline, and dissolution of manners, which took place in the ages following. It is also very remarkable,

be dictated by the doctrine of free grace. If what they say of themselves be true in its natural and obvious meaning, and if they believe it, which charity obliges us to suppose, it must be altogether vain to lay the least stress upon their own righteousness for their acceptance with God.

that this doctrine was always fully and distinctly taught in those churches which never submitted to the tyranny, or received the corruptions of the Romish Antichrist; I mean the churches of the Piedmontese vallies, which by so many judicious writers, are supposed to be the two witnesses mentioned in the Revelation, who fled into the wilderness from the persecution of the beast, and prophesied in sackcloth.

The accounts which have been transmitted to us of the principles held by them, long before the reformation, plainly show, that they maintained this doctrine from the beginning. And as it is well known that the reformation took its first rise from the gross and scandalous application of the doctrine of merit in indulgences, so all the reformers, without exception, were strenuous asserters of free grace. This was reckoned by them “*articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ,*” by which the church must stand or fall. Particularly, our reformers in both parts of this island agreed in preaching the same doctrine, and the eminent piety of our fathers is a standing evidence of its force and efficacy.

It doth not perhaps become, and probably it would not be safe for me to enter into a particular examination of the manner of preaching in the present age; and therefore my reflections upon that subject shall be very few and general. What is most obvious in our present situation, and what ought to affect Christians with most concern, is, the great prevalence of infidelity. This is the more surprising, that we have never wanted, and do not at present want, many able and eminent writers to stand up in defence of the gospel, and refute the changeable and inconsistent reasonings of infidels, whatever form they shall from time to time, think fit to assume, and on whatever principles they shall pretend to build. But, I am afraid, the best defence of all is but too much neglected, *viz.* Zealous assiduous preaching the great and fundamental truths of the gospel, the lost condemned state of man by nature, and the necessity of pardon through the righteousness, and renovation by the Spirit of Christ. This would make a far greater number of those who call themselves by the name of Christ, Christians indeed. And the visible efficacy of

his doctrine, would be a sensible demonstration of its truth and divine original. If these truths are not contradicted, it may be safely said, that they are by many kept more out of view than formerly. And surely we have no great cause to boast of our improvements in the preaching art, if its goodness is to be determined, like that of a tree, not by its blossoms, but its fruits.

There is one observation which may satisfy us, that the preaching of the cross of Christ will most effectually promote real reformation. It is, that those preachers who (to say no more) approach nearest to making our own merit and obedience the ground of our acceptance with God, very seldom, if ever, give any alarm to the consciences of their hearers. Let them recommend ever so pure and high a standard of morals, they are heard without fear, and, if they preach elegantly, with pleasure, even by the most profligate. To such preachers, all vain worldly-minded people, usually attach themselves, where they have not cast off the very form of religion; but most part of serious Christians, together with professing hypocrites, who cannot easily be distinguished in this world, always follow preachers of another strain. It is easy to see the reason of this from what hath been said above; there are none who set the strictness and obligation of the law, the holiness and justice of God, in so awful a light, as those who believe there is no shelter from the sanction of the law, and the wrath of an offended God, but in the blood of Christ. Perhaps, I am already ensnared and exposed to censure, by affirming, that there are among us preachers of different strains. But it is so certain a truth, that I cannot deny it; and so important, that I will not disguise it.

Upon the whole, as the present aspect of public affairs, as the state of the world, and character of the age, loudly call upon all of every station to exert themselves with diligence for the support and revival of truth and righteousness: I hope the ministers of the gospel will promote this end, by zealously laboring to bring men to the saving knowledge of Christ, “the way, and the truth, and the life—
“the foundation—the tried stone—the precious corner

“stone,” the strength and security of the building. To deny, explain away, or neglect to impart the truths of the everlasting gospel, is the way to leave the world in wickedness; but, by preaching them in purity, and with simplicity, which, we have reason to think, will be accompanied with “the demonstration of the Spirit,” sinners are reconciled unto God, the power of sin is broken in them, the divine image is formed in them, and upon these truths their hopes of eternal life must rest and depend. Let us be ever ready to say with the apostle Paul, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* “And let us quicken our diligence, and animate our endeavors, by expressing, with the psalmist David, our faith in the perpetuity of his kingdom. “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.”†

* Gal. vi. 14. † Psa. lxxii. 17, 18, 19.

at once our duty and interest, to consider with all possible care, in what way we may have the easiest and most effectual access to the hearts of sinners: what views of divine truth will be most convincing; what forms of address will make the strongest and most lasting impression; in one word, how we may acquit ourselves of our ministry, so as to be a "favour of life unto life," to many of those who hear us, and to "deliver our own souls" from the blood of those that perish.

Such, indeed, is the undeniable moment and importance of the truths of the gospel, that I am often ready to think, it will be easy to set them in so clear and convincing a light, as no person of common understanding shall be able to resist. I am often ready to say within myself, Surely, if they be warned, they will no more dare to rush on the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler; surely, the boldest sinner must tremble at the thoughts of death, judgment and eternity, fast approaching, and from which it is impossible to fly. But, when we see, how many are able to sit unmoved under the most awful threatenings from the word of God, how many continue unchanged under the most alarming dispensations of Providence, our thoughts are immediately carried to the unsearchable depth of divine counsels; and we must say with our blessed Saviour, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight;"* or with the apostle Paul, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."†

The secret counsel of the most High, however, though we must adore with reverence, it is impossible for us to comprehend. What influence this has upon the final state of particular persons, no man in the present life is, and probably no created being shall ever be able fully to explain. This only we know, that it is not such as to take away the guilt of sin, or destroy the efficacy of means. A sense of duty therefore constrains us to resume the ardu-

* Luke x. 21. † 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

ous and difficult task, intreating the assistance and blessing of God, under a firm persuasion that he will hear the prayer of faith, and make his own word "quick and powerful, " sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the " dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and " the marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents " of the heart."

The subject I have made choice of, and intend to handle in the ensuing treatise, immediately regards the substance of religion, and is happily as little entangled in controversy as any that could be named. We are told that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom " of God." In this all parties, every profession and denomination of Christians, do or ought to agree. By whatever name you are called, whatsoever leader you profess to follow, whatever ordinances you enjoy, if you are not "born again," you shall not enter into the kingdom of God.

That manner of preaching the gospel, explaining or recommending divine truth, appears to me most profitable, which brings oftenest into view, or, rather, never loses view of the great and essential difference between believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners, heirs of glory and heirs of hell. These are mixed together on earth. They have common privileges as men and citizens. They cannot be certainly distinguished by human observation; for though the image of God shines in a bright and sensible manner in some on the one hand, and some bear very plain and deadly symptoms on the other, whose state may be determined with little hazard of mistake; yet, in the intermediate degrees, there are multitudes whose real character is known only to God. What then can be said more awakening, and at the same time, more certainly true, than that every hearer of the gospel, and every reader of such a treatise as this, is either reconciled to God, and the object of his love, or at enmity with God, having "neither part nor portion" in his favor; and as many as die in this last condition, shall be the everlasting monuments of divine wrath. How important a distinction! and can

any man refrain from saying, "Lord! thou knowest all things—to which of these classes do I belong?"

But there is something, if possible, still more pressing in the passage of scripture which I have placed at the head of this discourse. Not only are all men of two different and opposite characters now, but all men are originally of one character, unfit for the kingdom of God; unless a change has past upon them they continue so; and, unless a change do pass upon them hereafter, they must be for ever excluded. This our Lord introduces with a strong asseveration, and signal note of importance: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." These words were spoken to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This "master in Israel" came to Jesus by night. Convinced he seems to have been of the power which attended his ministry, but, under a still stronger attachment to his worldly interest, he durst not openly avow his conviction. Our Lord, at once to enlighten his mind with the most salutary of all truths, and level his pride of understanding by the manner of conveying it, saith to him, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This appears to have been extremely astonishing, by his answer in the following verse; "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

It is not my purpose to give a tedious explication of the passage, or entertain the reader with a profusion of criticism upon the words. This expression, the kingdom of God, hath various significations in scripture, but chiefly two in the New Testament, (1.) The gospel dispensation, or government of the Messiah, as distinguished from the preceding periods; (2.) The kingdom of heaven, where the sincere disciples of Christ shall be put in full possession of the blessings of his purchase. I take it to be the last of these, that is, either only, or chiefly intended in this place. Both of them, indeed, may be meant in their proper order, and for their different purposes. An open profession and receiving the external badge, was necessary to a con-

teased friend and cowardly disciple; but a right to the spiritual privileges of the gospel, and the promise of eternal life, was the only thing that could make the profession valuable or desirable. Accordingly our Saviour seems to speak of both in his reply to Nicodemus's admission into the visible church by baptism, and renovation by the Holy Ghost. Jesus answered, Verily I say unto thee, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

I am sensible that regeneration or the new-birth is a subject, at present, very unfashionable; or, at least, a stile of language which hath gone very much into desuetude. It is, however, a subject of unspeakable moment, or, rather, it is the one subject in which all others meet as in a centre. The grand enquiry, in comparison of which every thing else, how excellent soever, is but specious trifling. What doth it signify, though you have food to eat in plenty, and variety of raiment to put on, if you are not born again: if after a few mornings and evenings spent in unthinking mirth, sensuality and riot, you die in your sins and lie down in sorrow? What doth it signify, though you are well accomplished in every other respect, to act your part in life, if you meet at last with this repulse from the Supreme Judge, "Depart from me, I know you not, ye workers of iniquity."

If this subject is, indeed, unfashionable and neglected, we are miserably deceiving ourselves. If a new nature is necessary, to attempt to repair and new model the old will be found to be lost labor. If the spring is polluted and continues so, what a vain and fruitless attempt is it to endeavor, by addition, or by foreign mixture, to purify the streams. Just so it is by no means sufficient, or, to speak more properly, it is altogether impossible, to reform the irregularities and vicious lives of sinners, and bring them to a real conformity to the law of God, till their hearts are renewed and changed. It is like rearing up an old fabric, adding to its towers, and painting its walls, while the foundation is gone. See what the prophet Ezekiel says of such foolish builders, "Wo to the foolish prophets—because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and

“ lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar : say unto
 “ them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall
 “ fall : there shall be an overflowing shower, and ye, O
 “ great hailstones, shall fall, and a stormy wind shall rent
 “ it.” *

But, perhaps, the substance of the doctrine is retained while the language is held in derision. We are told, it is but a figurative expression, and the same in its meaning with repentance or reformation. Doubtless it is so. And it were greatly to be wished, that many did thoroughly understand what is implied in repentance unto life. But the reader is intreated to observe, that it is a metaphor frequently used in the holy scripture. I think, also, it is a metaphor of peculiar propriety and force ; well adapted to bring into view both the nature of the change which it describes, and the means by which it is accomplished. If there are any who in writing, or speaking on this subject, have introduced or invented unscriptural phrases, and gone into unintelligible mysticism, this is neither wonderful in itself, nor ought it to be any injury or disparagement to the truth. There is no subject either of divine or human learning, on which some have not written weakly, foolishly or erroneously ; but that ought not to excite any aversion to the doctrine itself, which hath been perverted or abused. I pray, that God may enable me to write upon this interesting subject, in a clear, intelligible and convincing manner ; to support the truth from the evidence of scripture and reason ; to resolve, in a satisfying manner, any objections that may seem to lie against it ; but, above all, to carry it home with a persuasive force upon the conscience and heart. I contend for no phrases of man’s invention, but such as I find in the holy scriptures ; from these I am resolved, through the grace of God, never to depart. And, in the mean time, I adopt the words of the eminent and useful Dr. Doddridge, “ If this doctrine, in
 “ one town or another, be generally taught by my brethren
 “ in the ministry, I rejoice in it for their own sakes, as well
 “ as for that of the people who are under their care.”

* Ezek. xiii. 10, 11.

The plan of the following treatise is this :

I. To make some general observations upon the metaphor used by the apostle John, " Except a man be born again ;" and the same or similar expressions to be found in other parts of the word of God.

II. To shew wherein this change doth properly and directly consist, together with some of its principal evidences and effects.

III. To shew by what steps, or by what means it is usually brought about.

IV. In the last place, to improve the subject by a few practical addresses to persons of different characters.

C H A P. I.

Some general observations on the metaphor used by the apostle John, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN, and the same or similar expressions to be found in other parts of the word of God.

IT deserves the serious attention of every Christian, that, as this declaration was made by our Saviour in a very solemn manner, and by a very peculiar metaphor, so this is not the single passage in which the same metaphor is used. We find it in the apostle Paul's epistle to Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy Ghost."* We find one perfectly similar to it, in the same apostle's second epistle to the Corinthians, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are past away, behold, all things are become new."† It is elsewhere called a new creation, with reference to the power exerted in the production: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."‡ It is still a figure of the same kind that is used when we are exhorted "to put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts: and to be renewed in the spirit of our mind; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness."* To name no more passages, the real believer is said to be "born of God;"† in which the very expression of the text is repeated, and the change attributed to God as his proper work.

Whoever believes in the perfection of the scriptures will readily admit, that it is intended we should learn something from this very way of speaking itself. Let us therefore consider what may be safely deduced from it. And, as I would not willingly strain the metaphor, and

* Titus iii. 5. † 2 Cor. v. 17. ‡ Ephes. ii. 10.

* Ephes. iv. 22, 23, 24. † 1 John v. 4.

draw from it any uncertain conclusion; so it is no part of my design to run it out into an extraordinary length. Many smaller resemblances might easily be formed between the image and the truth, but they would be more fanciful than useful. The reader is only intreated to attend to a few leading truths, which seem naturally to arise from this metaphor, and may be both supported and illustrated from the whole tenor of scripture doctrine.

S E C T. I.

I. *From this expression, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD, we may learn the GREATNESS of that change which must pass upon every child of Adam before he can become an heir of life.*

NO stronger expression could have been chosen to signify a great and remarkable change of state and character, whether we take the metaphor in a stricter or a looser sense. If we may take the metaphor in a stricter sense, it may be intended to point out the change of state in an infant newly born, from what it was in immediately before the birth. The manner of its existence, of deriving its nourishment, the use and application of its faculties, and its desires and enjoyments, are all intirely different. If we take the metaphor in a looser sense, being born may be considered as the beginning of our existence. To this sense we seem to be directed by the other expressions of being created in Christ Jesus, and made new creatures. Does not this still teach us the greatness of the change? We must be entirely different from what we were before, as one creature differs from another, or as that which begins to be at any time, is not, nor cannot be the same with what did formerly exist.

This may also be well supported from a variety of other passages of scripture, and is a consequence of different truths contained in the word of God. For example, our natural state is, in scripture, compared to death, and our recovery to our being restored to life. Thus the a-

possible Paul in writing to the Ephesians says, "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." And a little after, "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."* To the same purpose the apostle John says, "We know that we have passed from DEATH to life."† The change is sometimes described by passing from darkness to light, than which two things none can stand in greater opposition to one another. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Every one must be sensible how easy it would be to multiply passages of the same kind. But this I forbear, and only wish we had all of us a deep impression of the meaning and importance of these upon our hearts.

It will not be improper, however, to observe how plainly the same truth appears from the power which the scripture represents as exerted in bringing a sinner from a state of nature to a state of grace. It is constantly affirmed to be the work of God, the effect of his power, nay, the exceeding greatness of his power. "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."* "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.† And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead."‡ Now is there any need of a divine agent to perform a work of no moment? Would it be celebrated as an effect of the power of God, if it were not truly great?

Let me now, in the most earnest manner, beseech every person who reads these lines, to consider deliberately with himself what is the import of this truth, and how firmly it is established. It appears that regeneration, repentance, conversion, or call it what you will, is a very great change from the state in which every man comes into the world.

* Ephes. ii. 1, 4, 5. † 1 John iii. 14. ‡ Ephes. v. 8. * Eph. ii. 8.
 † Phil. ii. 12. ‡ Eph. i. 19.

'This appears from our Saviour's assertion, that we must be "born again." It appears from a great variety of other scripture phrases, and is the certain consequence of some of the most essential doctrines of the gospel.

With what jealousy ought this to fill many of the state of their souls? How slight and inconsiderable a thing is it that with multitudes passes for religion? especially in these days of serenity and sunshine to the church, when they are not compelled by danger to weigh the matter with deliberation? A few cold forms, a little outward decency, some faint desires, rather than endeavors, is all they can afford for securing their everlasting happiness. Can the weakness and insufficiency of these things possibly appear in a stronger light than when true religion is considered as a new creation, and a second birth? If the inspired writers be allowed to express themselves either with propriety or truth, it is painful to think of the unhappy deluded state of so great a number of our fellow-sinners.

Will so great a change take place, and yet have no visible effect? Had any great change happened in your worldly circumstances, from riches to poverty, or from poverty to riches, all around you would have speedily discerned it. Had any such change happened in your health, it had been impossible to conceal it. Had it happened in your intellectual accomplishments, from ignorance to knowledge, it would have been quickly celebrated. How comes it then to be quite undiscernable, when it is from sin to holiness? I am sensible that men are very ingenious in justifying their conduct, and very successful in deceiving themselves. They will tell us that religion is a hidden thing, not to be seen by the world, but lying open to his view who judgeth the secrets of all hearts. And doubtless this is, in one view, a great truth: true religion is not given to ostentation; diffident of itself, it is unwilling to promise much, lest it should be found wanting. But it ought to be considered that, however concealed the inward principle may be, the practical effects must of necessity appear. As one table of the moral law consists entirely of our duty to others, whoever is born again, and renewed in the spirit

of his mind, will be found a quite different person from what he was before, in his conversation with his fellow-creatures.

Hypocritical pretences to extraordinary sanctity are indeed highly criminal in themselves, and extremely odious in the sight of God. But the present age does not seem to have the least tendency to this extreme. There is another thing much more common, not less absurd, and infinitely more dangerous to mankind in general: a demand upon the public, that, by an extraordinary effort of charity, they should always suppose the reality of religion in the heart, when there is not the least symptom of it in the life. Nay, some are hardly satisfied even with this, but insist that men should believe well of others, not only without, but against evidence. A bad opinion expressed of a man, even upon the most open instances of prophanity, is often answered with, "What have you to do to judge the heart?" It is amazing to think what inward consolation sinners derive to themselves from this claim of forbearance from their fellow-creatures. Let me beseech all such to consider, that as God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked, so in truth they usually deceive none but themselves. Every human affection, when it is strong and lively, will discover itself by its apparent effects; and it is as true of religious affections as of any other, that "the tree is known by its fruits."

But if they have reason to suspect themselves whose change is not visible to others, how much more those, who, if they deal faithfully, must confess they are quite strangers to any such thing in their own hearts. I do not mean that every person should be able to give an account of the time and manner of his conversion. This is often effected in so slow and gradual a manner, that it cannot be confined to a precise or particular period. But surely those who are no way sensible of any change in the course of their affections, and the objects at which they are pointed, can scarcely think that they are born again, or be able to affix a proper meaning to so strong an expression. I have read on observation of an eminent author, That those who cannot remember the time when they were ignorant or

unlearned, have reason to conclude that they are so still : because, however slow and insensible the steps of improvement have been, the effects will at last clearly appear, by comparison with an uncultivated state. In the same manner, whoever cannot remember the time when he served the former lusts in his ignorance, has reason to conclude that no change deserving the name of regeneration, has ever yet taken place.

It will be, perhaps, accounted an exception to this, that some are so early formed for the service of God, by his blessing on a pious education, and happily preserved from ever entering upon the destructive paths of vice, that they cannot be supposed to recollect the time when they were at enmity with God. But this is an objection of no consequence. The persons here described have generally so much tenderness of conscience, so deep a sense of the evil of sin, that, of all others, they will most readily discover and confess the workings of corruption in their own hearts, and that "law in their members that warreth against the law of God in their minds." They will be of all others most sensible of the growth of the new, and mortification of the old nature ; and will often remember the folly and vanity of youth, in instances that by most others would have been reckoned perfectly harmless.

What hath been said in this section, is expressly designed to awaken such secure and careless formalists as may have any general belief of the word of God. To be born again must be a great change. Can you then suppose that you have undergone this not only without any application to it, but without so much as being sensible of it, or being able to discover its proper effects.

S E C T. II.

This expression, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN, and other similar expressions, imply, that the change here intended is not merely partial, but universal.

A NEW birth evidently implies an universal change. It must be of the whole man, not in some particu-

lars, but in all without exception. As this is a truth which naturally arises from the subject, so it is a truth of the last moment and importance, which merits the most serious attention of all those who desire to keep themselves from illusion and self-deceit in this interesting question.

Innumerable are the deceits of Satan. If he cannot keep sinners in absolute blindness and security, which is his first attempt, he industriously endeavors to pervert their views of religion, either by causing them to mistake appearances for realities, or substituting a part for the whole. This branch of the subject is of the more consequence, that I am persuaded it is peculiarly applicable to great numbers of the ordinary hearers of the gospel as such. The great bulk of those who finally fall short of everlasting life, though they lived under the administration of word and sacraments, are ruined by mistakes of this kind. There are few of them, if any at all, who have at no time, through their whole lives, any serious impressions about their souls, or do nothing in the way of religion. There are still fewer who are speculative unbelievers, and fortify themselves in their prophane practices, by irreligious principles. The far greatest number do some things, and abstain from others, to quiet the inward complaints of conscience, and must have some broken reed or other on which they may rest their eternal hopes.

It might serve in general to alarm such persons, that, as I have observed above, the change is evidently very great, and therefore they ought not easily to suppose that it is already past. But I now add something still more awakening, that the change, however great, if it is only partial, is not such as is necessary to salvation. There may be a change truly great in some particulars, from one period of life to another, not only sensible to a man's self, but visible and remarkable to others about him, which yet is not saving, because it is not general, or because it is not permanent. The truth of this observation, that the change must be universal, appears from the constant tenor of the holy scriptures. Thus the Psalmist says, "then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto ALL thy command-

“ments.”* And the apostle James, “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of ALL.”† It is indeed, so much the language of scripture, that it is needless to insist upon it. God will be served without a rival, and will not share dominion with any in the human heart. But what I am persuaded will be of most use upon this subject, will be to point out, in a few particulars, by what means a partial change is sometimes brought about, and how this differs from the saving and universal.

1. In the first place, sometimes a partial change in point of morals, is produced merely by a natural or accidental change in age, temper, or situation. There are different sins to which men are addicted in the different periods or stages of the human life. These, of consequence, give way to, and are succeeded by one another. There are, indeed, instances of extraordinary depravation in some persons, who “selling themselves” like Ahab, to work iniquity, become the slaves of almost every evil habit incident to human nature. These, however, are esteemed monsters even by the world in general, who continue in the commission of every sin while they can, and burn with desires after them when they cannot. But it often happens that the folly and levity, nay, even the dissolute licentiousness of youth, gives way to the ambitious projects of riper years, and the hurry of an active life; and these again are succeeded by sordid, selfish, and covetous old age. In many cases the sins are changed, but the disposition to sin, and aversion from God, remains still the same. One sin may be easily supplanted by another, in a heart that is wholly a stranger to renewing grace. How greatly then may men deceive themselves, by drawing favorable conclusions from even a great and remarkable change in some one or more particulars, while they continue under the government of sins of a different kind. It is of small consequence which of the commandments of God are transgressed, since they are all of equal and indispensable obligation. It is of little moment for a man to get quit of one

* Psal. cxix. 6.

† James ii. 10.

distemper, by contracting another equally inveterate, and as certainly mortal. What profit was it to the Pharisee that he was not an extortioner like the publican? his pride rendered him still more odious and detestable in the sight of God.

I may add here, that besides the common and necessary change of age and temper, a change of situation, employment and connections, will sometimes wean a man from one sin, and introduce an attachment to another. If the temptation is removed, the fire may be extinguished for want of fuel. The inclination to sin in some kinds may be thus occasionally weakened, or the commission of it rendered impossible. It is easy to see that such a change as this can be of no avail in the fight of God; or rather, to speak more properly, it is only an apparent, and no real change at all. It is a difference of effect from an alteration of circumstances, but arising from the very same cause. Are there not many who may apply this reflection to themselves? Are there not many who have ceased to sin in some respects, because they have begun to sin in others? Are there not many who are abused and deceived by this delusory view? who take comfort to themselves by remembering some species of sins or follies which they now sincerely and heartily despise? Take heed that this be not entirely owing to your progress through life, or a change of circumstances and situation. Are you not still living as much to yourselves as ever? as much averse from a life of love to, and communion with God, as ever? Remember, that though your conduct may be wiser and more prudent, and your character more respectable in the world than before, this is no proof of regeneration; and "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. Sometimes a partial change is produced by strong occasional convictions, either from the word or providence of God. There are many instances in which convictions of sin are raised in the minds of the hearers of the gospel, which continue in great force for some time, and have a partial effect, which still remains. Even a Felix is sometimes made to tremble at the thoughts of a judgment to

come. It is very certain that natural conscience, when awakened by the word of God, will both restrain from sin, and excite to duty, even while sin hath the dominion upon the whole. As the spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit, in believers, so conscience, the divine witness in the hearts of unbelievers, may urge to the practice of duty in a certain measure, when it is not able to change the heart inwardly and universally. It may deter from sins to which the attachment is less strong, even whilst it is not able to expel a darling lust, or dethrone a favorite idol.

There is a remarkable example of this character in Herod, and his behavior to John Baptist. We are told by the evangelist Mark, that Herod "feared John, knowing "that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him, "and when he heard him he did many things, and heard "him gladly."* That is to say, he did many such things as were least contrary to the bent of corrupt affection. But that the change was not entire is plain; for when he was reprov'd for his beloved lust, it only serv'd to inflame his resentment, and he took away the life of his reprover. We find that Ahab king of Israel, of whom it is said, that he "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger "than all that went before him," yet humbled himself on the denunciation of divine wrath, and was so far penitent as serv'd to procure a suspension of the temporal stroke.

It appears, indeed, from innumerable instances in scripture, as well as from daily experience, that there are temporary convictions rais'd in the minds of many, both by the word and providence of God. It is also certain, that there are imperfect effects of these convictions, which often continue a considerable time, or rather are perpetual, though they are still only partial. Many sinners, though they continue unrenewed, yet dare not return to the same unbounded licence as before. Nay, there are some sins, under the penal effects of which they have severely smarted, which they never dare afterwards to indulge. We have a very remarkable national instance of this imperfect reformation in the Jews. They were at

* Mark vi. 20.

first shamefully and amazingly prone to idolatry, and continued so under repeated strokes, till the terrible desolation they met with at the Babylonish captivity; from that period however, notwithstanding their great guilt in other particulars, they never returned to idolatry, but to this day continue to have the deepest abhorrence of that capital crime.

There are many particular persons in the same situation. Some sins which have lain heavy on their consciences, or for which they have severely suffered in the course of Providence, they will not commit; but others, one or more, which may be called their "own iniquity," they hold fast, and will not let them go. Are there not different degrees of depravation and obstinacy to be found in different sinners, as well as different degrees of holiness, obedience, and submission in the children of God? And though there is usually a progress in the first to the worse, as well as in the last to the better, yet still there may be particular sins which they dare not commit, and particular duties which they diligently discharge. Nay, this partial character is often the very thing that blinds their minds, and continues their security in an habitual alienation of heart from the life and power of true religion.

Are there not many customary Christians who have a form of godliness, and, though they are utter strangers to communion with God, yet nothing will induce them to part with their form. Are there not many whom it would be unjust to brand with the grosser crimes of prophane swearing, sensual riot, or unclean lust, who yet have their hearts set upon the world, which they love and pursue, and on which they rest with complacency, as their sweetest portion? Are all outwardly decent and sober persons ready to take up the cross, and follow their master without the camp? Are they ready to forsake "houses and brethren, and sisters and lands, yea, and their own life also, for his sake and the gospel's?" And yet without this they cannot be his disciples. There are many hard sayings in religion, which ordinary professors cannot bear, and with which they never comply. Remember the case of the young man who came to our Saviour, and spoke with so much modesty and discretion, but could not bear this

great trial : “ Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and
 “ said unto him, One thing thou lackest : go thy way, sell
 “ whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou
 “ shalt have treasure in heaven ; and come, take up the
 “ cross and follow me. And he was sad at that saying,
 “ and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.”*

3. Sometimes a partial change is produced, in a great measure, even by the love and attachment which men have to some one darling and governing sin. The less willing they are to cut off the right hand and to pluck out the right eye, the more zealous and diligent they will be in other things, to atone for the indulgence, or to cover it from their own observation. How careful is a Pharisee to tythe the mint, anise, and cummin, while he neglects the weightier matters of the law ? How does he “ make broad his phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of his garment,” while he is defective in “ judgment, mercy and faith ?” How did the ancient Jews come with thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil, while living in the habitual neglect of some of the most important branches of the divine law ? We have an apposite example of this in the conduct of Saul, when sent against Amalek : he spared of the spoil what was good, though he was commanded to destroy it, and then pretended to make a free uncommanded offering of sacrifice unto God, for which he met with this just and severe reprimand : “ Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord ? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”† We see every day innumerable instances of the same kind ; when there is any sin which men are willing to spare, which they defend with arguments, or palliate with excuses, they are so much the more ready to overdo in such duties as are not so contrary to the present current of un sanctified affection.—From all this you will plainly see, that no man ought to judge of himself by the greatness of the change in any particular, unless it is universal, and without exception.

* Mark x, 21, 22.

† 1 Sam. xv. 22.

S E C T. III.

From these words, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN, HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and other similar expressions in the holy scriptures, we may infer that the change here intended is not merely EXTERNAL and IMPERFECT, but INWARD, ESSENTIAL and COMPLEAT.

I MIGHT have divided this observation into two parts, and treated of them separately, first shewing that it is not an outward and apparent only, but an internal and real change; secondly, that it is not an imperfect change, or difference in degree only, but a compleat and essential change of the whole character. But as the illustration of these two must have necessarily in a great measure coincided, and they are very closely connected, I have chosen to join them together.

That what shall be said on this subject may be the more useful and profitable, I will endeavor to explain, in as distinct and simple a manner as I am able, what you are to understand by the above remark. The first part of it will be most easily comprehended, that it is not an external only, but an internal change; that the most apparently strict and regular conversation, the most faultless discharge of outward duties, will not be sufficient, while the heart continues enslaved to sin in general, or under the dominion of any particular lust. The other part of the remark is, that the change must not only be imperfect, or in degree, but essential and compleat. That is to say, it is not sufficient that a man be somewhat less wicked than before, that he not only gives up some sins, but use moderation in others; nay, though he be under some degree of restraint universally, if still there is not what may be called an essential change of character, if still sin has the ascendancy upon the whole, though its dominion be not so uncontrolled as before.

Sin may certainly have the chief seat in the affections, though it hath not altogether quiet and peaceable possession. There must always be some governing principle, which, properly speaking, constitutes the character. As our Sa-

viour tells us, “ No man can serve two masters ; for either
 “ he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will
 “ hold to the one and despise the other ; ye cannot serve
 “ God and mammon.”* Grace and corruption are op-
 posite in their natures, and mutually destructive of each
 other, so far as they prevail : and therefore the great ques-
 tion is, not how far any of them is altered from what it
 was formerly in itself, but how far it prevails in opposition
 to the other, and hath truly the government of the man.
 I find it extremely difficult to communicate this truth in a
 simple and intelligible manner, so as to be level to the
 meanest capacities. And it is little wonder ; for here
 lies the chief part of the deceitfulness of sin. It will, I hope,
 be better understood by what is now to be added, both
 for its proof and illustration.

That what I have above asserted is agreeable to the ana-
 logy of faith, and a part of the will of God, may easily be
 made appear. It is the constant uniform doctrine of the
 holy scriptures. There we find it is the peculiar prerog-
 ative of God, that he seeth and judgeth the heart. By
 this his knowledge is distinguished from, and excels all
 created understanding, and, therefore, as no appearance
 will deceive, so no insincere profession will be accepted
 by him : “ For the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man
 “ looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh
 “ on the heart.”† To this purpose is the exhortation of
 David to his son Solomon : “ And thou Solomon, my son,
 “ know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a
 “ perfect heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord
 “ searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagina-
 “ tions of the thoughts.”‡

The stress that is laid on this in scripture, and the fre-
 quent repetition of the word “ heart,” can hardly have es-
 caped the notice even of the most cursory reader, or the
 most superficial observer. We find the consent of the heart
 required as indispensibly and chiefly necessary, and that
 as distinguished from outward and apparent obedience,
 which, without it, will be of no value. “ My son, give me

* Matt. vi. 24. † 1 Sam. xvi. 7. ‡ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

“thine heart,” says Solomon, “and let thine eyes observe
 “my ways.”* We find an inward change of heart and dis-
 position promised by God as the work of his Spirit and
 grace: “A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit
 “will I put within you; and I will take away the stony
 “heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of
 “flesh, and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause
 “you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judg-
 “ments and do them.”† We find the same thing im-
 plored by penitent sinners, as necessary to their recovery:
 “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right
 “spirit within me.”‡ And we find the duty of returning
 penitents prescribed in the very same terms: “Cast away
 “from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have trans-
 “gressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for
 “why will ye die, O house of Israel.”*

I shall only further observe, that we find in scripture an
 integrity of heart required to real religion; that is to say,
 that the love of God must be the commanding governing
 principle, that there must be no divided or rival affection
 suffered to remain: “For the Lord your God proveth you,
 “to know whether you love the Lord your God with all
 “your heart and with all your soul.”† The first duty of
 “the moral law runs in these terms: “Thou shalt love
 “the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,
 “and with all thy mind:”‡ which, as a precept of the
 gospel, is explained by the following passage; “He that
 loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me;
 “and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not wor-
 “thy of me.”* If, to any, the collecting of so many pas-
 sages of scripture seem tedious, it is entirely owing to the
 abundance and commonness of them. It were easy to have
 added ten times the number to those which have been al-
 ready quoted, a circumstance to which I particularly beg
 the reader’s attention, as it sets in the strongest light the
 certainty and importance of this truth.

Having so far confirmed and established the observation
 from the sacred oracles, I would willingly illustrate and

* Prov. xxiii. 26. † Ezek. xxxvi. 26. 27. † Psal. li. 10 * Ezek.
 xviii. 31. † Deut. xiii. 3. † Matt. xxii. 37. * Matt. x. 37.

apply it a little more particularly. And as truth seldom receives greater light from any thing than from a discovery of the opposite errors, I shall point out by what means sometimes an apparent or imperfect change is produced, which is not inward and essential. This I apprehend will be effected by a view of the following characters, every where to be met with. 1. A character formed upon a well-conducted selfish principle. 2. One that is supremely governed by reputation, and a desire of honor and respect from men. 3. One that is influenced by a religious principle, in which a spirit of bondage and slavish fear chiefly predominates.

In the first place, there is a character in the world which may be said to be formed upon a well-conducted selfish principle. It may be said indeed, in general, of every unrenewed person, that in such a heart God is dethroned, and self, in one shape or other, is exalted, is set in his place, and reigns in his stead: but what I have chiefly in view at present is, to point out the character of those who, in all those parts of their conduct which assume the name of religion or of virtue, are chiefly acted not by a sense of duty, but by an intention to promote their own present satisfaction and comfort. It is the language of experience and sound reason, as well as of the word of God, "that the wicked worketh a deceitful work." There are many immediate and sensible bad consequences of vice and wickedness. Some who have already smarted under their effects, may, therefore, in many instances avoid them, without any due sense of the evil of sin, as against the law of God, or taking his service as their hearty and unfeigned choice.

Let us give some examples of this. A man may avoid intemperance and excess, purely or chiefly, because it is hurtful to his health, and introduces such disorders into his frame as incapacitates him for relishing even the pleasures of the world and of sense. A man may find from experience, that being injurious to others in word or in deed, nay, even resenting the injuries done to himself, raises up so many enemies, and so inflames every little incident, as greatly disturb his peace. He may therefore

be patient and forbearing, whilst it is not owing to any meekness of mind, or government of his passions from a sense of duty, but merely to the strength of his judgment, and his falling upon the fittest way of promoting his own ease. It is precisely this sort of men who may often be observed to be reasonable, modest, and self-denied, in their deportment in the world in general, but savage and tyrannical, or peevish and discontented in their own families, where there are none upon equal terms with them, or able to make a formidable resistance to them. A wise man may, upon the whole, by reflection discover, that what gives the highest relish and poignancy to every sensible enjoyment is, to habituate himself to some degree of self-denial, to conduct them with decency, and to use them with sobriety and moderation. When this conduct, as indeed is commonly the case, is the fruit of experience, it is so sensible a change, that it often passes itself not only on others, but even on the person concerned, for a religious change. But if the change is not inward as well as outward, if the affections still flow in the same channel, though they are better hemmed in, and preserved from impetuosity and excess; if the source of happiness is still the same, though it is more sparingly or more wisely indulged, it is plainly the old nature, and the person cannot be said to be born again. He is outwardly regular, and comparatively less wicked than before, but cannot be said to love and serve God "with all his heart and with all his soul."

We may learn from this very important lesson, to distinguish between human virtue and religion, between a decent and blameless carriage upon motives of present conveniency, and a new nature, or a gracious state. I know some are highly dissatisfied at making any distinction of this nature; but is it not plainly possible that such a character as is described above may exist? Is it not also plain, for reasons too obvious to be insisted on, that it cannot deserve the name of a new or spiritual birth? And is it not, therefore the duty of ministers of the gospel to put men in mind of this, as well as every other source of self-deceit? Nay, the necessity in one view is greatest, in such a case as this, that we may warn those of their danger who have a

name to live while they are dead, that we may shake the strong-hold of the presumptuous self-applauding formalist, who is often more deaf and insensible to the things that belong to his peace, than the most abandoned profligate.

Is there any ready to say, Why do you take upon you to judge the heart, and ascribe what you must confess to be excellent and amiable in itself, to wrong motives and an irreligious principle? I answer, I judge no man's heart; but, while I leave it to the decisive judgment of God, would willingly subject its actions to its own review. It is but an appeal to the inward court of conscience, or rather a citation of the person, with conscience as the witness, to the tribunal of him that "trieth the reins and the heart." But, after all, there is no difficulty in going a step farther. We may often know the "tree by its fruits." We may often discern the falsehood of these plausible moralists, by an habitual worldliness of temper and conversation, by a great indifference about the ordinances and worship of God; nay, sometimes a bold and avowed opposition to vital experimental religion, to the language and exercises of the spiritual life.

To prevent the misunderstanding of what hath been said, it will be necessary to observe, that I intend not to deny the propriety or the use of these assiduous motives, as they may be called, which arise from the present benefit and advantage of true religion. I have said only, that the obedience or reformation which flows from no higher principle, is not such as will be acceptable to God; it is not that change which is necessary before we can enter into life eternal. There are, however, various uses to which these considerations may justly, and ought in duty to be applied. They ought to satisfy us of the excellence and truth of religion in general, and to be produced in opposition to the licentious and prophane topics of conversation, so often to be met with in promiscuous company. When any one begins to declaim in favor of lust and sensuality, and alledges that nature has given us desires, and why should it give them, but in order to their gratification? Let the hearer immediately observe, that, by the corruption of nature, our appetites are greatly inflamed, and not at all

in a sound state; that, as is plain from the most uncontested experience, the best and most desirable enjoyment of any sensible delights is, that thankful, self-denied, moderate use of them, which the word of God authorises or prescribes.

The same reflections may very properly serve for awakening grosser sinners to a sense of their danger. The prodigal seems to have been first brought to himself by a deep reflection upon his own folly. But he did not rest here: he did not content himself with endeavoring to recover, by sobriety and industry, the wealth which he had squandered away, but returned to his father for the forgiveness of his crime. In the same manner, no doubt, the loss of health, subitance, and reputation, should convince the sinner of the evil of his ways. This argument is used by the apostle Paul: "What fruit had ye then in the things of which ye are now ashamed *?" But I would never call that religion, which proceeds to no higher views; nor that repentance, which is completed by no better principle.

Such reflections should also be improved by every good man, to impress his mind with a deep sense of the goodness of God. Every thing that he commands is truly most eligible in itself, and most beneficial to us. His will is as gracious as his authority is absolute. Religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.†" Well might our blessed Master say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light‡." This should daily dispose us to thankfulness to that God who surrounds us with his care, and who follows us with loving-kindness and with tender mercies. His very restraints are favors, his commands are blessings.

Is it possible to avoid adding, that the same views should be made use of to fortify us against temptation. When a sense of duty is the prevailing desire, we may very safely corroborate it with all these inferior considerations. It

* Rom. vi. 21. † Prov. iii. 17. ‡ Matt. xi. 29, 30.

should make sin the more hateful and abominable, and prevent us from yielding to that party which still secretly pleads for it in our imperfectly sanctified hearts.

Before I leave this branch of the subject, I must speak a few words to sinners of a different character. If then many decent and regular persons are nevertheless under the wrath of God, what terror should this give to the more openly prophane, who are living in instances of gross wickedness? How many are there to be found among us, nay, how many appear from Sabbath to Sabbath in our worshipping-assemblies, who live in the habitual practice of some of the most notorious crimes? How many, who live in a bold defiance of the truths and laws of our great Master, who are not only stained with original pollution, but laboring under a daily increasing load of actual guilt? Are there not some swearers and blasphemers of the great and dreadful name of God? Some despisers and prophaners of his holy day? Some who add drunkenness to thirst, wasting the creatures of God by dissipating their own substance, defacing the image of God by undermining their own health, at one and the same time procuring and hastening their final destruction? Are there not some walking in the lust of uncleanness? Some retaining, without restitution, the gain of unrighteousness? Is it not surprising that such do not tremble at the word of God? Can there be any doubt that all of the above characters are unrenewed? Is there any pretence for their deceiving themselves? There is no just excuse even for the more regular and sober building their hope on a false foundation, but there is not so much as a shadow of excuse for them. Dare any such entertain a doubt of a judgment to come? Can any mortal be insensible of the precariousness of time? The king of terrors lays his hand upon one after another, as he receives a commission from the King of kings; and it is distressing to think in what an unprepared state many receive the summons, which nevertheless they must of necessity obey.

Whoever thou art who readest these lines, if thou art yet unrenewed, but particularly if thou art one of those whose sins are open and manifest, I beseech thee in the

most earnest manner, to be reconciled unto God. "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The blood of this Saviour is of infinite value. His Spirit is of irresistible efficacy. He is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Delay not one moment. Give immediate thanks that thou art not already in the place of torment. Believe in the Son of God for righteousness and strength. Add not to all thy other sins against him, by undervaluing his atonement and despairing of mercy. And may it please God, by his own power, to reach thy heart, to snatch thee as a brand from the burning, and make thee an everlasting monument of his grace and love.

2. In the second place we may often find an appearance of religion or virtue in a character, supremely governed by reputation, or a desire of respect and honor from the world. I say supremely governed, because no doubt there may be a mixture of other principles whilst this is the leading, the directing, and the governing view. I am sensible there are some who have no other view of any kind by a religious profession than to deceive others, and under the fair disguise of piety and seeming devotion, to carry on with more security and success their unrighteous designs. That some such are to be found in the world, sad experience is a melancholy proof. The greatness of their guilt it is not easy to conceive, and still more difficult to express. As it must always proceed upon a known deliberate contempt of God, there is usually such a hardness of heart and fearedness of conscience attending it, that there is little probability of making any impression upon them; or rather to speak more properly, they have all the symptoms of being given up of God and left to themselves. But there is something extremely harsh and unnatural in suspecting any of wilful deliberate hypocrisy, till it is plainly and openly detected. The truth is, I am persuaded, that as it is a dreadful, so it is a rare character. The far greatest part of those who are under the power of hypocrisy, deceive themselves as much as, or rather more than

the world. These last fall more properly in my way to be considered, as having undergone a seeming or apparent, without any real change.

In order to illustrate the character and state of those who are supremely governed by reputation or a desire of honor and respect, it will be proper to observe, that as the law of God is a transcript of his own perfect inherent excellence, true religion must be in itself amiable and lovely. Nay, it must appear so even in the eyes of those who are engaged in a stated opposition to its interest. You will say, how is this possible? Is it not a manifest contradiction? I answer, That though the spirit and principles from which true religion must flow, be directly contrary to the bent of an unrenewed heart, yet their effects are both amiable and beneficial. Bad men cannot endure inward mortification and self-denial, being humbled as sinners in the sight of God, justified freely by his grace, sanctified by his Spirit, and having nothing whereof to glory. Against these vital principles of piety the natural mind sets itself with violence, and the unrenewed heart rises with indignation. But the effect of true religion or a diligent compliance with the duties of the moral law, as it is amiable in itself, so it is also of good report among men. We are told in scripture, "that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." And the apostle Paul exhorts us to our duty in the following terms: "Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

Does not this at once discover how many may attain to a considerable degree of regularity in the practice of their duty, while their governing principle is no better than a desire of the esteem of others. That character acquires a value in their eyes, which is in general reputed, and will set them in the most favorable light. This hath often a secret and insensible influence, to which they themselves do not attend. What favors the deceit is, that many of

* Phil. iv. 8.

the very same duties are commanded in the law of God, and reputable in the sight of man. They gladly embrace them therefore as the service of God: it pleases them to think, they shall by this means be acceptable to him. They fondly flatter themselves, that this is the chief ground of their choice, and are not sensible that they are but offering incense to their own vanity. Self-partiality often hides the truth from our view, and conceals the chief springs and motives of action. Since disorder was introduced into the human frame by sin, there is no creature whose character is so mixed, variable, inconsistent, and self-contradictory as man. Other creatures are regular and uniform, steadily fulfil their functions; their nature and disposition may be known without ambiguity, and they always reach their end. But man is, as it were, torn to pieces by the conflicting principles of light and darkness; and from the different and contrary symptoms which often appear, it is hard to tell in what class he should be ranged.

From this will evidently appear, the necessity of an inward and essential change. That which is done to gain the applause of men, will never be reckoned an acceptable part of the service of God. On the contrary, he holds it in the highest detestation. See the exhortation of our Saviour: "Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven."* I cannot help observing here, that men of this character may be divided into two classes, who commonly state themselves in opposition to, and have the greatest hatred or contempt for each other, and yet are acted by one common principle.

There are some who seem chiefly to confine their views to a fair and honorable carriage in their correspondence and commerce between man and man. These are commonly persons of higher rank, and all who desire to emulate them, and wish to be classed with them. In such honor holds the place of religion; or, at least, is a superior and more powerful principle. They would not willingly

* Matt. vi. 1.

stain their reputation with any thing that is base or mean, according to the standard they have formed to themselves, of decency of character and dignity of carriage. This standard of decency, however, is very changeable. It is either more narrow or more extensive, according to the sentiments of those with whom they most frequently converse. And there is often some mixture of religion, which serves under, and co-operates with, the commanding motive.

There are vast multitudes of this character in the present age, who cannot be described in juster or more significative terms than those of the apostle Paul; they are "conformed to this world." They tread in its steps, they act upon its maxims, they ask its approbation, and they have their reward.

How far such persons are from being renewed in the spirit of their mind, and how much they are the servants of men, may be plainly discovered by the following sign; that they are almost as much ashamed of unfashionable duties, as of dishonorable crimes. How different is their boasted dignity of mind from a truly holy resolution and christian magnanimity? Are there not some, whose integrity in ordinary cases may be depended on, and who would abhor the thoughts of a mean and dirty action, as it is usually styled, but who would be covered with nearly equal shame, if surpris'd in any act of devotion, as if detected in dishonesty and fraud? How many, who would brave the king of terrors in the field of battle, from a sense of honor; but who, though far from being infidels, have not sufficient courage to worship, in their families, the great Creator and Preserver of men? Such may see the reception they shall meet with at last, and even feel the justice of their own condemnation in these words of our Saviour: "Whoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."*

* Mark viii. 38.

There are others of a different stamp, who seek the approbation of men, more by an appearance of piety and devotion, and the duties of the first table of the law. That there are some such also, not only the word of God, but daily experience puts beyond all doubt or question. "This people," saith our Lord, "draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me *." I set aside, both in this and in the former instance, the case of gross, intended, and deliberate hypocrisy. But are there not many, who, in their religious duties, seem chiefly to have in view the attaining or preserving the esteem and approbation of others? They are not determined from any inward and personal conviction of the excellence or necessity of religion; but from their youth up, they have still heard religion spoken of with reverence, and seen religious persons treated with respect. This makes them consider an entire neglect of religious duties as shameful rather than sinful; and some degree of professed attachment to them, as necessary to their character and credit.

This, like many other motives, has a strong, though at the same time an insensible influence, and when mixed with imperfect convictions of sin, will produce no small degree of regularity in religious exercises, while yet the heart is habitually set upon the world. In whatever age or place there is a regular and settled administration of the ordinances of Christ, there will be many whose religion is no more than a blind imitation of others, and a desire of some title to that character which is in esteem and repute for the time being. Wherever there is much real, there will also be much counterfeit religion. Wherever there is much true piety, it is always loaded with the dead weight of many customary professors. Wherever there is much outward esteem waiting upon the servants of God, there will always be many of these fair-weather christians, who follow Christ whilst the profession is honorable, but are unacquainted with that part of his service, which consists in taking up the cross, and suffering reproach. Their

* Matt. xv. 8.

character is well described by our Saviour, under the image of seed falling upon stony places. “He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended *.”

3. In the third place, there is still another character different from both the former, in which there may be an apparent and imperfect, while there is no compleat and essential change. The character I have now in view, is formed upon religious principles, but in which a spirit of bondage and slavish fear greatly predominates. It is often difficult, according to the scripture expression, rightly to divide the word of truth: it is difficult to point out the errors by which men deceive themselves, and mistake the shadow for the substance, and at the same time to caution them so distinctly, as that serious persons may not be alarmed; their peace and comfort interrupted by unnecessary or ill-grounded fears. Perhaps there are few subjects in which this difficulty is greater, than the one I have now mentioned. I pray that God, for Christ's sake, may enable me to open the truth in such a manner, as may convince and awaken those who have hitherto built with untempered mortar, and may give additional peace and consolation to those who have “fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before them.”

That it is of importance to open this character, every one may, upon a little reflection be sensible. There are many who will not find themselves included in any of the two former. Upon the most candid examination, conscience bears them witness, that they have more in view than merely present ease and comfort, or the approbation of others. They have often a strong impression of the importance of an endless eternity. This hath a sensible and considerable influence upon their conduct, and is a motive quite distinct from worldly pleasure. It compels them to duties out of the reach of human observation, and there-

* Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

fore they cannot think that the praise of men is their highest aim.

But are there not many such under the dominion of fear? that is to say, conscience in some measure awakened, denounces vengeance against the breaches of the law of God: providential dispensations fill them with a terror of divine power; they know they cannot live always, and tremble to think what shall become of them after death. Well, perhaps the reader will say, with some surprize, is this wrong? No, so far their exercise coincides with that of real penitents. But here, if I may so express it, the ways part asunder: the real penitent, by a discovery of the intrinsic evil of sin, of the mercy of God, and the great foundation of a sinner's hope, is led in the way of peace; his heart is truly changed, and brought under the influence of the love of God, whom he obeys as his law-giver; to whom he submits as his Lord; and in whom he rests as his portion. But there are others, who, by abstinence from some sins, against which the reproofs of conscience are most distinct and severe, and by the formal discharge of many religious duties, endeavor to lessen their fears; to lay a foundation for a precarious peace; and, as it were, by a costly sacrifice, to purchase an immunity from hell. Fear not only awakens, but continues to govern them; they lay down a legal system of obedience and self-righteousness, but all the while they drag the yoke with great impatience. They do not hate sin from their hearts, on its own account, but are afraid that they shall burn for ever for committing it. They do not love God, but they fear, because they know that they cannot resist him. They do not engage in his service with cheerfulness, or delight in it as their choice, but groan under it as a burthen. Their hearts and affections are set upon present and temporal enjoyments; but they apply themselves in some measure to the duties of religion, because they know they cannot keep the world always; and submit to it, as rather better and more tolerable than everlasting misery.

The frequency of this character will stand in need of little proof. If the features are justly drawn, I am persuaded they will be easily known, for they are very com-

mon. Are there not many who may justly suspect themselves to be acted by no higher motive than the fear of wrath? Does not this plainly shew itself, by your backward, heartless, cold discharge of duty; your regret and sorrow in parting with, and frequent relapses into sin? Is not your religion temporary and changeable? Does it not rise and fall with the sensible tokens of divine presence and power? Have you not trembled on a sick-bed, or other time of danger; humbled yourselves before God; cried for relief; and promised amendment? But has not your resolution relaxed upon your recovery, and your diligence borne proportion to the supposed nearness or distance of the danger? Is not this then manifestly the effect of fear: and may not the words of the Psalmist be justly applied to all such? “When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and enquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer: nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant *.”

Few things, I apprehend, will be of more importance than to shew, in a clear and satisfying manner, that the obedience or religious performances that are influenced by no higher motive than fear, are not acceptable to God, nor any sufficient evidence of a renewed heart. This, indeed, is equally plain from many passages of scripture, and from the nature and reason of the thing. It appears from all those passages formerly cited, and many others where mention is made of the inclination of the heart and will, of which obedience on compulsion can be no manner of proof. It appears undeniably from the great commandment of the law, and sum of practical religion, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind †.” It appears from what is always represented as the great commanding and constraining motive of the gospel: “For the love of Christ constraineth us, because

* Psa. lxxviii. 34, 35, 36, 37.

† Luke x, 27.

“ 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 *.” To the same purpose the apostle John says, “ We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him †.” We find in scripture that there is a direct opposition stated between the spirit of genuine converts under the gospel, and a spirit of bondage, or slavish fear; “ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father ‡.” So says the same apostle to Timothy, “ For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind §.”

The truth is, it is equally plain from the nature and reason of the thing. That which is done only or chiefly from fear, cannot be any evidence of the change that is acceptable to God, because, properly speaking, it is no real or inward change at all. The effects of sin are restrained or controlled by superior power, but the inclination to it remains still the same. It is a common and known principle, that whatever is the effect of compulsion or force upon the agent, whether it be good or evil in itself, hath nothing moral in its nature. The sword that commits murder, and that which executes justice, deserves equal blame or praise, or rather none of them deserves either the one or the other. A detected thief, compelled to make restitution, or loaded with chains so that he cannot steal, does not thereby become honest in his nature.

The case is precisely the same with those who, in their religious duties, are under the government of fear, although it be the fear of their almighty Judge. From any similar instance between man and man, we may at once be sensible of this truth. If one man is willing to overreach another, but, through his adversary's superior skill, is not able, or, terrified by threatenings, is not bold enough

* 2 Cor. v. 14. † 1 John iv. 16. ‡ Rom. viii. 15.

§ 2 Tim. i. 7.

to attempt it, what character does he bear, or deserve, but that of a disappointed knave? What parent or master will be satisfied with the obedience of a child or servant, who plainly discovers that he hates his commands, and grieves at his authority? It is true, as man can only judge with certainty of the outward appearance, this circumstance must be left out of every system of human government. We can make no laws on earth to punish the intention: but so much we know of it, as may make us sensible what all such deserve, and shall receive, at the hand of God, whose prerogative it is that he knoweth and judgeth the secrets of all hearts.

I shall only further observe, that the same thing appears in the clearest manner, from the nature of that happiness which is prepared for the children of God in the life to come. It is purely spiritual, as it is perfectly holy: it consists in the knowledge of God, in the exercise of love to him, in conformity to his nature, and the execution of his will. Those who are under the dominion of fear, who have no love to God, but only desire to avoid his wrath; will certainly find, that, though it were possible for them to escape hell, they neither deserve, nor are able to relish, the employment and happiness of heaven. As the commands of God are a burden to them on earth, his immediate presence would be a still more insupportable burden in heaven.—From all this I hope it appears evidently, that a character may be formed upon religious principles, and yet, if it is never carried further than a restraint by fear; it is not that change which is necessary to salvation.

It will not be improper, or rather it will be absolutely necessary to make a reflection or two upon this branch of the subject for its improvement, and to prevent its being mistaken or misapplied. For this purpose let it be observed, that we must carefully distinguish the slavish dread above explained, from that dutiful reverential fear which every child of God is still bound to preserve upon his mind of his Father who is in heaven. Of the first kind it is said, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment: he that feareth is not

“made perfect in love.”* In proportion as the love of God prevails, the first sort of fear is banished, but the other is so far from being banished, that it rather increases. This is no other than a profound veneration of the unspeakable greatness and glory of God, and particularly of his holiness and purity, which should bring every creature prostrate before him. We find in the vision of Isaiah, the heavenly hosts represented as deeply penetrated with such a discovery: “In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw 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.”†

This not only may, but ought, in us to be accompanied with a fear of the punishment incurred by sin; at the same time it must be inseparably connected with, or rather founded upon a sense of the holiness of his nature, the purity of his law, and the justice of his vengeance. On the contrary, that fear of God which prevails in the unregenerate, is founded only on the terror of his power, as a natural attribute. It is like the struggling of a chained slave, who “gnaws his tongue for pain,” who is not satisfied with the equity of the law, which he has transgressed, and cannot admit the justice of that sentence, the execution of which he apprehends.

There is no inconsistency at all between the fear and love which terminate on the correspondent attributes of God, majesty and mercy. A christian may, and ought, to grow in a sense of the divine presence, and reverential dread of the divine majesty, and so be still more afraid of sinning; at the same time, he may also grow in a sweet calm and composure of mind, a fiducial trust and reliance on the divine faithfulness and mercy; just as, on the other hand, some sinners evidently increase both in presumption and timidity. During a great part of their lives

* 1 John iv. 18.

† Isaiah vi. 1, 2, 3.

they act without reflection and without restraint, and yet, at particular seasons, they are in a manner distracted with terror: nay, though it often happens that gross wickedness fears the conscience, and produces an insensibility and hardness of heart, there are instances of the greatest profligates being liable to the most alarming fears.* Let us never, therefore, confound things so very opposite as a fear of the living God, joined to an inward and hearty approbation of his commands, and that unwilling obedience or abstinence which views him as a stern tyrant, and trembles at the thoughts of his wrath.

It will be farther necessary to observe, that, as a slavish fear is to be entirely distinguished from that which is filial and dutiful, so no doubt there is often, even in real christians, a mixture of the spirit of bondage itself, though they are supremely governed by a better principle. This is not to be wondered at, since they are sanctified but in part. There is a strong remainder of sin and corruption in them in different kinds, and, among the rest, a very blameable degree of unbelief and distrust. How many are there whose comfort is lessened, and whose hands hang down, through an excessive fear of death, the last enemy? What a refreshment should it be to all such, to think of this end of our Saviour's coming, to "deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject unto bondage."† For their sakes, I am persuaded, it will not be disagreeable that in the close of this section, I lay down a few marks, by which they may be enabled to judge whether this slavish fear predominates or not.

Is then, Christians, whether or not is your fear of wrath immediately connected with a sense of the evil of sin? Do you see these two things in their inseparable relation to, and mutual influence upon one another? Do you fear wrath as the effect of sin, and sin as the just cause of wrath?

* We are told that Nero, one of those monsters called Roman emperors, though he ventured to perpetrate some of the most horrid crimes, was yet so easily terrified, that a thunderstorm used to make him hide himself under a bed.

† Heb. ii. 15.

Have you no fault to find with this connection? Do you plead guilty before God, and confess that you are without excuse? Is sin truly hateful in itself, and your own unhappy proneness to it an habitual burden? The language of a believer is the same with that of the apostle Paul: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin *." In those who are under the dominion of fear, there is no just sense of the evil of sin, there is a proneness to extenuate it, and inclination to justify it, and a continual attempt to forget or conceal it. The crime is still sweet, though the punishment is terrible. They are not satisfied to find that God is so holy, so just, and so powerful. With them his government is arbitrary, his law is severe, his nature implacable; and, instead of changing their own disposition, they would much rather wish a change in his will.

2. Whether does your fear of God drive you from his presence, or excite a strong desire of reconciliation and peace? The slavish fear which is not attended with any just views of the divine mercy, clothes God with terror, and makes him the object of aversion. This is plainly the first effect of sin. It was so in the case of Adam, who, as soon as he had lost his integrity, when he heard God's voice in the garden, fled and hid himself. We find the same sentiment expressed by the men of Bethshemesh, upon an extraordinary token of divine power and jealousy: "And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God, and to whom shall he go up from us †." Nay, the same seems to have been the view of the apostle Peter, when surprised with an astonishing evidence of his master's power and Godhead. "When

* Rom. vii. 12, 13, 14.

† 1 Sam. vi. 20.

“ Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “ Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* ”

This disposition is daily manifest in many who are under the dominion of fear. The worship of God is painful to them, his service is a burden, his presence is terrible : they keep at a distance, therefore, as much as they can or dare. Their peace and composure is chiefly owing to their losing themselves, and occupying their minds entirely with different objects. No sign will more surely discover the nature and influence of slavish fear than this. There is a gloom and melancholy spread over every thing in religion to them ; when they are engaged in sacred duties, it is a heavy tiresome task, and they rejoice in getting them over, as a bullock when he is loosed from the yoke. On the other hand, real christians, though burdened with sinful fear, cannot take refuge in any thing else than God ; they dare not take their rest in the creature, but say with Job, “ Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ; ” † or with the Psalmist David, “ Yet the Lord “ will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and “ in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer “ unto the God of my life.” ‡ Nothing gives relief to such, till they attain to a view of the divine mercy, and a humble hope of peace and reconciliation.

3. Whether have you comfort and satisfaction in a sense of God’s favor, as well as a distressing fear of his wrath. This also will serve to distinguish between those who have no other religion than what fear produces, and those in whom it only maintains a conflict with a better principle. There are some who are restrained from sin, and compelled to many duties, by fear, who may easily see what governs them, because they are altogether strangers to joy and satisfaction in God. This is not, indeed, what they aim at. They have never yet seen his favor as the object of supreme desire. They only believe so far as to tremble, and would fain by composition, so to speak, and some degree of compliance, though reluctant and backward, avoid the divine wrath. A coldness and con-

* Luke v. 8. † Job xiii. 15. ‡ Psal. xlii. 7.

straint runs through all their performances, and they are apt to call in question the reality of joy in God, and communion with him, because they are altogether strangers to it themselves. But all the real children of God desire a sense of his love, as well as grieve or fear under a sense of his displeasure. The light of his reconciled countenance gives them more joy and gladness than the greatest affluence of corn or of wine; and under the severest chastisement, instead of flying from his presence, they say with Job, "O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."* Nothing, indeed, can be more proper than calling the one a filial, and the other a slavish fear: for great is the difference between a child fearing the displeasure of a parent whom he sincerely loves, and a slave dreading the resentment of an enraged tyrant, whose service he abhors.

S E C T. IV.

From this metaphor, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and other parallel expressions in the holy scriptures, we may learn that the change here intended is SUPERNATURAL.

WHEN I say it is a supernatural change, I mean that it is what man cannot by his own power effect without superior or divine aid. As we are by nature in a state of enmity and opposition to God, so this is what we cannot "of ourselves" remove or overcome. The exercise of our own rational powers, the persuasion of others, the application of all moral motives of every kind will be ineffectual, without the special operation of the Spirit and grace of God. Thus the apostle John describes those who believe in the name of Christ: "Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."† And thus the apostle Paul expresses himself: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done,

* Job xxiii. 3, 4.

† John i. 13.

“but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”* There is no part of the scripture doctrine which the natural man hears with greater aversion, or opposes with greater violence. It gives so humbling a view of our own character and state, and stands so directly opposed to pride and self-sufficiency, that it cannot be truly acceptable to any, till they are brought to a saving acquaintance with its power and efficacy. However it hath been, this “foolishness of preaching,” or rather, this commonly esteemed foolish part of preaching, that God hath most remarkably blessed for the salvation of souls; I will therefore endeavor to shew, in as plain and satisfying a manner as I am able, that this is the doctrine of the holy scripture; and then to vindicate it from the chief objections that are usually raised against it.

How many passages of Scripture are there, that speak in the strongest terms, not only of our miserable but helpless state before conversion. Thus the apostle to the Ephesians, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”† And again, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where with he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved.)‡ In his epistle to the Colossians, he repeats the same thing; “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all your trespasses.”§ The reader must know, that in many other passages the same truth is to be found, couched under the same or like metaphors; such as “blindness, darkness, hardness of heart.” The force of the expression is seldom sufficiently attended to. Suffer me then to put the question, Do you give credit to the holy scriptures? Do you form your opinions without partiality or prejudice from them? Then you must receive it as truth that man, in his natural state, can do nothing of himself to his own recovery, without the concurrence of superior aid. If there is any meaning or propriety in scrip-

* Titus iii. 5. † Eph. ii. 1. ‡ Eph. ii. 4, 5. § Col. ii. 13.

ture language, we must yield to this. What more could be said, than that we are "dead" in sin? What more incapable of action, than one who is entirely deprived of life?

But lest there should be any remaining exception, the thing is asserted in plain and explicit terms, without any metaphor, by the apostle John, from our Saviour's own mouth: "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God; every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."* I shall mention only one passage more, in which, under the similitude of a wretched outcast infant, the prophet Ezekiel represents the natural state of Jerusalem. "And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born, thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live."† Here all the circumstances are collected, that could signify at once a miserable and weak, wretched and helpless condition or that could serve to make our deliverance at once a sign, instance both of grace and power.

This leads me to observe, that the same truth will receive further light from these passages of scripture, in which the real agent in this great change is pointed out, and which celebrate the efficacy of his power. As in the text it is asserted, that, "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." So in other passages, true believers are said to be "born of God—born from above—born of the Spirit." The power of God exerted in the renovation of the sinner, is described in language taken

* John vi. 44, 45. † Ezek. xvi. 4, 5, 6.

from the first formation of the world. “For we are his
 “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,
 “which God hath before ordained that we should walk in
 “them.”* And, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new
 “creature; old things are past away, behold all things are
 “become new.”† See the prophecies of the Old Testament,
 respecting the plentiful effusion of the holy Spirit in the
 times of the gospel: they contain a clear description of di-
 vine supernatural influence. Thus the prophet Isaiah,
 “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and
 “floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit up-
 “on thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and
 “they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows
 “by the water-courses.”‡ To the same purpose the pro-
 phet Ezekiel: “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. A new heart also
 “will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within; and
 “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I
 “will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit
 “within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and
 “ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”|| Let it
 not seem tedious to any that I have collected so many pas-
 sages of scripture on this subject. It is no light thing; and
 indeed, it is no common thing to believe it from the heart.
 But let us now affirm it, on divine testimony, that regene-
 ration is the work of the Holy Ghost.

I would not build this truth upon any other evidence.
 When we stand in God’s room, bear his message, and
 speak in his name, nothing should be affirmed, which
 cannot be supported by a “Thus saith the Lord.” But
 having done so, I think I may warrantably observe how
 much the visible state of the world corresponds with the
 scripture declarations on this subject. I hope this will be
 neither unsuitable nor unprofitable, considering what an
 inward aversion men have to receive and apply them.
 Do we not daily see many instances of persons, of first

* Eph. ii. 10. † 2 Cor. v. 17. ‡ Is. xlv. 3, 4.

|| Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27.

rate understandings and great natural abilities, who yet continue blind to their duty to God, and the salvation of their souls? As they are born, so they continue to show themselves through their whole lives, "wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." What proofs do they often give of the power and influence of habits of wickedness over them? How frequently does it happen, that their attachment to sin in general, or to some particular sin, is such, as to bear down before it all regard to their own interest, temporal and eternal? While at the same time persons of unspeakably inferior talents, enlightened by the Spirit, and sanctified by the grace of God, shall stand firm against the most dangerous temptations, and escape the pollution that is in the world through lust. This our blessed Lord adores as a part or proof of the sovereignty and unfathomable wisdom of his heavenly Father. "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."*

Is it not plain, that superior advantages of instruction, though very valuable, are far from being always effectual? Sometimes those who live long under the salutary instruction and edifying example of pious parents and masters, continue, notwithstanding, in an insensible state. Sometimes we see persons sit long under the most enlightening and awakening ministry, with hearts as hard as the nether millstone. The case of the ordinary hearers of the gospel is indeed often affecting, and leads to serious meditation on the depths of the divine counsels. Suffer me to bespeak the readers of this class in the following terms. Are not many of you a wonder to yourselves, as well as to one another? Is not your danger often pointed out to you in the clearest manner? Is not your character drawn and distinguished by the most undeniable marks? Are not your duty and interest set before you in such a manner, that it cannot be contradicted, and there is no-

* Luke x. 21.

thing left to reply ? And yet after all, though there may be some weak or temporary resolutions, it is without any real or lasting effect. Doth not this ratify and confirm the following passage of scripture ? “ Who then is Paul, and “ who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, “ even as the Lord gave to every man ? I have planted, “ Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, “ neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that wa- “ reth, but God that giveth the increase.”*

To be absent altogether from the ordinances of God is a dreadful and dangerous thing, for it leads directly to a state of total blindness and undisturbed security. I have often thought, however, that the case of many who continue to give their attendance is much more wonderful. Are there not habitual drunkards often seen in the house of God ? Are there not some prophane swearers often seen in the house of God ? Are there not some who walk in the lust of uncleanness ? some who retain, without restitution, unrighteous gain, whom approaching death, the wrath of God, and the fire of hell cannot terrify ? Of such, we may justly say with the apostle Paul, “ But if our gospel be hid, it “ is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this “ world hath blinded the minds of them which believe “ not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is “ the image of God, should shine unto them.”†

Let it be further considered, how much providential warnings are generally despised, even when they are so awful in their nature, and so clear in their meaning, that one would think nothing but an absolute infatuation could prevent their effect. Sinners may keep themselves from hearing the word of God, and from any such reading or conversation as will bring eternity in their view. But he visits them in their families or in their persons, and they cannot fly from these terrible things in righteousness, by which he pleads his cause from day to day. Are not the young and beautiful soon carried to their graves ? Are not the great and noble soon humbled in the dust ? Have not sensuality and riot, impurity and lust, slain their victims,

* 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7. † 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

and raised up monuments fraught with moral instruction in every age? How long is it ago, since Solomon said, "Whoredom and wine, and new wine, take away the heart?" And of a harlot, "She hath cast down many wounded, and many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."* But though uninspired writers have said this as well as he, nay, though it is visible to all, have men become wise? Have they shunned the paths of the destroyer? No: we may justly say of the present times, as the Psalmist David said many ages ago, "This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings,"† Nothing, nothing will change them, till the Spirit of God rouse and awaken the conscience, powerfully constrain the will, and effectually renew the heart.

Hence then it appears, that the new birth is a "supernatural change;" it is the effect of the power of God; it is the work of the Holy Ghost. I have been at the more pains to establish this truth, because I am persuaded, that until it be truly received, there may be a form, but there can be nothing of the power of godliness. But we must now vindicate it from the objections and abuse, to which it may be thought liable. There are many who still harbor in their minds, and sometimes produce in conversation, the objection mentioned by the apostle Paul; "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?"‡ This, indeed, is the sum of all the objections that ever were, or ever can be offered against it: and I make the short answer of the same apostle; "Nay, but O man! who art thou that repliest against God?" This is but making or imagining an inconsistency between two things, both of which God hath clearly established and inseparably joined in his word. These are, his own power necessary to the change, and our duty in the use of the means; or rather, our sin while continuing at enmity with him, and refusing his mercy.

I make no scruple to acknowledge, that it is impossible for me; nay, I find no difficulty in supposing, that it is

* Prov. vii. 26, 27. † Ps. xlix. 13. ‡ Rom. ix. 19.

impossible for any finite mind to point out the bounds between the "dependence" and "activity" of the creature. But though we must ever remember, that it is he alone who can "bring a clean thing out of an unclean," yet we know also, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We know that "God will be just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth:" that he rejects with disdain, the imputation of being the author of sin. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man."* For our greater assurance of this, he hath condescended to confirm it by his oath. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"† The connexion between this and the former truth appears plainly in the following passage: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."‡

Perhaps also, there are some who abuse this doctrine to sloth and negligence. At least they may pretend this, as an excuse or palliation of their contempt of religion. But is it not an inference directly contrary to what the scripture teaches us much more justly to draw from the same truth, viz. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."|| The former inference would be just in the case of devils, who, having received their sentence, can only now "believe and tremble:" but it would be altogether unjust, and a dreadful contempt of mercy in those, to whom the offer of salvation by grace is addressed. What is now transacting in the ministry of the gospel, shall contribute at last to stop every mouth, and put this criminal excuse to eternal silence. Suppose the sinner at the judgment-seat to offer this defence for himself: "I was altogether under the power of corruption; it was impossible for me to do any thing of myself." Is

* James i. 13. † Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ‡ John v. 40.

|| Phil. ii. 13, 14.

it not natural to reply, "Where learned you this?" From the holy scriptures. "And did not the same scriptures also tell you, Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him.—Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But I could not reconcile one scripture to another. "And was that any way wonderful? Or can it possibly justify your rebellion against the plainest commands, that you was not able fully to comprehend what is said of the absolute dominion and sovereignty of God?"

Let us therefore settle it in our minds, that, though we are of ourselves utterly unable to produce a change in our hearts, "nothing is impossible with GOD." He first made them, and he is able to reform them. On a conviction of our own inability, one would think we should but the more humbly and the more earnestly apply to him who is all-sufficient in power and grace. The deplorable, and naturally helpless state of sinners, doth not hinder exhortations to them in scripture; and therefore, takes not away their obligation to duty. See an address, where the strongest metaphors are retained, the exhortation given in these very terms, and the foundation of the duty plainly pointed out. "Wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."* From which it is very plain, that the moral inability, under which sinners now lie, as a consequence of the fall, is not of such a nature, as to take away the guilt of sin, the propriety of exhortations to duty, or the necessity of endeavors after recovery.

But what shall we say? Alas! the very subject we are now speaking of, affords a new proof of the blindness, prejudice, and obstinacy of sinners. They are self-condemned; for they do not act the same part in similar cases. The affairs of the present life are not managed in so preposterous a manner. He that ploughs his ground, and throws in his seed, cannot so much as unite one grain to the clod; nay, he is not able to conceive how it is done.

* Eph. v. 14.

He cannot carry on, nay, he cannot so much as begin one single step of this wonderful process toward the subsequent crop; the mortification of the seed, the resurrection of the blade, and gradual increase, till it come to perfect maturity. Is it, therefore, reasonable that he should say, I for my part can do nothing. It is, first and last, an effect of divine power and energy. And God can as easily raise a crop without sowing as with it, in a single instant, and in any place, as in a long time, by the mutual influence of soil and season; I will therefore spare myself the hardship of toil and labor, and wait with patience, till I see what he will be pleased to send. Would this be madness? Would it be universally reputed so? And would it not be equal madness to turn the grace of God into licentiousness? Believe it, the warning is equally reasonable and equally necessary, in spiritual as in temporal things: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: for he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”*

* Gal. vi. 7. 8.

C H A P. II.

In which is shewn wherein this change doth properly and directly consist, and what are its principal evidences and fruits.

S E C T. I.

Wherein the change in regeneration doth properly and directly consist.

I HAVE hitherto, by general remarks, endeavored to caution the reader against taking up with erroneous and defective views of the nature of religion. We now proceed a step farther: and I would willingly point out, in as distinct a manner as I am able, what is the change which is wrought in all, without exception, who are the real children of God, by whatever means it is brought about; what it is in the temper and disposition, in the life and practice, which constitutes the difference between one who "is," and one who is "not born again." The different steps by which this change may be effected in the sovereign providence of God, and the different degrees of perfection at which it may arrive, I purposely omit here, and reserve as the subject of a distinct head of discourse.

That we may enter on the subject with the greater perspicuity and simplicity, it will be proper to begin with observing, that the design and purpose of this change is to repair the loss which man sustained by the fall. Man, at his first creation, was made after the image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship and communion with him. He was not only subservient to the divine glory, by a natural and necessary subjection to the divine dominion, which all creatures are, have been, and ever will be, but by choice and inclination, his duty and delight being invariably the same. By the fall he became not only obnoxious to the divine displeasure, by a single act of transgression, but disobedient to the divine will in his habitual and prevailing inclination. This is the character given not of one man

only, but of the human race. “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.”*

He became, at the same time, not only unworthy of, but wholly disinclined to communion with God, and habitually prefers the creature before the Creator, who is “God blessed for evermore.” In regeneration, therefore, the sinner must be restored to the image of God, which, in a created nature, is but another expression for obedience to his will. He must also be restored to the exercise of love to him, and find his happiness and comfort in him. His habitual temper, his prevailing disposition, or that which hath the ascendancy, must be the same that was perfect and without mixture, before the fall, and shall be made equally, or perhaps more perfect in heaven after death.

As the change must be entire and universal, corresponding to the corruption of the whole man, it is not unusual to say, it may be fully comprehended in the three following things, giving a new direction to the understanding, the will, and the affections. And no doubt, with respect to every one of these, there is a remarkable and sensible change. But as the understanding is a natural faculty, which becomes good or evil, just as it is applied or employed, it would be scarce possible to illustrate the change in it without introducing, at the same time, a view of the disposition and tendency of the heart and affections. As, therefore, the change is properly of a moral or spiritual nature, it seems to me properly and directly to consist in these two things, 1. That our supreme and chief end be to serve and glorify God, and that every other aim be subordinate to this. 2. That the soul rest in God as its chief happiness, and habitually prefer his favor to every other enjoyment. These two particulars I shall now endeavor to illustrate a little, in the order in which I have named them.

* Gen. vi. 5.

1. Our supreme and chief end must be to serve and glorify God, and every other aim must be subordinate to this.

All things were originally made, and are daily preserved for, nay, they shall certainly in the issue tend to the glory of God; that is, the exercise and illustration of divine perfection. With this great end of creation the inclination and will of every intelligent creature ought to coincide. It is, according to scripture and reason, the first duty of man to "give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." This, I know, the world that lieth in wickedness can neither understand nor approve. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* The truth is, we ought not to be surprized to find it so, for in this the sin of man originally consisted, and in this the nature of all sin, as such, doth still consist, viz. withdrawing the allegiance due to God, and refusing subjection to his will. The language of every unrenewed heart, and the language of every sinner's practice is, "Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?" But he that is renewed and born again, hath seen his own entire dependance upon God, hath seen his Maker's right of dominion, and the obligation upon all his creatures to be, in every respect, subservient to his glory, and without reserve submissive to his will. He hath seen this to be most "fit" and "reasonable," because of the absolute perfection and infinite excellence of the divine nature. He is convinced that all preferring of our will to that of God, is a criminal usurpation by the creature of the unalienable rights of the great Creator and sovereign proprietor of all.

Regeneration, then, is communicating this new principle, and giving it such force as it may obtain and preserve the ascendancy, and habitually govern the will. Every one may easily see the different operation and effects of this principle and its opposite, by the different carriage and behavior of men in the world. The unrenewed man seeks his own happiness immediately and ul-

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

timately: it is to please himself that he constantly aims. This is the cause, the uniform cause of his preferring one action to another. This determines his choice of employment, enjoyments, companions. His religious actions are not chosen, but submitted to, through fear of worse. He considers religion as a restraint, and the divine law as hard and severe. So that a short and summary description may be given of man in his natural state. That he hath forgotten his subjection, that God is dethroned, and self-honored, loved, and served in his room.

This account will appear to be just, from every view given us in scripture of our state and character, before or after conversion. It appears very clearly, from the first condition required by our Savior of his disciples, viz. self-denial. "Then said Jesus to his disciples, If any man
" will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up
" his cross, and follow me."* All those who are brought back to a sense of their duty and obligation as creatures, are ready to say, not with their tongues only, but with their hearts, "Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor,
" and power, for thou has created all things, and for thy
" pleasure they are and were created."† It ought to be attended to what is the import of this, when spoken from conviction. They not only consider God as being most great, and therefore to be feared, but as infinitely holy, as absolutely perfect, and therefore to be loved and served. They esteem all his commands concerning all things to be right. Their own remaining corruption is known, felt, and confessed to be wrong. This law in their members, warring against the law of God in their minds, is often deeply lamented, and, by the grace of God, strenuously and habitually resisted.

Perhaps the attentive reader may have observed, that I have still kept out of view our own great interest in the service of God. The reason is, there is certainly, in every renewed heart, a sense of duty, independent of interest. Were this not the case, even supposing a desire of reward, or fear of punishment, should dispose to obedience, it

* Matt. xvi. 24. † Rev. iv. 11.

would plainly be only a change of life, and no change of heart. At the same time, as it did not arise from any inward principle, it would neither be uniform nor lasting. It is beyond all question, indeed, that our true interest is inseparable from our duty, so that self-seeking is self-losing; but still a sense of duty must have the precedency, otherwise it changes its nature, and is, properly speaking, no duty at all.

To honor God in the heart, then, and to serve him in the life, is the first and highest desire of him that is born again. This is not, and cannot be the case, with any in a natural state. But, before we proceed to the other particular implied in this change, it will not be improper to make an observation, which I hope will have the greater weight, when the foundation of it is fresh in the reader's mind. Hence may be plainly seen the reason why profane and worldly men have such a tendency to self-righteousness, while the truly pious are filled with an abhorrence that soul-destroying fallhood. This, I dare say, appears strange to many, as I confess it hath often done to me, before I had thought fully upon the subject: that those who evidently are none of the strictest in point of morals, and have least of that kind to boast of, should yet be the most professed admirers and defenders of the doctrine of justification by works, and despisers of the doctrine of the grace of God. But the solution is easy and natural. Worldly men have no just sense of their natural and unalienable obligation to glorify God in their thoughts, words, and actions, and therefore all that they do in religion, they look upon as a meritorious service, and think that certainly something is due to them on that account. They think it strange if they have walked soberly, regularly, and decently, especially if they have been strict and punctual in the forms of divine worship, that God should not be obliged (pardon the expression) to reward them according to their works. It is a hard service to them, they do it only that they may be rewarded, or at least may not suffer for the neglect of it, and therefore cannot but insist upon the merit of it.

On the other hand, those who are born of God, are sensible that it is the duty of every rational creature to love God with all his heart, and to consecrate all his powers and faculties to his Maker's service. They are convinced that, whoever should do so without sin, would do only what is just and equal, and have no plea of merit to advance. But when they consider how many sins still cleave to them, how far short they come of their duty in every instance, they ask for mercy, and not for reward, and are ready to say with the Psalmist David, "If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand: but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."* To sum up this reasoning in a few words. The reluctant obedience which some pay to the divine law, is considered as a debt charged upon God; whereas real obedience is considered as a debt due to God. And therefore it must always hold, that the very imperfection of an obedience itself increases our disposition to overvalue and rest our dependance upon it.

S E C T. II.

The second part of this change.

THE next thing implied in a saving change is, that the soul rests in God as its chief happiness, and habitually prefers his favor to every other enjoyment. On this branch of the subject I would beg the reader to observe, not only the meaning and substance of the proposition, but the order in which it is placed. There must be first a devotedness of mind to God, and a supreme leading concern for his honor and glory. He must be, if I may so speak, again restored to his original right, his dominion and throne, while the creature is reduced to its obedience and subjection. In consequence of this, there is an unfeigned acquiescence in God, as the source of comfort, and a high esteem of his favor as better than life. This does not go before, nay, is hardly distinct or separated

* Psa. cxviii. 3, 4.

from, a sense of duty, but is founded upon it, and grows out of it. When a holy soul has seen the infinite excellence and glory of the true God, loves him supremely, and is devoted to him entirely, he also delights in him superlatively.

Such a person is fully convinced that those, and those alone are happy, whose God is the Lord, and that those who are afar off from him shall certainly perish. In a natural state, as the sure consequence of sin, the transgressor flies from God, with a dread and horror of his presence. But the renewed soul returns to him with desire, and feels an uneasiness and want that cannot be supplied but by the intimation of pardon, and sense of divine love. The warmth and fervor of devout affection is expressed in the strongest terms in scripture: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God.* Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live, I will lift up my hands in thy name, my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips."†

It is necessary that serving and delighting in God should be joined together on a double account. Their influence on one another is reciprocal. It is not easy to distinguish a conscientious study to serve and glorify God, from a slavish obedience through fear of divine power, but by its being inseparably connected with a delight in God, as the choice of the heart, and centre of the affections. On the other hand, it is hard to distinguish cleaving to God as our portion and happiness, from an interested mercenary bargain in religion, but by its being preceded by, founded upon, nay, even resolved into, a sense of the supreme honor due to God for his infinite excellence. This reasonable service will then be attended with an unspeakable sweetness and complacency, and the all-sufficiency of God will be an unshaken security for the happiness and peace of those who put their trust in him.

* Psa. xlii. 1, 2. † Psa. lxxiii. 3, 4, 5.

We may often observe these two dispositions jointly exerting themselves, and mutually strengthening one another, in the language and exercises of the saints in scripture. With what fervor of spirit, and with what inimitable force and beauty of style, do we find the Psalmist David expressing himself in both views. Sometimes he makes a full surrender of himself and his all to the divine service and disposal; at other times his soul “makes her boast in God,” and he exults in his happiness and security under the divine protection: “O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord*.—The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup, thou maintainest my lot: the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage†.”

These two things are, indeed, often so intimately united that we are at a loss to know whether we should interpret the language of the sacred writers as a profession of duty, or an expression of delight, as in the following words; “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being.—My meditation of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord‡.” How deeply the Psalmist was penetrated with a sense of the honor and service due to God, may be particularly seen in some of those animated passages in which his enlarged heart calls upon every creature to join in the work of praise: “Bless the Lord ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.”||

It is easy to see how this distinguishes the natural from the new-born soul; nay, it is easy to see how this distinguishes the man who is renewed in the spirit of his mind, from all others, however various their characters, however different or opposite their pursuits. The design of man’s creation is expressed in the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism, in a way

* Psal. xvi. 2. † Psal. xvi. 5, 6. ‡ Psal. civ. 33, 34.
 § Psal. ciii. 20, 21, 22.

that can scarce be altered for the better; it was, that he might glorify God, and enjoy him for ever." As he departed from his duty by sin, so also, at the same time, from his happiness. As he refused to do the will of God, so he no more sought his favor, but placed his happiness and comfort in the creature "more than the Creator, who is "God blessed for ever." All unrenewed persons, in one shape or another, place their supreme happiness in something that is not God. In this one circumstance they all agree, though the different forms which the world puts on to solicit their affection, the different degrees in which they prosecute it, and the different ways in which they apply or abuse it, are so very many, that it is impossible to enumerate or describe them. Though there is but one God, the idols of the nations are innumerable. There is but one way to peace, and if that is neglected, the unsatisfactory nature of all created enjoyments makes men fly from one earthly comfort to another, till they feel, by late experience, the vanity of them all. Their state is justly described by the wise man, when he says, "Lo this only have "I found, that God made man upright, but they have "fought out many inventions."*

It may not be improper here, just to hint at a few of the principal pursuits by which the characters of men are diversified, their hearts and cares divided, and the one thing needful forgotten and disregarded. Some there are who yield themselves up to the unrestrained indulgence of pleasure. Sensual appetite and passion carry them on with unbridled fury. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, possess their affections, and their prevailing desire is to gratify these appetites, as far as their situation and circumstances enable them, or the rival pursuits of others will permit them. This, which is usually the first attempt of un sanctified and ungoverned youth, is well described by the wise man, in the following strong caution against it: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy "youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy "youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the

* Eccles. vii. 29.

“fight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.”* This is the path of the abandoned and heaven-daring profligate, who casts off all fear of God, who bursts afunder every bond, “who draws iniquity with cords of vanity, and sins as it were with a cart-rope.”

Again, There are some whose hearts are set upon present gain. Instead of making that sober and moderate use of this world and its enjoyments, which becometh mortal creatures, they look upon it as their home. Instead of considering it only as a mean to a higher end, they have it as their chief or principal view, to secure or enlarge their possession of it. These “say to the gold, Thou art my refuge, and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence.”—They think their “houses will endure for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations.” This is often the sin of riper years: and, that the brutish folly of sinners may more eminently show itself, it is often the reproach and scandal of old age, when its absurdity is most sensible and apparent. What doth it signify how much men of this character despise the levity of youth, or hate the filthy receptacles of sensuality and lust, while their affections are supremely set upon the present world, while “they bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth?”

It is often sufficient to raise in every serious person a mixture of compassion and indignation, to hear those with whom poverty is the only crime, openly pleading for, and boasting of their attachment to the world, or treating with a smile of contempt those who tell them, from the word of God, that it is vain. Though nothing is more frequently confirmed by experience, it is usual to consider this as only pulpit declamation, a part of our business and profession, but containing a maxim that cannot be applied to common life. Let all such be informed, whether they will hear it or not, that, however regular and abstemious they may be as to all sensual indulgence, however diligent, eager, and successful in trade, “except they be born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God.” And, that they

* Eccles. xi. 9.

may not deceive themselves, but know in part at least, wherein this change consisteth, let them peruse and ponder the following passage of the apostle John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."*

Once more. There are some who walk in the path of ambition. Pride and vain glory is the idol at whose shrine they bow. These, indeed, may be divided into very different classes. Pride, which may be called the master-passion of the human frame, takes in the most extensive and universal range. There is scarce any state in which it is not able to exert itself, scarce any circumstance which it is not able to convert into the means of its own gratification. All natural advantages which men enjoy over others, whether in respect of body or mind; all the additional trappings of society, viz. wealth, station, and office; all acquired advantages, intellectual, or even moral, become the fuel of pride. As some endeavor by extraordinary actions to spread their fame in public life, others, though in a narrower sphere, are under the habitual government of the same desire. While great men are taking cities, and destroying kingdoms, to get themselves a name, others of meaner rank are vying with one another in dress, furniture, and equipage, or such inferior arts as they have been able to attain. Nay, those who never did any thing that could merit praise, too often shew themselves under the government of the most hateful and detested kind of ambition, by a rancorous malice and envy against such as excel or outshine them. We may go a step farther, and say, there is great reason to believe, that in some the cultivation of their minds, long and assiduous application to study, zealous and successful endeavors to promote the public good, ought to be ascribed to no other source, to no higher motive.

I thought I could not fall upon any way to illustrate this part of my subject, which would make it more intelligible, than to give this short view of the characters and pursuits

* 1 John ii. 15.

of the men of the world; and then to observe, That the change in regeneration doth properly consist in a strong inward conviction of the vanity of worldly enjoyments of every kind; and a persuasion, that the favor and enjoyment of God is infinitely superior to them all. Whatever other differences there may be, this will be found in every child of God, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest: from the wisest to the most ignorant; and from the oldest to the youngest. Every such one will be able to say with the Psalmist, "There be many that say, "Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light "of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness "in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and "their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, "and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."*

I shall afterwards have occasion more fully to explain the comparative influence of this desire; but before I conclude this section, must make the two following remarks: 1. That the favor of God must appear to the believer as absolutely necessary to his comfort. 2. As full and sufficient for that purpose.

1. He that is born again, considers the favor of God as absolutely necessary to his comfort. He sees the emptiness and inherent vanity of all things else. Even when the world smiles, even when things succeed with him to his wish, he will not rest satisfied with any, or all temporal mercies. He will, above all, desire an interest in that love which God beareth to his "chosen people," a right by promise or covenant to the use of present comforts, and the favor and protection of his special providence. How contrary this to the temper of many, who have a name to live while they are dead? If the world smiles, they follow it with eagerness, and embrace it with complacency, while they are cold and indifferent in their desires towards God. Perhaps, when they are distressed with outward calamities; when experience constrains them to confess the vanity of the creature, they cry to God for relief. But when ease

* Psal. iv. 6, 7, 8.

and prosperity return, they soon forget his works, are well pleased with their condition, and neither grieve for his absence, nor are afraid of his anger. This shews plainly, that whatever occasional symptoms they may discover, they are supremely and habitually possessed by a love of the world, and desire of sensual gratification. In opposition to this, every real Christian sees the favor of God to be so absolutely necessary, that he cannot be without it. He sees it to be more necessary than riches, honors, or pleasures; nay, than health, or even life itself; all which he values chiefly as they are the fruits of the divine bounty, as tokens of divine love, and as they afford him an opportunity of promoting the divine glory. He is ready to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee: my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."*

2. He that is born again, considers the favor of God as full and sufficient for his comfort and happiness. That is to say, he is habitually satisfied with this as his portion, whether there be abundance or straitness as to outward provision. He counts the favor of God as absolutely necessary, but nothing else is considered as such. No earthly enjoyments can satisfy him without God's favor; but this will satisfy him, be his outward condition what it will. I am far from meaning to affirm, that every good man is free from the least rising murmur, the least impatient or rebellious thought. If it were so with any man, he would be perfect in holiness; but I mean to signify, that this is his habitual and prevailing temper. He is inwardly convinced, that those alone are happy; and that they are, and shall be, completely happy, who are reconciled to God, and the objects of his special love. His own remaining attachment to present things, and immoderate sorrow under outward calamity, he sincerely laments as his weakness, and humbly confesses as his sin. He endeavors to supply the void left by every earthly comfort, when it is withdrawn, by the fulness and all-sufficiency of God. He

* Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26.

possesses, in some measure, and breathes after more and more of the temper expressed in the two following passages of scripture: "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."* Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."†

Thus I have endeavored to point out wherein the change in regeneration doth immediately and properly consist. It is just the recovery of the moral image of God upon the heart; that is to say, to love him supremely, and serve him ultimately, as our highest end; and to delight in him superlatively, as our chief good. This recovery, however, is but begun on earth. It is gradually improved in the progress of sanctification, and shall be fully completed at the resurrection of the just. The sum of the moral law is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. This is the duty of every rational creature; and, in order to obey it perfectly, no part of our inward affection or actual service ought to be, at any time, or in the least degree, misapplied. This is the case with no mere man, while he continues in the body. But regeneration consists in the principle being implanted, obtaining the ascendancy, and habitually prevailing over its opposite. Even in those who are born again, there will still be many struggles between the "law of sin in their members," and the "law of God in their minds." This we find deeply lamented by the apostle Paul: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"‡ It ought to give unspeakable consolation to the christian, when he reflects, that the seed which is planted by divine grace, shall be preserved by divine power. A gracious God will neither suffer it to be smothered by contending weeds, nor destroy.

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. † Habak. iii. 17, 18. ‡ Rom. vii. 24.

ed by the inclemency of this tempestuous climate, till it be transplanted into the milder regions of peace and serenity above.

S E C T. III.

The effects of regeneration ; with some of the principal evidences of its sincerity.

IN the further prosecution of this head, I proposed to mention some of the principal evidences and fruits of a saving change. These, no doubt, it were easy with sufficient propriety greatly to extend and enlarge, because they include all the marks and signs of real religion, suited to every character and every situation in which a christian can be placed. The heart being renewed, the life will of necessity be reformed, and holiness in all manner of conversation, including the duties of piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men, will be its native and genuine effect. But this would be too wide and general a field. I find most writers on this subject take particular notice of the new views and apprehensions which the regenerate person hath of himself, and every other thing or person to which he stands related. I shall therefore very shortly observe, he who is born again, discovers his new nature and life by new apprehensions of God—of himself—of the world—of eternity—of Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners—and of all the ordinances of his appointment.

The regenerate person has new views of God, both in respect of greatness and goodness. He really and inwardly believes the being, presence, power and providence of God, which he in a great measure disbelieved before. Whereas formerly, even what he did believe of God was seldom in his thoughts ; now it is almost impossible for him to look upon any thing, or person, or event, without considering its relation to God. O what “terrible majesty” does his sanctified understanding perceive in this Being of Beings, compared to the times of his former blindness ? What a lustre and glory does the opened eye see in all the divine perfections ? Above all, what a ra-

wishing and astonishing view has he of the divine goodness and love? Wicked men, governed by self-love, are therefore insensible of obligations. Inordinate in their desires, they are never satisfied with their possessions: whereas the child of God discovers and confesses the infinite goodness of his Creator in all his mercies, of the least of which he is not worthy.

He hath quite new apprehensions of himself, his own character and state. Before, he thought himself his own master, looked upon every religious law as a hard and tyrannical restraint; but now, he sees that he belongs to God: he now remembers his Creator, confesses his obligations, and mourns for his transgressions. A converted sinner often admires and stands astonished at his own former conduct. He wonders at the boldness of a poor guilty helpless rebel, perhaps cursing and blaspheming, perhaps rioting in sensuality and lust. He wonders that the power of God did not arrest him in his course, and by some signal stroke, make him a standing monument of righteous indignation. He trembles to think of his former state, and it excites in him a deep and lively acknowledgment of the riches of divine grace. How great a sense of this does the apostle Paul often express in his own case; "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious.—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 above is often connected with, and increased by, his views of the world and of worldly men. The charm is now broke; the false colors are now taken off from the world and all its enjoyments. How ardently did he love them once? how eagerly did he persecute them? and how rich did he esteem them? He envied every one who possessed them, and thought that none such could fail of being completely happy. But now, he can never separate the idea of riches from temptation, and often considers the dreadful change of state in those who are carried about in pomp and grandeur on earth; who are cloathed in purple

* 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; but are, in a little time, tormented in hell fire. Formerly, he valued persons by their station, by their wealth, by their spirit and genius, or other natural qualifications. But now, a christian in a cottage appears more honorable and more amiable than a blasphemer in a palace. Now, his heart is joined to every servant of Christ, though despised in the world, though emaciated by sickness, though deformed with old age; nay, though loathsome and fordid through penury and want. He sees the beauty of these excellent ones of the earth, under all their present disadvantages, and in them is all his delight. With regard to persons of an opposite character, the penitent often recollects, with a bleeding heart, his fondness for, and attachment to, sinful companions; and his kindness to them, is converted into a yearning tenderness and compassion for their miserable state.

Further, the regenerate person has new apprehensions of eternity. Formerly, the shadows and vanities of time so engrossed his thoughts, so filled and occupied his sight, that eternity was seldom at all, and never fully in view. But now, it is frequently and strongly upon his mind. Now it, as it were, joins itself with, and points out its own relation to every subject, and its concern in every pursuit. Now, it is present as the object of faith, to correct the false representations of sense, and to oppose the unjust claim of earthly and momentary gratifications. Formerly, things unseen were counted in a manner precarious and fabulous, of small moment in any determination: but now, there is such a discovery of the great realities of another world, as weighs down all created things, and makes them feel as a feather in the balance.

Let us here stand still, and pause a little. Let me beseech every reader to ponder this reflection, which I cannot pass. Oh! what concern have we all in everlasting endless eternity! O subject without bounds! Who is able to do it justice in words? Who is able to reach it even in thought? Happiness that shall continue through everlasting ages. Misery, anguish, torment, that shall never have an end. Are we all, without exception, to be so divided

at last? Yes; the great Judge shall separate the righteous from the wicked, and shall set the one on his right-hand, and the other on his left. Shall then companions on earth; shall fellow-citizens, and fellow-foldiers; the dearest friends and the nearest relations, be parted asunder, and take a long, long, eternal farewell? O the strong deceit and illusion of sin, that is able to hide eternity from dying men! O the inconceivable blindness of those who are unmindful of a future state, while they inhabit these tabernacles of clay, which are so often tottering; which are daily wasting, and shall so soon fall in pieces and crumble into dust! How is it possible we should forget, that in a little time “we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

The regenerate person has also new views of Jesus Christ, the great and only Saviour of sinners. Before, he was “without form or comeliness, or any beauty, that he should desire him.” Before, (as is, alas! the case with very many) all the truths, relating to the person, character, and office of a Mediator, were hated as absurdities, or despised as enthusiasm. They were nick-named nonsense, cant, and unintelligible stuff. Or if decency forbade this, they were altogether cold and without relish. But now, the name of a Saviour is “precious—even as ointment poureth forth.”* The strongest language is too weak to express his gratitude, or breathe out his love. “He is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand:—yea, he is altogether lovely.”† How great is the difference between the self-righteous formalist and the humble penitent? The one, trusting in himself that he is righteous, knows little of the value of a Saviour; the other, deeply penetrated with a sense of guilt, and strongly conscious of absolute weakness, “counts all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord; and desires to be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is of God by faith.”‡

* Cant. i. 3.

† Cant. v. 10.

‡ Phil. iii. 8.

Again, the regenerate person has new views of the ordinances of Christ's appointment. They were formerly his burden, now they are his delight. Before the sabbath wore, as it were, a sable garb, and an offensive gloom. It was looked upon as a piece of confinement and restraint. He was ready to say, "What a weariness is it; when will the Sabbath be over, and the new moon, that we may set forth corn, and fell wheat?" But now, he calls it a delight, the "holy of the Lord, and honorable." Now, he thirsts after the water of life, esteems, loves, and desires the word of God. He now readily joins the holy Psalmist in all these fervent expressions to be found in his writings, of affection to the truths and ordinances of God. "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.* The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.† My soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen it in the sanctuary.‡ I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord; our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem!"||

Suffer me now to conclude this general account of the spirit and temper of the regenerate, with a few particular characters, by which they will commonly be distinguished.

1. The new nature will discover itself by great humility. There is no disposition more the object of divine abhorrence and detestation, than pride; nor consequently, any more amiable and necessary than humility. We are told, that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."* To the same purpose the prophet Isaiah, "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."† Pride was the sin by which the angels fell from their glory and happiness. It

* Pſal. cxix. 97. † Pſal. cxix. 72. ‡ Pſal. lxxiii. 1, 2.

|| Pſal. cxxii. 1, 2. * James iv. 6. † If. lvii. 15.

appears to have been the chief ingredient in the first sin of man; and in general, the leading part of a sinful character. Before there can be any saving change; before there can be any esteem or relish of the gospel of the grace of God, there must be a deep humility of mind, and thorough conviction of guilt and wretchedness. This must still continue, and have a constant and visible effect upon the believer's temper and carriage. The truth is the way in which a sinner's peace is made with God, the ground on which his hope and comfort is founded, and the means of his improvement in the spiritual life, all conspire in making him humble. "Where is boasting? It is excluded. "No flesh is permitted to glory" in the divine presence. Every sincere penitent, every real believer, every profiting disciple of Christ, learns the emptiness of the creature, the fulness, sovereignty, power, wisdom, and grace of the Creator and Redeemer, from all that he hears, and from all that he feels.

In his former state, either his ignorance of God, or his wrong views of God and of himself, made him set a high value upon his own interest, and think he had a high claim to happiness, and success of every kind. This made him repine at the course of Providence, and very hardly allow that justice was done him when his attempts were defeated, or his desires disappointed. What swollen impatience do many shew under the hand of God? What corroding envy possesses their minds when they take a view of the (perhaps mistaken) happiness of others? But he that is born again is deeply sensible, that he deserves nothing at the hand of God. His habitual sentiments and language, are the same with what we find in scripture so frequent with the saints: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant*.—It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. † Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." ‡ Whereas formerly he was apt to view his own character with much complacency, and to have

* Gen. xxii. 10.

† Lam. iii. 2.

‡ Ephes. iii. 8.

high thoughts of the dignity of human virtue, now he hath changed the stern pride of philosophy, for the self-denial and meekness of the gospel. He has such views of the glory and majesty of God, of the purity of his law, and of the holiness of his nature, that he sinks, as it were, into nothing in his own sight, and knows not how to throw himself into a low enough posture in the divine presence. Agreeably to this we have a striking picture, drawn by our Saviour in the parable of the Pharisee and publican, of true penitence, particularly as standing in opposition to self-sufficiency and pride: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as
 " other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even
 " as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes
 " of all that I possess. And the publican standing afar
 " off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven,
 " but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me
 " a sinner."*

Further, true religion makes a man humble toward his fellow creatures, as well as toward God. The one, indeed, is the certain and necessary effect of the other. Every thing which one man can enjoy in preference to another, and which ordinarily becomes the fuel of pride, is the gift of God, and therefore there is no room left to glory. What distinction can any man enjoy above another, but it must be of one of these two kinds, worldly advantages, or spiritual gifts? Now worldly advantages are of no such value, in the eye of a real Christian, as to be matter of boasting. All swelling on this account is effectually restrained by true religion: that which brings eternity in view, makes all temporal things of wonderfully little value to have or to lose. And even still less will a good man glory in his advantages over others of a spiritual kind. Pride can never be so greatly misplaced, as when it shows itself here. The Christian will say to himself, in the words of the apostle Paul, "For who maketh thee to differ from
 " another? And what hast thou, that thou didst not re-
 " ceive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory,
 " as if thou hadst not received it?"†

* Luke xviii. 11, 12, 13. † 1 Cor. iv. 7.

On Regeneration.

I cannot help also observing here, that every true convert is naturally led to consider himself as the chief of sinners, and every real Christian to reckon that others are preferable to him in holiness and spiritual attainments. This is often taken notice of by religious writers, in a perfect consistency both with scripture and experience. We see this was the case with the apostle Paul, that eminently holy, faithful, and active minister of Jesus Christ. He expressly styles himself the "chief of sinners;" and says, "Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me "first," or in me as a capital and leading instance, "Jesus "Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern "to them which should hereafter believe on him to life "everlasting."* And elsewhere to the same purpose, with a view to his ministerial labors: "For I am the least of "the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, "because I persecuted the church of God; but by the grace "of God, I am what I am, and his grace which was be- "flowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more "abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of "God which was with me."† This is easy to be accounted for. Every man must have a far more clear discovery and conviction of his own sins, in their heinous nature and aggravating circumstances, than of those of any other, as well as a greater insight into the remaining corruption of his own heart. Hence it is natural for him to conclude, that none have been so deeply indebted as himself to the riches of divine grace, for pardon and recovery.

From every view we can take of the matter, therefore, it is plain that the regenerate person must be, according to the strong and beautiful language of the Holy Scripture, "clothed with humility." He must be very humble; he must be humble in every respect; he must be inwardly, habitually, constantly, universally humble. I know no disposition better fitted either to determine our character in general, or to decide when the Christian is discharging any duty in a proper manner. It is also a good touchstone by which to try a profession, or apparent zeal for re-

* Tim. i. 16. † 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10.

ligion. I am sensible it is a duty openly to profess Christ before men, and that he has pronounced a dreadful threatening against those who shall meanly deny him: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, or of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* There are many of the duties of a Christian which require a firm resolution, a boldness and fortitude of mind; yet even this should be accompanied with humility. Unnecessary ostentation is always a suspicious sign. A Christian should be constrained, in all such cases, by a sense of duty, and enter upon his work with a diffidence of himself, and reliance on divine strength.

Let not the reader think this part of the subject tedious, or extended beyond its due bounds; let him rather enter on a deep and careful search into his own heart, and see how it stands with himself in this particular. There is often a counterfeit humility. A proud and vain-glorious carriage is odious to man as well as to God. Pride in one man, is always in open hostility against pride in another; nay pride, when discovered, effectually defeats its own purpose. Not only is a man who is vain of nothing, justly and universally contemptible, but in all cases, as Solomon says, "for a man to search his own glory, is not glory." Even the most eminent abilities, the most amiable qualifications, and the most laudable actions, are greatly sullied by an apparent vanity and thirst of praise. It is hardly possible to bring others to acknowledge that man's worth who asserts it with his own tongue, and absolves the world by paying tribute to himself. Hence there is a remarkable observation of a foreign writer of eminent piety and learning, to this purpose, That a worldly principle, when it is attended with sound judgment, and in its highest perfection, does homage to religion, by imitating its effects. And, indeed, what is all politeness of carriage, but a sort of hypocritical humility, and an empty profession of that deference to the judgment and kindness to the persons of others, which a true Christian hath implanted in his heart?

* Mark viii. 38.

How self-deceiving is pride? How many are there even of those who have a form of godliness, who are wrapt up in themselves, who would have all men to esteem them, who would have their opinions to prevail, and their measures to take place, in every matter of the smallest consequence, and are never satisfied but when this is the case? Of this they are often quite insensible themselves, when every one about them perceives it without the least difficulty or uncertainty. Nay, is it not very surprising and very lamentable, that there is still so much pride to be found even in good men, which betrays itself by many evidences, impatience of contradiction in their sentiments, excessive grief, or immoderate resentment, when their characters are attacked by unjust and malicious slander? It is lawful to be sure, in such a case, to embrace every opportunity of vindication; but, as it is not wonderful that it should happen, so the real Christian should study to bear it with meekness, and to forgive it sincerely, as he asks forgiveness of God.

From all this it is easy to see, that the regenerate person must be humble. Believe it, O Christian, so much as you have of humility, so much you have of true religion. So much as your sentiments are altered in this respect, so much you have ground to think the change to be real; and so much as you take root downwards in true humility, in the same proportion you will bear fruit upwards, in all the duties of a regular, exemplary, and useful conversation.

2. Another excellent and useful evidence of regeneration, is the sanctification of natural and lawful affections. There are, perhaps, few either more sure or more plain evidences of real religion than this. Regeneration does not consist in giving us new souls, new faculties, or new affections, but in giving a new tendency and effect to those we had before. There are many persons to whom we bear naturally an affection, and it is far from being the design of religion to destroy this affection, but to regulate it in its measure, to keep it in its proper channel, and direct it to its proper end. This is a part of the subject which I have always thought of great moment and importance, on more accounts than one. It hath pleased God, by joining us

together in society, to constitute a great variety of relations; these ties are of God's own making, and our affections to all persons so related to us are natural, and in some of them very strong. How then do they operate? In what manner do they express themselves? Nothing will more evidently prove what is the ruling disposition of the heart. Whenever we love others sincerely, we shew it by desiring and endeavoring to procure for them those blessings which we ourselves most highly esteem.

Let us take any one of these relations for an example. Does a parent sincerely love his children? Religion doth not weaken, but strengthen this affection, and add to the force of his obligation to serve them. But if the parent truly loveth God above all, how will his love to his children be expressed? Surely by desiring, above all, that they may be "born again." Their following sinful courses will give him unspeakably more grief than their poverty, sickness, or even death itself. He will be more concerned to make them, and more delighted to see them, good than great; and, for this purpose, every step of their education will be directed. Would not every parent shudder at the thoughts of sending a beloved child to a house infected with the plague, or any other scene where health or life would be in imminent danger? What then shall we think of those parents who, from the single prospect of gain, without scruple, place their children in houses deeply infected with the leprosy of sin, and expose them, without the least necessity, to the most dangerous temptations?

I know there are some instances in scripture of persons who have been considered as very pious themselves, who yet were shamefully negligent in this branch of their duty. Of these Eli, mentioned in the book of Samuel, is one, whose sons, though in the most sacred office, "made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." I imagine I could easily bring in doubt, if not the reality, at least the eminence of his piety, and others of the same kind, though often taken for granted, without much examination; but I shall only observe what an opposite account is given of the divine conduct toward Eli and toward Abraham, the father of the faithful. He revealed his will, and employed

In his message the child Samuel, to the neglect of Eli, grown old in his courts, and denounced the most severe and terrible judgments against him and his house: "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle; in that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth."* On the contrary, see the honorable distinction put upon Abraham: "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."†

Nothing indeed can be more plain from reason itself; than that, in proportion to the impression which parents have upon their own minds of the importance of salvation, will be their concern and care that their children also may be the heirs of everlasting life. Suffer me to ask every parent who reads this discourse, or rather to beseech all such, to ask themselves seriously, what are their own strongest desires and hopes concerning their children? In those moments when your affections are fondest, and your partial flattering expectations most distinctly formed, are you obliged to confess that your minds run much more upon the prospect of your childrens living in affluence and splendor, or being promoted to places of honor and trust; than their being brought to a saving acquaintance with Christ and him crucified, that whether they live or die they may be the Lord's? If this is the case, you have just ground to fear that you are of that unhappy number who "favor not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man."

* 1 Sam. iii. 11, 12, 13. † Gen. xviii. 17, 18, 19:

3. Another excellent evidence of regeneration is, the moderation of our attachment to worldly enjoyments in general, and habitual submission to the will of God. So soon as this change takes place, it will immediately and certainly abate the measure of our attachment to all earthly things. Formerly they were the all of the soul, its portion and its rest; but now a clear discovery being made of greater and better blessings, they must fall back into the second place. There is a wonderful difference between the rate and value of present possessions of any kind, in the eye of him who lives under the impressions of eternity, and of him who believes it but uncertainly, who understands it very imperfectly, and who thinks of it as seldom as conscience will give him leave. It must be confessed we are all apt to be immoderate in our attachment to outward blessings; this is the effect and evidence of the weakness of our faith: but, so far as faith is in exercise, it must mortify carnal affection. There is no way in which an object appears so little, as when it is contrasted with one infinitely greater, which is plainly the case here. The truth is, time and eternity, things temporal and things spiritual, are the opposite and rival objects of human attention and esteem. It is impossible that one of them can be exalted, or obtain influence in any heart, without a proportional depression of the other. They are, also, as they severally prevail, the marks to distinguish those who are, and those who are not, brought again from the dead. For as the apostle says, "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."*

Further, it is not only in abating the measure of our attachment to worldly things that religion shews itself, and the change is discovered, but in the use and application of them. The real Christian's powers and faculties, possessions and influence, are consecrated to God. His abilities are laid out for the glory of God. He no more considers them as a mean of excelling others, and getting to himself a name, but of doing good. He finds it his highest

* Rom. viii. 6.

pleasure to serve God with his talents; he thinks it his duty to plead for him in his conversation, to honor him with his substance, to enforce and ratify the divine laws by his authority and example.

The same thing shews plainly why a Christian must manifest his new nature by submission to the divine will. Does he receive his mercies from God? Does he love them less than God? Does he esteem it his duty to use them in his service? And can he possibly refuse to resign them to his pleasure? I am sensible that resignation at the will of God, absolute and unconditional, is a very difficult duty, but it is what every believer habitually studies to attain. He chides his remaining impatience and complaints, grieves at the continuing struggles of his imperfectly renewed will, and is sensible that in this the superiority of his affection to God above the creature ought to appear. Unrenewed persons, when their earthly hopes are disappointed, immediately renew the pursuit; they only change the object to one more within their reach, or they alter their measures, and endeavor to amend the scheme; but real Christians, receiving a conviction of the vanity of all created things, seek their refuge and consolation in the fulness and all-sufficiency of God.

S E C T. IV.

A more particular enquiry into what properly constitutes the sincerity of the change.

THUS I have given a succinct view of the most remarkable effects and visible evidences of regeneration. I cannot, however, satisfy myself with this, because I am persuaded the great question is, how far they ought to go, and to what measure of strength and uniformity they ought to arrive. There are not a few who may, in a certain degree, sincerely think themselves possessed of most or all the dispositions mentioned above, whose state is nevertheless very much to be suspected. On the other hand, perhaps, some of the humblest, that is to say, the very best, may be in much fear concerning themselves, because they

do not perceive either the vigor or steadiness in their holy dispositions which they greatly desire and are sensible they ought to attain. Besides, what hath been hitherto said is only general, viz. that those who are born again will have new apprehensions of things, will be humble, mortified to the world, and submissive to the will of God. In this way it will be most applicable to, or at least most sensible in those who had once gone great lengths in profanity, and were, by the almighty and sovereign grace of God, snatched as "brands from the burning." The opposition between their new and old characters is ordinarily so great, that it will not admit of any doubt. To some others it may be necessary to make a more strict and particular enquiry into the nature of sincerity, and what is the full and proper evidence of the reality of the change.

That the reader may form as clear and distinct conceptions on this subject as possible, he may be pleased to recollect what was observed above, That perfect holiness consists in having the heart wholly possessed by the love of God, without the mixture of any inferior or baser passion; and that regeneration consists in a supreme desire to glorify God, and a preference of his favor to every other enjoyment. Now what chiefly occasions difficulty in discerning the reality of this change is, that there is much unsubdued sin remaining in the children of God, and that there are many counterfeit graces, or appearances of religion, in those who are, notwithstanding, in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

That there is a great degree of unmortified corruption still remaining in the saints of God, and that not so much as one is wholly free from it, is apparent from too many melancholy proofs. It appears from the pathetic complaint of the apostle Paul, formerly referred to, of the law in his members warring against the law of God in his mind. It appears, also, from the gross sins into which some eminently holy persons have been suffered occasionally to fall, through the strength of temptation, as David's adultery and murder, Solomon's idolatry, the apostle Peter's denial of his master, and several others recorded in scripture.

On the other hand, there are also counterfeit graces, common or imperfect operations of the Spirit, which do not issue in a real conversion and savage change. This it will be proper to keep in mind, and perhaps, also, to attend a little to the proofs of it both from scripture and experience. That the word of God has some effect even upon those who continue unrenewed, is plain from many examples recorded in the sacred volume. We read of a Felix trembling at the thoughts of a judgment to come: “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.”* But we are not informed that he ever found that convenient season, or desired to hear any more of such words.

In the parable of the sower we have a character described of those who not only, “heard” the word, but “received” it with joy, and on whom it had an immediate and visible, though only a temporary effect. “Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up they were scorched, and, because they had not root, they withered away†.—He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”‡ We read also of a Herod, who not only heard the word gladly, but did many things.—“For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him, and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly.”§ Nay, we see even Ahab, the profane prince of Israel, humbling himself, and putting on sackcloth, under the denunciation of divine wrath. Neither have we any reason, from the circumstances of the story, to believe that this was wholly hypocritical, but the contrary. “And it came to

* Acts xxiv. 25.

† Matt. xiii. 5, 6.

‡ Ibid. ver. 20, 21.

§ Mark vi. 20.

“ pass when Ahab heard these words, that he rent his clothes, “ and put sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted, and lay in “ sackcloth, and went softly.”* These things, and all others of the same kind, even in wicked men, are represented as the effect of the operation of the Spirit, in many passages of scripture. I shall only mention one, which is pretty remarkable, and well merits our attention. “ For “ it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and “ have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers “ of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, “ and the power of the world to come, if they should fall “ away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they “ crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put “ him to an open shame.”†

The same thing indeed appears plainly from the state of the world, and in a particular manner from that variety of partial characters which I have formerly described. There are many things which have a religious appearance, and are taken by the deluded possessor for religion, when at bottom there is no real religion at all; and “ mene “ tekel” shall be written upon them in the day of trial. There is a long gradation of characters between the openly profane sinner, with a hardened heart, a seared conscience, and a shameless countenance, on the one hand; and the refined, self-deceiving hypocrite, with his duties and his forms, on the other: between those who are furious, violent, and malignant enemies to religion in profession and practice; and those, who answer discreetly with the young man in the gospel; and of whom it may be said, as our Saviour says of him, that they “ are not “ far from the kingdom of God.” This shews at once the importance and difficulty of pointing out the great and distinguishing characters of real religion, and shewing how it essentially differs from all counterfeits.

But now, from the account given above of the nature of regeneration, and what hath been further added in illustration of it, we may see how this distinction is to be made, as far as it can be made by any, excepting the

* 1 Kings xxi, 27. † Heb. vi. 4.

great Searcher of hearts. I apprehend, that the great and distinguishing mark of the truth and sincerity of religion in general, and of every gracious disposition in particular, arises from comparing it with its opposite. It is "the prevailing interest of God and the Redeemer in the heart, above the interest of inferior good; the habitual comparative preference we give to his service and enjoyment, before every other object of desire." This must be proved by its effects daily. And agreeably to this, our blessed Lord says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."* And again, in yet stronger terms, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters; yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."† Would you therefore know whether you are born again? Are you in doubt, when you find the spirit lusting against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit? Try, by diligent and universal examination, which of them is, upon the whole, the strongest; which of them habitually yields to the other, when they come in competition. Into this all other marks and signs of religion resolve themselves at last; and from the evidence they give of the prevalence of the love of God in the heart, they derive all their worth and value. Every holy disposition must be examined, not by its absolute, but its comparative strength; and the true knowledge of our state arises from the conclusion and result of the whole.

There were, in the last age, many and great debates among men of piety and learning, whether special and common grace differ essentially in their nature, or if they differ only in degree. What I have just now said may, perhaps, be thought by the intelligent reader, to imply my embracing the last of these opinions. My judgment of this question is the same I have formed of many others, that it is unnecessary, or even hurtful. It has perhaps, if

* Mat. x. 37, 38. † Luke xiv. 26.

examined to the bottom, no distinct meaning at all; but if it has any meaning, I am afraid it is a question which it is impossible for us to resolve. That it may be made plain to persons of common understanding, the question is, whether it is most proper to say, that a wicked man, or an unrenewed person, let his behavior be ever so unexceptionable, or his experiences ever so comfortable, can have no true love to God; no, not in the least degree: or whether we ought not rather to say, his love to God is less than his love to the creature. I confess, I think it is best to say, in the words of the Holy Ghost, that "he loveth the creature more than the Creator"—that "he loveth the praise of man more than the praise of God;" and for this reason, he hath no "true" love, either to God or man.

In the preceding part of this treatise, I have affirmed, with sufficient clearness, that there must be an essential change in order to salvation; and that, till this be wrought, the person is in sin, and can do nothing but sin. The reason of this is very plain; that the supreme and governing motive of all his actions is wrong, and therefore every one of them must be so, upon the whole. I suppose, if they were to explain themselves fully, this is chiefly meant by those who insist that there is an essential difference between special and common grace. And in this view, no doubt, it is not only certainly true, but a truth of very great importance. It appears, however, on the other hand, equally certain and undeniable, that when we observe good dispositions and good actions in one character, and see the same appearances in another, we have no way by which we can discover the difference, but by their perseverance, and their comparative effects. Neither, indeed, has the person himself any other rule by which they can be judged. For which reason, I would be very willing to affirm both sides of the above question; to say that an unregenerate person has no true love to God or his neighbor, and at the same time, that this is only because no love but that which is supreme and prevalent is true, or will be accepted as sincere.

Unless we take up the matter in this light, we are in danger of doing great hurt on both hands. On the one

hand, it is ready to alarm the pious, humble, and timorous soul, if we say, that special grace differs essentially from common grace, and that there must be something quite different in its kind, as to every gracious disposition, than what ever resided in hypocrites. Alas! will the fearful person say, I have seen some who have gone great lengths, who have been well esteemed, and well received among all serious people; and yet have made shipwreck of the faith, dishonored their profession, and opened the mouths of adversaries to blaspheme. They had all the appearance of as much love to God, as much delight in his service, as much zeal for his glory, as much strictness, and as much usefulness of conversation; nay, more than I can pretend to. What then am I to think of this? Must all my gracious dispositions be essentially different from theirs? And how is this difference to be made appear? To all such I would say, those unhappy persons, by their conduct, and that alone, plainly discover, that they have either been wholly impostors and deceivers of the world, or that they have loved some object of carnal affection; some lust, of one kind or another, more than they loved God. The strength of their affections in one way, has been over-balanced by the dominion of corruption in another. And that corruption which has been long disguised or restrained, at last breaks out with so much the greater violence, and the greater noise.

Again, on the other hand, by affirming that there is a difference in kind between special and common grace; and that a hypocrite or unrenewed person cannot have the least measure of the same sort of love to God or man with a child of God, we are apt to make some slaves to sin, upon examining themselves judge amiss in their own favor. They cannot help thinking that they have a real unfeigned affection for that which is good in many respects; as indeed they have, when it doth not stand in competition with their reigning or darling lust. To give an example of this; it is frequently made a mark of true religion, to love the people of God; and indeed, it is one of the best, and when taken in the sense I have mentioned above, as a supreme

and prevalent love, it is an infallible sign. It hath no less warrant than the word of God: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death."* But I dare say, there are many who live in sin, and are strangers to the power of godliness, who, upon the most impartial examination of themselves, would conclude, that they did love the people of God.

Perhaps some will say, they may love good men, but they love them for other qualities, and cannot love them because of their piety. Experience tells us the contrary. They may esteem them, love them, speak well of them, and do them service because of their piety. Nay, I have known (though that is more rare) some very loose livers, who seemed to have nothing good about them, but an esteem of pious persons, and a desire to espouse their cause, which they continued to do in all ordinary cases. But should these servants of God presume to reprove them sharply, or hinder them in the enjoyment of their darling lust, their love would soon turn to hatred. Who would not have said that Herod sincerely loved John Baptist, when the very reason assigned for his respect and attendance is that "he was a just man and an holy." Yet the same Herod, when he was reprov'd by John for his scandalous adultery and incest, shut him up in prison. And afterwards, so little was his constancy, that when the daughter of Herodias had gain'd upon his affection by her dancing, and involved him in a rash promise, he gratified her mother's savage cruelty with the Baptist's head. The description of his situation of mind is remarkable, but far from being singular; we are told, "the king was exceedingly sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes that sat with him, he would not reject her."† Here was love in one sense, or in a certain degree; but he loved the damsel and her mother, and the good opinion of his courtly companions, still more than the faithful preacher.

We have innumerable examples of the same thing every day before our eyes. Voluptuous men love the peo-

* 1 John iii. 14. † Mark xvi. 26.

ple of God, but will not obey their salutary counsel, because they love their lusts more. Covetous men will love the people of God, and praise them, and defend them, but will not open their purses to provide for them, because they love their silver and gold more. What I have said of this disposition, might be easily shewn to hold with regard to every other. In short, whatever unseen or inward difference there may be; whatever diversity of operation of the holy and sovereign Spirit, the great trial to us is the same which Christ made of Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" It is good that we should often repeat the question as he did, and blessed is that man who is able in sincerity to say with Peter, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."*

I am sensible, there will be many ready to challenge this, or at least to be inwardly dissatisfied with it, as too general and undetermined. They will be ready to think, that this leaves the matter still at a great uncertainty; and that it must be very difficult to decide in many cases, whether the love of God or of the world hath the greatest habitual influence in the heart. The truth is, I am far from denying or dissembling that it is a matter of great difficulty in many instances; nay, as I have hinted in some of the former pages of this discourse, there are cases in which it is altogether impossible to come to any certain determination. In some, grace and corruption are so equally matched, as it were; have such violent struggles, and take their turns so often, in restraining and governing one another, that it will be hard to tell, till the last day, which of them was strongest upon the whole. But this is no just objection to what I have delivered above. It was never intended that such unequal and variable Christians should enjoy much peace; and if they do, it is surely upon some idle or imaginary ground. To many it may be justly said as Jacob said to his son Reuben, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."† Instead of devising ways, and making suppositions, to encourage such persons to think well of their own state, it is a far safer, and much

* John xxi. 17. † Gen. xlix. 4.

kinder office, to excite them to a holy jealousy over themselves. This indeed seems to be the language of scripture with regard to us all: "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."* Elsewhere, says the same apostle, "And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."†

The life of a Christian is constantly represented in scripture as a life of vigilance and caution, of activity and diligence. "Be sober and vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."‡ The same apostle says, "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."|| I beg it may be observed, that this is no way contrary to that confidence in the divine mercy and good hope through grace, which the gospel imparts to the believer.

These are intended to animate him to diligence in duty, in dependance on divine strength, and are themselves gradually confirmed and improved, by producing their proper effects. Few seem to have enjoyed more of the consolations of the gospel than the apostle Paul; and yet he represents even the fear of final disappointment, as what daily influenced his own conduct. "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."*

I cannot help taking notice here, that there is often just cause to find fault even with persons who, to all appear-

* Heb. iv. 1. † Heb. vi. 11. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 8. || 2 Pet. i. 5—10.

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ance, are sincerely pious upon this subject. For all such I desire to have the highest esteem, and to treat them with the greatest tenderness and affection. In the mean time, they ought to be willing, and even desirous of having their mistakes pointed out to them. Now I am persuaded, there are many who seek after assurance of their own interest in God's favor in a wrong way, and that they often expect it in a degree that is not suited to the present state.

1. They often seek it in a wrong way; they are ready to lay hold of impressions upon their minds; and, in a variety of particulars, are in danger of repeating the sin of the Pharisees, who asked a sign from heaven. When a minister is speaking or writing on this subject, they expect something particular and personal; and, if I may speak so, that he should be in God's stead, and give them assurance, in place of telling them how they ought to seek it. But this eagerness, from however good a disposition it may spring, is unwarranted and preposterous. We must be satisfied to walk in the way that God hath pointed out to us; to give thanks to him for the sure foundation of a sinner's hope which is laid in Zion, and to conclude the safety of our own state from a serious and deliberate examination of ourselves by the rules laid down in the holy scriptures. In this way only, is the most solid, settled, and lasting peace to be obtained.

Perhaps some will be ready to say, Do you then condemn in general all regard to impressions that may be sensibly felt upon the mind, or all secret and powerful suggestions of passages of scripture? Does the Holy Ghost the comforter never in this manner enlighten or refresh those souls in whom he dwells, according to his promise? "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* No, far from it; I have no design of denying the real operation or gracious presence of the Spirit of God, which is certainly one of the most essential and one of the most comfortable doctrines of the "glorious gospel; but at the same time,

* 2 Cor. vi. 16.

from the love I bear to it, I would guard it against mistakes and abuse. When any truth, or any passage, of scripture is suggested to the mind, which particularly and strongly points out the duty proper to our present state and circumstances; when this is backed with a powerful sense of its obligation, and by that means a deceitful or slothful heart is revived and quickened; this is thankfully to be acknowledged, and readily complied with. When a doubtful, dejected, or desponding mind is relieved, by a strong and affecting view of some encouraging promise or gracious invitation to the weary sinner, or the contrite spirit; when, in such a case, the mind is led to a discovery of the rich mercy and free grace of God to the guilty and miserable, it ought to be embraced and improved; and in many such instances, serious persons harrassed by temptation, have had cause to say with David, "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reigns also instructed me in the night season."*

This is no more than the necessary consequence of the constant over-ruling providence of God, which, as it extends to the disposal and direction of the most minute circumstances in the course of nature, cannot fail to be particularly exercised about the holiness and peace of his own children. They obey what appears to be their duty, or an argument against sin; they trust the divine faithfulness in what concerns their comfort; and adore the divine wisdom and goodness in the propriety and seasonableness of either or both. But for any person, from the sudden suggestion of a passage of scripture, ("I am thy God" for example; or, "I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine") without any examination of his temper and disposition, to conclude the safety of his state, is surely a piece of presumption without ground.

Neither is it less foolish than presumptuous; for all such must be liable to be cast down by other and contrary suggestions. We know very well, and have an instance of it in our Saviour's temptation, that satan can suggest passages of scripture; nay, and speak piously and plausibly

* Psal. xvi. 7.

upon them: but their conclusions must be tried by other scriptures. To all who are inclined to the above deluding practice, I would say with the apostle John, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God*." Or with the prophet Isaiah, "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them†." There is also a very proper advice, mixed with caution, given by the same prophet, in the following words; "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. Behold all ye that kindle a fire, all that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fires, and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow‡."

2. I must also observe, that many serious persons seem to desire, and even to expect, assurance in such a measure and degree, as is not suited to our present state. They would have faith and hope to be the same with sense. They would have heaven and earth to be the same, and would put on their crown before they have finished their course. I am persuaded, many deprive themselves of that comfort to which they have an undoubted title, and which they might easily possess, by aiming at that which is beyond their reach. They do not remember, that it is true in this respect as well as in many others, what the apostle says, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known§." Would you but reflect upon yourselves, Christians, you would be ashamed of your complaints. You would be ashamed that you should so much as lay claim to so high a degree of comfort, when you are so careless in your duty. Your improvement in the spiritual life is but very gradual, and therefore it is no wonder your hope should be but in proportion to it.

* 1 John iv. 1. † Is. viii. 20. ‡ Is. l. 10 11. § 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

It is of the greatest consequence in religion, to distinguish carefully between that hope and comfort which arises directly from the promises of God in scripture, and that which arises from a reflex observation of the change that has taken place in our own temper and practice. To entertain and encourage doubts in the former case, is directly contrary both to our duty and interest; but in the other, perhaps suspicion and diffidence is most becoming the Christian temper, and most conducive to the advancement of the Christian life. Is there any person perusing this treatise, who is incommoded and distressed with anxiety and fear? Take heed that you be not doubting as much of the certainty of God's word, as you are jealous of your own state. Is it not more than sufficient that you have so many gracious invitations, so many full, free and unlimited offers of mercy, through a Redeemer, to the chief of sinners? Does it not give repose to the mind, and rest to the conscience, when, by direct acts of faith, you receive and rely on Christ alone for salvation; seeing him to be single in this undertaking, and all-sufficient for its accomplishment, and therefore cleaving to him as your Lord and your God, and your all. I would not chuse to affirm, that assurance, in the ordinary sense of that word, is essential to faith, or that its proper description is, to believe that my sins are forgiven me; yet surely, some measure of hope is inseparable from it. Faith and despair are opposite and inconsistent. If you do really believe the sincerity of the offer; if you do really believe the fulness and ability of the Saviour, "the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace in believing, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

To this let me add, that considering the matter, even with regard to a renewing and sanctifying work of the Spirit upon your hearts, your complaints are often excessive and unreasonable. You would have evidence, not that the work is begun, but that it is finished. You desire comfort, not such as is sufficient to strengthen you against temptation, and bear you up under suffering; but such as would make temptation to be no temptation, and suffering to be no suffering. But if you are sensible that you still

adhere to God as your portion, that you cannot find peace or rest in any thing else; and that a whole world would not induce you to give up even your doubtful title to his favor and love, surely you ought to endeavor after composure of mind: you may be frequently in the state of the apostle Paul, who says of himself, "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side, without were fightings, within were fears*." And yet say with the same apostle, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.†." It is not meant by this to condemn an earnest desire to abound in hope, or a frequent and strict examination of our state and temper, but to warn Christians against impatience, and against an unthankful, fretful disposition, which indeed disappoints itself, and prevents the attainment of that peace, for the want of which it complains.

This leads naturally to the mention of another fault incident to serious persons, which will lay a foundation for a very important lesson upon this subject. The fault here intended is, falling into a slothful, despondent neglect of duty. The devices of satan, our great enemy, are very various, and unspeakably artful. When he cannot keep men in security, and drive them blindly along the broad path which leadeth to destruction, he endeavors to make their duty as painful and burdensome to them as possible. When some persons give themselves to serious self-examination, he embarrasses them with scruples, he involves them in doubts, he distresses them with fears. This often brings on a relaxation, or suspension of their diligence in duty; they give themselves up to anxious, complaining thoughts; they stand still, and will go no farther in religion, till they are satisfied whether they have as yet gone any length at all. But whatever good ground any person may have to be dissatisfied with himself, so soon as he perceives that this is its effect, he ought to resist it as a temptation. I cannot better illustrate this, than by a similitude borrowed from the scripture language on the same

* 2 Cor. vii. 5.

† 2 Cor. i. 8, 9.

subject. Whether do you think that child most dutiful, under a sense of his father's displeasure, who patiently and silently applies himself to his work, or he who saunters about in idleness, and with peevish and sullen complaints, is constantly calling in question his father's love?

This lays the foundation for a very necessary and useful direction, which indeed flows naturally from all that has been said on the evidence of regeneration. Endeavor, Christians, to preserve and increase your hope in God, by further degrees of sanctification, by zeal and diligence in doing his will. The more the image of God in you is perfected, it will be the more easily discerned. If you are at any time ready to doubt whether such or such corruptions are consistent with real religion; if you find this a hard question to resolve, go another way to work, and strive by vigilance and prayer to mortify these corruptions, and then the difficulty is removed. If in a time of affliction and distress, you find it hard to determine whether it ought to be considered as the correction of a father, or the severity of a judge, endeavor through divine grace to bear it with the patience of a child, and you will soon see its merciful original by its salutary effect. What should be the daily study of a Christian, but to mortify sin in heart and conversation? and his comfort should arise from his apparent success in this important strife. When grain of different kinds is but springing from the ground, it is not easy to distinguish between one and another, but their growth ascertains their quality, which is still more fully discerned as they approach nearer to maturity. Imitate in this the great apostle of the Gentiles, "Not as though
 " I had already attained, either were already perfect; but
 " I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which al-
 " so I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count
 " not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I
 " do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reach-
 " ing forth unto those things which are before, I press
 " toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God
 " in Christ Jesus*!"

* Phil. iii. 12. 13, 14.

Before closing this section, I must observe that though the account I have given of the great mark of real religion, may still leave some in the dark, yet surely it carries in it the clearest and plainest condemnation of many hearers of the gospel. Oh, that it were possible to fasten a conviction of it upon their minds! Are there not many who appear from sabbath to sabbath in the house of God, who dare not affirm seriously to their own hearts, that God and his service has more of their habitual settled affection than the world, or any of its enjoyments? I do not here understand gross sinners, whose crimes are "open going before" unto judgment; but I mean the more sober and regular professors of religion, who may have "a form of Godliness, and deny the power thereof." I am persuaded this is a more proper trial of their state, than any particular rule of duty. Many such persons know so little of the extent and spirituality of the law of God, that it is not impossible they may be ready to affirm they do not allow themselves in any known sin, as the young man in the gospel seems to have answered sincerely, when he said to our Saviour, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth*."

But I would farther ask them, Whether hath God or the world most of your love, most of your thoughts, and most of your care? Can such of you pretend this, whose eager, ardent, nightly thought and daily pleasure, is only to increase your substance? who would not go to market without re-examining your transactions, and computing your gain; but can daily go to the house of God, without observing, enquiring after, or desiring to see its proper fruits? Can such of you pretend this, to whom all serious conversation is tedious and disgustful, and the society of good men a painful restraint? to whom the sabbath is a dull, melancholy, and burdensome season? Oh, my brethren, let me beseech you to be faithful to your own souls. Your precious time is daily hastening on; the day of your merciful visitation is wearing fast away. Hear while there is yet peace, and intreat that God, for Christ's sake, would

* Mark x. 20.

freely pardon all your sins; would renew you in the spirit of your minds; would fit you for his service on earth, and for his presence and enjoyment in heaven.

Thus I have explained at considerable length, and with all the care and accuracy in my power, the great and general evidence of regeneration, viz. the superiority of the interest of God and the Redeemer in the heart, above the interest of inferior good. This, I hope, will be of use in itself, to distinguish the precious from the vile, to preserve you from sin, and excite you to diligence in every part of your duty, that it may be more and more manifest. At the same time, it will be of the greatest service, in the use and application of other signs of real religion, by shewing when they are conclusive, and when they are not.

C H A P. III.

Of the steps by which this change is accomplished.

WE proceed now to consider by what steps, and by what means, this change is brought about. I am deeply sensible how difficult a part of the subject this is, and how hard it will be to treat of it in a distinct and precise, and at the same time, in a cautious and guarded manner. It is often complained of in those who write on this subject, that they confine and limit the HOLY ONE, and that they give unnecessary alarms to those who have not had experience of every particular which they think proper to mention. There is no doubt but God acts in an* absolute and sovereign manner in the dispensation of his grace, as in every other part of his will. As he cannot be limited as to persons, so neither as to the time and manner of their reformation. To this purpose, and in this precise meaning, our Saviour says, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."†

Sometimes it pleaseth God to snatch sinners from the very brink of the pit, to raise up some of the most abandoned profligates, as trophies of his victorious grace and mercy; while he suffers others, far more moderate and decent, who are "not far from the kingdom of God," finally to fall short of it. He sometimes glorifies his power and

* It will be proper to inform the reader, that the word "absolute" used here, and in some other places of this discourse, is by no means to be understood as signifying the same thing with "arbitrary." He who acts arbitrarily, acts without any reason at all. To say this of the divine procedure, would be little less than blasphemy. When we say that God acts "in an absolute and sovereign manner," the meaning is, that he acts upon the best and strongest reasons, and for the noblest and most excellent ends; but which are many or most of them beyond our reach and comprehension; and particularly, that there is not the least foundation for supposing that the reasons of preference are taken from comparative human merit.

† John iii. 8.

mercy at once, by converting his most inveterate enemies, and making them the most zealous, active, and successful advocates for his cause. Such an instance was the apostle Paul, who from a persecutor become a preacher. Sometimes conversion is speedily and suddenly brought about, and the times and circumstances of the change may be easily ascertained. This was the case with the jailor recorded in the history of the Acts of the Apostles. The same may be said of the apostle Paul; and there have been particular examples of it in every age. Sometimes, on the other hand, the reception of the truth, and renovation of the heart, goes on by slow and insensible degrees; nor is it easy to say by what means the change was begun, or at what time it was completed. This was perhaps the case with most, if not all, the disciples of our Lord, during his personal ministry.

Sometimes the change is very signal and sensible, the growth and improvement of the spiritual life speedy and remarkable, the greatest sinners becoming the most eminent saints; like the woman mentioned in the gospel, to whom many sins were forgiven, and who loved her Redeemer much. Sometimes, on the other hand, the change is very doubtful, and the progress of the believer hardly discernible. Some of this sort are reproved by the apostle Paul in the following words, which are but too applicable to many professing Christians of the present age: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”*—Sometimes the convert hath much peace and sensible comfort, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and sometimes, on the other hand, he is distressed with doubts and fears, and made to walk in darkness. Once more, some sinners are brought in by deep and long humiliation, and are almost distracted with legal terrors, while others are powerfully, though sweetly, constrained by the cords of divine love. All these “worketh the self same spirit, who divi-

* Heb. v. 12.

“deth to every man severally as he will.” I desire, that what has now been said, may be still kept in mind; so that if the evidences of a saving change can be produced, there need be little solicitude about the time or manner of its being wrought.

What I propose to offer on this part of the subject, is not to be considered as in the least degree contrary to, or inconsistent with, these truths. Nay, I am not to lay down a plan and say, this is the ordinary way in which sinners are brought to the saving knowledge of God, leaving it to him, in some few, uncommon, and extraordinary cases, to take sovereign steps, and admit exceptions from the ordinary rules. This is a way of speaking common enough; but though it may be very well meant, I apprehend it hath not in it much, either of truth or utility. The salvation of every child of Adam is of free, absolute, sovereign grace: and the actual change may be wrought at any time, in any manner, by any means, and will produce its effects in any measure, that to infinite wisdom shall seem proper. Neither ought we to pretend to account for the diversity in any other manner than our Saviour does: “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”* Therefore what I have in view, is to speak of such steps in the change as are, in substance at least, common to all true converts. It will be a sort of analysis, or more full explication of the change itself, and serve, among other uses, further to distinguish the real from the counterfeit. Too much can hardly be said on this subject: “For what is the chaff to the wheat? faith the Lord.” It will also illustrate the divine wisdom, as well as sovereignty, by showing how that diversity of operation, so remarkable in different subjects, produces in all at last the same blessed effect.

S E C T. I.

There must be a discovery of the real nature of God.

IN the first place, one important and necessary step in bringing about a saving change, is that the sinner get

* Luke x. 21.

a discovery of the real nature, the infinite majesty, and transcendent glory of the living God! Perhaps some will be surpris'd, that, as usual, a conviction of sin is not mentioned first, as the preliminary step. I enter into no quarrel or debate with those who do so; but I have first mentioned the other, which is but seldom taken notice of, from a firm persuasion, that a discovery of the nature and glory of the true God lies at the foundation of all. This alone can produce salutary convictions of sin; for how can we know what sin is, till we know him against whom we have sinned. The same thing only will point out the difference between real conviction, and such occasional fears as never go farther than a spirit of bondage.

In support of this, you may observe, that in scripture, those who are in a natural or unconverted state, are often described as lying in a state of ignorance or darkness. They are said to be such as know not God: "Howbeit then when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods."* See also the following description: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts."† Agreeably to this, the change produced in them is represented as giving them light or understanding, in opposition to their former ignorance; "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.‡ But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."§ In this way is the matter represented in scripture, much more frequently than is commonly observed; and, as the understanding is the leading faculty in our nature, it is but reasonable to suppose that the change should begin there, by

* G. I. iv. 8. † Eph. iv. 18. ‡ Acts xxvi. 18. § 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.

a discovery of the nature and glory of God, as the foundation of all that is afterwards to follow.

This will be further evident, if we reflect upon the account formerly given, and sufficiently supported from the holy scriptures, of the nature of this change, That it consists in a supreme regard to the glory of God, and an habitual prevailing desire of his favor. To this it is absolutely necessary, as a preliminary, that there be a discovery of the real nature and transcendent glory of God. How can any man have that as the chief and leading motive of action which he doth not understand? How can any man have that as the supreme object of desire, which he doth not know? Neither of these is possible; there must, therefore, be some such discovery as I have mentioned above. It is true, this is but imperfect at first; there will be in the truly regenerate a growing discovery of the glory of God, as well as a growing delight in him, as its consequence: yet there must be some view of his nature, as the beginning of the change, and the ground-work of every holy disposition.

This discovery of God implies two things, which, as they are both necessary, so they deserve our particular attention; and it is not improper to distinguish carefully the one from the other. 1. It must be a discovery of his real nature. 2. A discovery of the worth and excellence of his nature, which is, properly speaking, the glory of God.

1. It must be a discovery of the real nature of God. He must be seen to be just such a Being as he really is, and no false or adulterated image must be placed in his room, or adored in his stead. He must be seen in his spiritual nature, as almighty in his power, unsearchable in his wisdom, inviolable in his truth; but, above all, he must be seen as infinite in his holiness and hatred of sin, as impartial in his justice, and determined to punish it. Such is the scripture representation of God, as "glorious in his holiness.—Evil cannot dwell with him, and sinners cannot stand in his presence." It is the error of the wicked to suppose the contrary; and, indeed, it is the very

source of wickedness to deny the being, or to deny the holiness of God; and these amount much to the same thing. "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God; he hath said "in his heart thou wilt not require it.*—The fool hath "said in his heart there is no God.†—These things thou "hast 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."‡

God must be seen as he is represented in his own word, which is the only rule of faith, the pillar and ground of truth. This is a matter of the greatest importance, which, I am sorry to say, is in this age very seldom attended to, but which is most manifestly and undeniably just. If God is not seen in his real nature, as he is in truth, he can never be acceptably served. If a wrong or false character of God is formed, no worship we can offer to him, no love or respect we can bear to him is genuine; or rather, to speak more properly, our service and attachment is, in that case, wholly misplaced, and not directed to him at all, but something else is loved, honored, and served in his room. I beseech the serious reader to observe, what an unspeakable jealousy God discovered under the Old Testament dispensation, as to the purity of his worship, and what a heinous crime all idolatry was esteemed. How great was the divine displeasure at the making and worshipping the golden calf, although it is very probable Aaron only intended to represent the true God, by the same symbol they had seen in Egypt? Did not this belong to the substance, and not only to the circumstances of religion? Is it not then equally interesting under the New Testament as under the Old? Was the unchangeable God so much displeas'd at giving him a false name, and will he not be equally displeas'd with those who attribute to him a false nature?

As this truth serves to explain the nature and rise of regeneration, so it also receives particular light and evidence itself from what has been said in the preceding parts of this subject. Regeneration consists in having the image of God again drawn upon the heart; that is, its being car-

* Psal. x. 13

† Psal. xiv. 1.

‡ Psal. l. 21.

ried out to the supreme love of God, and delight in him or, in other words, brought to the supreme love of, and delight in, perfect goodness and immaculate holiness. When this is the case, the sinner is renewed, he again bears the image of God, which he had lost, he is again fitted for the presence of God, from which he had been expelled. But if he has wrong notions of God, if he takes him to be essentially different from what he really is, he serves not the true God at all, he bears not his image, he delights not in his fellowship, he is unfit for his presence. If religion consists in a divine nature, such a person does not possess it, unless there are more Gods than one. There may, indeed, be an alteration in him, he may have transferred his allegiance, and changed his master, for idols are many, but he is not brought unto God; and, so long as God is immutable, his happiness is impossible.

I can recollect nothing that is worth notice as an objection against this, but that our knowledge of God, at any rate, is extremely imperfect and defective. It is so to be sure, while we are in this world; nay, probably, it will be so to all eternity: for "who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what can we do? deeper than hell, what can we know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."* But there is a great difference between the imperfection of our knowledge of God, and forming conceptions of him that are fundamentally wrong. There is a great difference between having weak and inadequate ideas of the truth, and believing or acting upon the opposite falsehood. Unless this is admitted, we shall never see the unspeakable advantage which the Jews enjoyed over the Gentiles, "because to them were committed the oracles of God;" nor indeed shall we see the worth and beauty of the ancient dispensation in general. It was one uniform display of this great and important truth, which is delivered with so much majesty by God himself: "I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my

* Job iii. 7, 8, 9.

“praise to graven images.” Neither is this at all relaxed under the New Testament. The importance of “holding the truth as it is in Jesus”—of “holding fast the form of sound words”—and “keeping the truth,” is often declared, as well as that “no lie is of the truth.” And no wonder that in this pure and spiritual constitution, it should be necessary to have clear and distinct views of him who is “the Father of spirits.”

Thus I hope it appears, that, in order to a saving change, there must be a discovery of the real nature of the one only, the living and true God. Before we proceed further, let me observe that hence may be seen, in the clearest light, the danger both of ignorance, and error.

1. Of ignorance. It is plain that those who are grossly ignorant must be unrenewed. Those who do not know God, cannot possibly love him. Do you not now see the meaning and weight of the strong language of scripture, where we are told the heathen nations were sitting “in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death?” What force should this give to the prayers so often offered up, both in public and in private, that the “name” of God may be “hallowed,” and his kingdom come? How much should it add to the zeal and diligence, especially of those who are appointed to watch for the souls of others? What concern should it give them, lest any under their immediate inspection “should perish for lack of knowledge.” It is indeed surprising to think, what gross ignorance prevails at present among many, notwithstanding the excellent opportunities of instruction which they have in their offer. Nay, even among those who are instructed in several branches of human science, it is astonishing to think what ignorance there is of every thing that relates to religion.

If accident or curiosity has brought this discourse into the hands of any such, let me intreat their attention for a little. I beseech you to think upon, and tremble at your state. You may have some sort of a nominal belief of an unseen, unintelligible being, called God, while you know neither “what you speak, nor whereof you affirm.” You may perhaps have heard, or rather in our happy native country you cannot but have heard of Christ Jesus, the Son

of God, filed often the Savior of finners ; but you “ know neither the Father nor the Son.” You know not God as Creator, nor, by consequence, your obligations and duty to him, or your apostacy and departure from both. You know not what sin is, and therefore, you cannot know a Saviour. If ever you come to true religion at all, light will break in upon you in your darkness, you will no more be able to forget God, he will follow you into your secret chambers, he will come home upon you, and assault you, as it were, with the reality of his presence, with the sanctity and purity of his nature, and the terrible majesty of his power. O how great is the effect of a real discovery of the divine glory, whether in the word, or by the providence of God ; to a faint or to a sinner. Hear how Job expresses himself, “ I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* We have the same thing well described by the prophet Isaiah, as the effect of divine power in desolating judgments. “ Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the 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 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 ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.”† “ So soon as it pleases God to open your eyes upon himself, with whom you have to do, it will humble you in the dust, it will discover your danger, it will make redemption precious to you, and the name of a Saviour unspeakably dear.

* J. b. xlii. 5, 6. † Isaiah ii. 10, 11, 19, 20, 21.

2. The same thing shews the danger of error, as well as ignorance. Among many loose and pernicious principles, which are zealously spread, and blindly embraced in this age, one of the most prevailing and dangerous is, the innocence of error. "O, say some, every man is to enquire freely, and each will embrace what appears to him to be the truth. It is no matter what a man believes, if his life be good. Even he who mistakes, may be as acceptable to God as his opposite, if he is equally sincere." Now there is no doubt, that liberty to enquire freely, is an inestimable blessing, and impartiality in religious enquiries an indispensable duty. But the above maxim becomes false and dangerous by being carried an excessive length; and it is carried to this excess by the favor of two suppositions, which are false and groundless. The maxim is applied frequently to justify an open and virulent opposition to the most important truths of the gospel; nay, sometimes, even a denial of all religion, natural and revealed. To be able to apply it thus, it is necessary to suppose that false opinions will have as good an influence upon the heart as true. If this is the case, the boasted privilege of free enquiry is not worth having, and all the labor bestowed on the search of truth is entirely thrown away. Another supposition contained in the above maxim is, that a person may be as sincere in embracing gross falsehoods, as in adhering to the truth. If this be true, our Creator hath not given us the means to distinguish the one from the other, which is the highest impeachment both of his wisdom and goodness.

Such persons do not consider, that a corrupt inclination in the heart brings a bias on the judgment, and that when men do not "like to retain God in their knowledge," he frequently in his righteous judgment, gives them up to a reprobate mind. Nay, when they reject his truth from an inward hatred of its purity, he is said to send them "strong delusions," as in the following passage: "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had

“pleasure in unrighteousness*.” But the nature of regeneration will serve, in a peculiar manner, to shew the danger of error. If men form wrong notions of God, if they love and worship, and resemble a false God, they cannot be renewed, they are not like, and therefore unfit for the presence of, the true. Be not deceived, he cannot deny himself, and therefore “there is no fellowship of righteousness with unrighteousness, no communion of light with darkness, no concord of Christ with Belial†.”

I must here, to prevent mistakes, observe that this ought, by no means, to be extended to differences of smaller moment, under which I rank all those which regard only the externals of religion. I am fully convinced, that many of very different parties and denominations are building upon the one “foundation laid in Zion” for a sinner’s hope, and that their distance and alienation from one another in affection, is very much to be regretted. Many will not meet together on earth for the worship of God, who shall have but one temple, where all the faithful, “from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their” eternal “Father.” But after all, I must needs also believe, that it is possible to make shipwreck of the faith. This appears plainly from the following, as well as many other passages of scripture: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction‡.” If any take up false notions of God, or expect sanctification and eternal life in any other way than he hath pointed out in his word, though they may now build their hope on a fond imagination that he is such an one as themselves, they shall at last meet with a dreadful disappointment in this awful sentence, “Depart from me, I know ye not, ye workers of iniquity.”

* 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11, 12. † 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 1.

S E C T. II.

There must be a discovery of the infinite glory of God.

IN the second place, As there must be a discovery of the real nature, so also of the infinite glory of God. He must not only be seen to be just such a being as he really is, but there must be a sense of the infinite worth, beauty, and perfection of his character. These two things, though intimately connected, are yet so distinct from one another, as to deserve to be separately considered. The first is necessary, but it is not sufficient alone, or by itself. There can be no true religion, unless there be a discovery of the real nature of God. But though there be a knowledge of what God is, unless there be also a discovery of the excellence and glory of this nature, he can never be the object of esteem and love. It is one thing to know, and another to approve; and, whilst this last is not the case, whatever we may know or affirm, or be persuaded of, with relation to the Supreme Being, we do not know him to be God, nor can possibly glorify him as God. This momentous truth we may surely comprehend, by what is analogous to it in our experience, between created natures. Speculative knowledge and love are by no means inseparable. Men may truly know many things which they sincerely hate; they may hate them even because they know them: and when this is the case, the more they know them they will hate them with the greater virulence and rancor. This not only may, but always must take place, when natures are opposite one to another, the one sinful, for example, and the other holy. The more they are known, the more is their mutual hatred stirred up, and their perfect opposition to each other becomes, if not more violent, at least more sensible.

We have little reason to doubt, that the fallen angels, those apostate spirits, have a great degree of speculative knowledge. I would not, indeed, take upon me to affirm that they are free from error and mistake of every kind, yet it seems highly probable that they have a clear, though, at the same time, a terrible apprehension of

“ what ” God is ; for they have not the same opportunities, or the same means of deceiving themselves, that we have in the present state. But do they love him, or see his excellence and glory ? Very far from it. They believe and tremble ; they know God, and blaspheme. The more they know of him, the more they hate him ; that is to say, their inward, native, habitual hatred is the more strongly excited, and the more sensibly felt.

The case is much the same with some sinners, when first awakened, and it continues to be the same so long as they are kept in bondage and terror. They have an awful view of the holiness of God’s nature, of the strictness of his law, and the greatness of his power. This is directly levelled against their own corrupt inclinations, and carries nothing with it but a sentence of condemnation against them : “ Cursed is every one that continueth not “ in all things which are written in the book of the law, to “ do them*.” This brings forth their enmity, which before perhaps lay hid. It is remarkable that some persons of loose and disorderly lives, will sometimes maintain, at stated seasons, a profession of piety. So long as they can keep their consciences still and quiet by general indistinct notions of God, as very easy and gentle, no way inclined to punish, they think of him without aversion, nay, will go through some outward forms with apparent satisfaction and delight. Their notion of divine mercy is not a readiness to pardon the greatest sinner on repentance, but a disposition to indulge the sinner, and wink at his continuance in transgression. No sooner are such persons brought to a discovery of the real character of a holy God, than their thoughts of him are entirely changed. They have gloomy views of his nature, and harsh thoughts of his providence ; they fret at the strictness of his law, and, as far as they dare, complain of the tyranny of his government. Their sentiments are the same with those expressed by the men of Bethshemesh : “ Who is able to stand before this “ holy Lord God, and to whom shall he go up from “ us†.”

* Gal. iii. 12. † 1 Sam. vi. 20.

I cannot help observing, that here we are, if I may speak so, at the very fountain-head of error. What is it else that makes many frame to themselves new and flattering schemes of religion, that makes them imagine a God so extremely different from that holy Being he is represented in his own word? When men will not conform their practice to the principles of pure and undefiled religion, they scarce ever fail to endeavor to accommodate religion to their own practice. Are there not many who cannot endure the representation of God as holy and jealous, which is given us in scripture? With what violence do they oppose themselves to it by carnal reasonings, and give it the most odious and abominable names? The reason is plain. Such a view of God sets the opposition of their own hearts to him in the strongest light. Two things opposite in their nature cannot be approved at once, and, therefore, the consequence is, God or themselves must be held in abhorrence. But we have reason to bless God, that their resistance to the truth is only a new evidence and illustration of it, shewing that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*." And as this enmity to God discovers itself in opposition to his truth on earth, it will become much more violent, when further resistance is impossible. When an unregenerate sinner enters upon a world of spirits, where he has a much clearer sight and greater sense of what God is, his inherent enmity works to perfection, and he blasphemes like those devils with whom he must forever dwell.

From all this it will evidently appear, that there must be a discovery of the glory and beauty of the divine nature, an entire approbation of every thing in God, as perfectly right and absolutely faultless. It is self-evident, that without this, there cannot be a supreme love to God, in which true religion properly consists; no man can love that which doth not appear to be lovely. But I further add, that this is absolutely necessary to the very beginning of the change, or the foundation on which it is built. It

* Rom. viii. 7.

is necessary, in order to any genuine, salutary convictions of sin. What is it else but a discovery of the spotless holiness, the perfect excellence, and infinite amiableness of the divine nature, that humbles a sinner under a sense of his breaches of the divine law? Without this, there may be a sense of weakness and subjection, but never a sense of duty and obligation. Without this there may be a fear of wrath, but there cannot be a hatred of sin.

This seems directly to lead to the next great step in a saving change, viz. a conviction of sin and misery. But before we proceed to point out the progress of conviction, it will not be improper to take notice of a few truths which result from what hath been already said. This is the more necessary, that erroneous or defective views of religion are commonly occasioned by some mistake in the foundation.

1. The necessity of regeneration itself appears with peculiar force, from what hath been said on this part of the subject. There must be a real inward change of heart, before there can be any true religion. If the moral excellence of the divine nature must be discovered, if God must be seen as glorious in his holiness, the heart and temper must be changed as well as the life. Nothing is more plain from the holy scriptures, than that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;" and it is equally plain from experience and the nature of the thing. While men continue in the love of sin, it is impossible that they should see the beauty of infinite holiness. So long as they love sin, they must hate holiness, which is its opposite, and not less contrary to it than light is to darkness. Therefore, all restraint upon our outward conversation, all zeal and diligence in expensive rites and ceremonies; all duties of whatever kind that arise from fear, or other external motives, are of no consequence, till the temper and inclination of the heart is entirely renewed.

2. From what hath been said, we may plainly perceive, that regeneration from first to last must be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Ghost. It must be the effect of divine grace, and the work of sovereign power. Let not

any creature be unwilling to stand indebted for his new creation to the Author of his first being; "for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things*." While man is in his natural state, he is an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works. The discoveries that are made to him of the real nature of God in his works and in his word, while he continues in this disposition, are not amiable but hateful. Nay, he is so far from loving him as his father, that he fears him as his enemy. This fear will discover itself one of these two ways. Sometimes it will make the sinner fly from God, cast instruction behind his back, and increase unto more ungodliness, till natural conscience is feared and insensible. How many there are of this kind, whom one crime only precipitates into another, experience is a melancholy proof. It is worth while at the same time to observe what intimations are given us in scripture, that this is the first and natural effect of sin upon all, to drive them at a further distance from God. Two instances of this have been given above. Our first parents no sooner sinned, than they fled and hid themselves when they heard God's voice in the garden, as impatient of his approach. A similar reflection we see in the apostle Peter, on being witness to an extraordinary effect of his Saviour's divine power: "And when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord†." See another instance of the same kind. "And the whole multitude of the country of the Galarenes round about, besought him to depart from them, for they were taken with great fear.‡"

Another common effect of this natural fear, in some respects contrary to the former, is to dispose men to perform some constrained and hypocritical services, in order to avoid punishment. This is described in the temper and conduct of the children of Israel, as represented by the Psalmist; "When he slew them, then they sought him; they returned, and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high

* Rom. xi. 36.

† Luke v. 8.

‡ Luke viii. 37.

“ God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him
 “ with their mouth, they lied unto him with their tongues;
 “ for their heart was not right with him, neither were they
 “ stedfast in his covenant.”* Hence it appears, that to a
 discovery of the glory and excellence that is in God, it is
 necessary that we be in some measure changed into the
 same image. To say that this is the effect of our own at-
 tempts and endeavors in the way of duty, without the con-
 straining power of divine grace, is, when thoroughly ex-
 amined, a manifest contradiction. If persons endeavor
 to force or oblige themselves to love any one, it is a sure
 sign that he is very unlovely in their eyes. Love cannot
 be forced, or rather to speak more properly, forced love is
 not love at all. In a word, it is our indispensable duty to
 attend to every dictate of conscience, and to follow it so
 far as it goes; but I cannot help thinking, that for a sinner
 truly and sincerely to desire a change of nature, would be
 an evidence of a change begun. Therefore, till a sinner
 get a supernatural illumination, he can never see the glory
 and beauty of the divine character. Before this, he may
 seek to propitiate God’s favor, he may wish to avoid his
 wrath; he may desire a change in God for his own safety,
 but he cannot be satisfied with him as he really is. It must
 be the same almighty power, which brought the world out
 of nothing into being, that must bring back the sinner from
 his rebellion and apostacy, according to that promise, evi-
 dently applicable to the Saviour; “ Thy people shall be
 “ willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of ho-
 “ linefs.”† Neither is the same thing less clearly asserted
 in the New Testament; “ For it is God which worketh
 “ in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”‡

3. Hence we may see wherein lies the fundamental es-
 sential difference between common or imperfect convicti-
 ons, and the effectual sanctifying and saving influences of
 the Holy Ghost. The first arise from a view of the natu-
 ral perfections of God, from a belief of his power and se-
 verity, without any discovery of his righteousness and
 glory. Therefore, however great a length they may pro-

* Ps. lxxviii. 34, 35, 36, 37. † Ps. cx. 3. ‡ Phil. ii. 13.

ceed, however different or opposite their effects may be, they never produce any real change in the heart. It is of great consequence to attend to this important distinction; for though imperfect convictions sometimes are entirely effaced, and are followed by no lasting effect at all, yet it is often otherwise. They frequently produce a counterfeit religion, which not only continues for a time, but is carried down by some to the grave as a lie in their right-hand. So subtle are the deceits of Satan, that there are many hollow forms of religion, not only upon a legal, but an evangelical bottom. I shall give the reader a sketch of the principles and outlines of both.

There are some legal hypocrites. Awakened to a sense of their danger merely from the irresistible power of God, they fall to the exercise of repentance, and hope that by so doing they may live. Hence the whole system of bodily penance and mortification. Hence also so strong an attachment, in some worldly persons, to the external forms of religion, and veneration for the places of divine worship. Being now somewhat more regular and decent in their ordinary carriage than before, they entertain a fond hope that all shall be well. In the mean time, they are so far from being restored to the image of God, or being governed by his love, that all this is a burden to them; and indeed it is because it is a burden, that they are so prone to think it meritorious. Conscience checks them, and they dare not run to the same excess with others, or even repeat what they themselves did formerly; and by this comparison, cannot help thinking they are in a hopeful way. But did such persons reflect a little on the nature of God, they would see their error. They would learn, that they are so far from being renewed in the spirit of their minds, that whatever lengths they go, they are dragged or driven against their will; and whenever they can find a plausible excuse, they are ready to withdraw their neck from the yoke. A just view of the glory of God, and the obligation upon every rational creature to love and imitate him, would effectually cure them of all self-righteousness and self-dependance; would lead them to himself and the grace treasured up in his Son, to "work in them the

“ whole good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of
“ faith with power.”

On the other hand, there are evangelical hypocrites. These begin upon the same principles, and their views have the same radical defect with the former. They are awakened to a sense of danger, and sometimes made to tremble through fear of divine judgments, but without any discovery of the glory and amiableness of the divine nature. If such persons happen to live in a family or congregation, where they hear much of the doctrine of redemption, it may have its place in their scheme. They may be so convinced of their own manifold transgressions, as to be satisfied to throw their guilt upon the surety, and rely on the sufferings and death of Christ, for deliverance from the wrath of an offended God. Nay, I have not the least doubt that some may, by a confident presumption, imitate the faith of God's elect, and believe that Christ died for themselves in particular. So long as this persuasion can maintain its ground, it may, and must give them great joy and satisfaction. Who would not find consolation in thinking themselves in safety from divine wrath? Yet all this while they never see the evil of sin in itself, as an opposition to the nature, and a breach of the law of God. They are never brought to love an infinitely holy God in sincerity of heart. They may love him, because they suppose themselves the peculiar objects of his love, with some obscure, confused, sensual idea of the delights of heaven; but they know not or consider not, the nature of that salvation he hath provided for his chosen.

All such love, it is plain, ariseth from a false confidence in their own state, and not from a true knowledge of God. Their notions of God's love to them contain more of a partial indulgence to them as they are, than of his infinite compassion in forgiving what they have been. The effects of such religion are just what might be expected from its nature, violent and passionate for a season, and commonly ostentatious, but temporary and changeable. Self-love lies at the root, and therefore, while they are pleased and gratified, they will continue their profession of attachment; but when self-denial or bearing the cross is re-

quired, they reject the terms, they lose their transporting views, and return to their sins.

There are many examples of this, not only in scripture, but in the history of the church in every age. Many of those disciples who seemed gladly to embrace the doctrine, and highly to honor the person of Christ, when they heard some of the most mortifying precepts, "went back and walked no more with him*." The character is little different, which we find described under the image of the stony ground hearers, who "having not root in themselves, when persecution or tribulation arose because of the word, by and by were offended." I hope this, with the explication above given of its cause, may be of use to account for some appearances in a time of the revival of religion. Persons who seem to have the same exercises with real converts, yet afterwards fall away, and "return with the dog to his vomit again, and with the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." This gives occasion to adversaries to speak reproachfully, and is greatly distressing to those who truly fear God. But would men carefully attend to what the holy scriptures teach us to expect, their surprisè in all such cases would cease. "For it must needs be that offences must come†." And though there are many counterfeits, there will still be sufficient means to distinguish the gold from the dross.

S E C T. III.

There must be a conviction of sin and danger.

THE next great step in a saving change, is a deep humiliation of mind, and conviction of sin and danger. The absolute necessity of this is very evident, and indeed generally confessed. It is equally evident, whether we consider the nature of the change itself, the means of its production, or the motives to all future duty. If an entire change is necessary, there must be an entire and thorough dissatisfaction with, and disapprobation of, our

* John vi. 66.

† Matt. xviii. 7.

past character and state. Whoever is pleased with his present character, will neither desire, endeavor, nor even accept of a change. If we consider the means of our recovery, by Jesus Christ suffering in the room of sinners, the same thing will appear with increasing evidence. Those who are not humbled under a sense of guilt and corruption, will treat with great contempt a purchased pardon and a crucified Saviour. This our Lord himself often tells us in the plainest terms. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* To these indeed his invitation and call is particularly addressed: "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."†

To the same purpose, we shall find many other passages, both of the prophetic and apostolic writings. The glad tidings of salvation are always directed to the humble, miserable, broken-hearted, thirsty, perishing soul. Thus in the prophet Isaiah, "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."‡ When Christ entered on his personal ministry, he opened his commission in the following terms. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."|| I shall only mention one other passage: "And I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."*

From these passages, and many others in the same strain, it is evident beyond contradiction, that there must be a deep humiliation of mind, and sense of guilt and wretchedness, before a sinner can be brought unto God. This

* Luke v. 31, 32. † Matt. xi. 29. ‡ Is. lv. 1. || Luke iv. 18.

* Rev. xxi. 6.

indeed hath ordinarily been considered as the first step towards conversion. In order to treat of it in the most clear, and at the same time the most useful manner, I shall divide it into two branches, and first, consider what is the true and genuine source of conviction or sorrow for sin; and secondly, to what degree it must be, in order to a saving change.

First then, let us consider what is the true and genuine source of conviction and sorrow for sin. And here we may observe in general, that properly speaking, there can be but two sources of sorrow or humiliation of mind at all, viz. fear of suffering, and sense of the evil and desert of sin. Both these are found in true penitents; and it is their union and mutual influence that distinguishes repentance unto life from every counterfeit. Many have trembled through fear of punishment from God, and been dismayed at the tokens of his presence, who, notwithstanding, lived and died strangers to true religion, or any saving change. We see that even Judas the traitor to his Lord repented, confessed his sin, nay, did what he could to repair the wrong, throwing back the price of innocent blood; and yet hanged himself in despair. The scripture only further says, he went into his own place; but there have been few, if any, interpreters of scripture, who entertained any doubt that it was the place of torment. We every day see that occasional danger, or the apprehension of immediate death, throws some into fits of terror, extorts from them confessions of guilt, or promises of amendment; and yet, in a little time they return to their former practices, and sin with the same security, and perhaps with greater avidity than before.

What is the essential defect of such seeming penitents? It is that they have no just sense of the evil of sin in itself; they have no inward cordial approbation of the holiness of God's nature and law, or of the justice of that sentence of condemnation which stands written against every transgressor. Here, O, Christian, is the cardinal point on which true repentance turns, and the reader may plainly perceive the reason and necessity of what was formerly observed, that there must be a discovery of the infinite glory and

amiableness of the divine nature. Without this there may be a slavish terror, but no true humiliation. It is only when a sinner sees the unspeakable majesty, the transcendent glory, and infinite amiableness of the divine nature, that he is truly, effectually, and unfeignedly humbled.

Oh! that I could deliver this with proper force! that I could write and speak under an experimental sense of its truth! The sinner then perceives how infinitely worthy his Maker is of the highest esteem, the most ardent love, and the most unremitted obedience. He then sees, that every intelligent creature, from the most shining seraph in the heavenly host, to the meanest and most despised mortal worm, is under an infinite, eternal, unchangeable obligation to love God with all his heart, and strength, and mind. On this account he is convinced, that alienated affection and misplaced allegiance is infinitely sinful. He sees this obligation to be founded not merely nor chiefly on the greatness of divine power, but on the intrinsic inherent excellence of the divine nature. Therefore he is persuaded, that there is not only danger in rebelling against, or dishonoring God, but a great and manifest wrong and injustice in refusing to honor him. This strikes him with a sense of his own guilt, and the guilt of all those who live "without God in the world."

At once to confirm and illustrate this truth, I must make two observations, which will be found universally to hold, on the character and conduct of true penitents. 1st. That they obtain a new sense of the excellence and obligation of the duties of divine worship, both public and private. Before, they were apt to consider the duties of worship as little more than the means of religion; that the fear of an invisible Judge might be a bond upon the conscience, and keep men from fraud and dishonesty, or from riot and sensuality. They were cold and formal therefore in their own attendance, and never heard any speak of joy or sensible communion with God in his sanctuary, but they were ready to express their detestation of it as hypocrisy, or their contempt of it as enthusiasm and folly.

But now the language of adoration is in some measure understood, which had been wholly insipid and without

meaning before. They join with the psalmist in saying, "Honor and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering, come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him all the earth."* See also these elevated strains of praise, which, whether they are meant as the exercise of the church militant on earth, or the church triumphant in heaven, are equally proper here. "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within; and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory, and honor, and thanks to him that sat on throne, who liveth for ever and ever; the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created."† And to the same purpose, "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 honor, 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 honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."‡ Nay, a true penitent begins to see the beauty even of the divine sovereignty, that all things belong to God, and therefore it is most fit that all things should be subject to him, ac-

* Psal. xcvi. 6, 7, 8, 9. † Rev. iv. 8, 9, 10, 11.

‡ Rev. v. 11, 12, 13.

ording to that strong and beautiful passage : “ And the
 “ four and twenty elders which sat before God on their
 “ seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying,
 “ We give thee thanks, O Lord God almighty, which art,
 “ and wast, and art to come, because thou hast taken to thee
 “ thy great power, and hast reigned.”*

The other observation I am to make is, that a true penitent always acquires the deepest abhorrence of that atrocious, though prevailing sin, of profaning the name of God in common discourse. There are many persons, not otherwise the most abandoned, who have no just sense of the heinousness of this sin : and as it is not directly levelled against the temporal interest of our neighbors, it is far from being generally so scandalous and dishonorable as it ought to be. Such religion or virtue as is founded on worldly principles and views, may easily consist with its continuance ; but he who is convinced of the evil of all sin, as rebellion against, and disobedience to God, will see the horrible guilt and impiety that attends this abominable practice. That religion which is the work of God’s holy Spirit, and consists in the recovery of his lost image, will never be able to bear so direct a violation of his sacred authority, so unprovoked an insult upon his honor and glory.

A fear of punishment then we have seen, without a sense of the evil of sin in itself, is not sufficient. Let me now add, that this discovery of the evil of sin in itself, must increase our fear of punishment, by shewing it to be just. A fear of punishment while alone, always tempts the sinner to search about on all hands for arguments against that suffering, the justice of which he cannot perceive. Hence infidelity of heart and secret suggestions, that surely it cannot be that God will punish as he hath said. Hence blasphemous impatience. Hence rising thoughts and rebellion against God, even while under his rod ; such as are described by the prophet Hosea : “ And they have not cried
 “ unto me with their heart when they howled upon their
 “ beds.”† Nay, hence sometimes the bitterest professed

* Rev. xi. 16, 17.

† Hosea vii. 14.

infidels among those, who have been brought up in the knowledge of the truths of the gospel, while they have never seen their beauty, or felt their power.

But so soon as there is a discovery of the glory of God, and the universal and perfect obedience due from all to him, this throws a new light on the tokens of a divine displeasure against sin, in the works of creation and providence. This carries home, with irresistible force, all the threatenings of the wrath of God against sinners in his word. Their justice is then deeply and inwardly felt, and the sinner begins to wonder at the patience of a long-suffering God, that has not long ere now made him a monument of vengeance.

The same view it is that not only begins, but carries on and compleats genuine convictions of sin, that silences all objections, and refutes the reasonings of the carnal mind. Every sincere convert will have, in a greater or lesser degree, the evidence in himself, that his change is of sovereign grace. He will probably be able to recollect in how many instances his mind set itself to oppose, and was at pains as it were to collect and muster up every objection against the obligation and sanction of the law of God. The objections are raised, first, against the necessity or benefit of obedience, and then against suffering for disobedience; till all are borne down by the same almighty power which spake and it was done, and which can "lead captivity captive." I cannot propose to enumerate all the objections, or rather, all the forms, in which objections may arise in the sinner's mind, when struggling against conviction; but I shall mention a few of them, and show what it is that must put them to silence.

1. Perhaps the sinner will say, alas! why should the law be so extremely rigorous, as to insist upon absolute and sinless obedience? Hard indeed, that it will admit not of any transgression, any omission, the least slip, or failing or frailty, but pronounceth so severe a sentence, "Curled is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."* But consider, pray you, what is the law, and who is the au-

* Gal. iii. 10.

thor of the law. The sum of all the commandments of the law is, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Is this unreasonable? or, is it too much? Is he not infinitely amiable, and absolutely perfect? Is he not the just and legitimate object of supreme love? Is not every defect of love to God essentially sinful? and can it be otherwise considered? He is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He must therefore assert his own majesty and right, and say, as in the prophet, "Is there a God besides me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."* A discovery of the glory of God at once silences this objection, and shows that he asks but his due; and as he is the unchangeable God, any abatement in the demands of the law not only would be unreasonable, but is in truth impossible.

2. Again the sinner will perhaps say, "But why should the sentence be so severe? The law may be right in itself, but it is hard, or even impossible for me. I have no strength: I cannot love the Lord with all my heart. I am altogether insufficient for that which is good." Oh that you would but consider what sort of inability you are under to keep the commandments of God! Is it natural, or is it moral? Is it really want of ability, or is it only want of will? Is it any thing more than the depravity and corruption of your hearts, which is itself criminal, and the source of all actual transgressions? Have you not natural faculties, an understanding, will, and affections, a wonderful frame of body, and a variety of members? What is it that hinders them all from being consecrated to God? Are they not as proper in every respect for his service, as for any baser purpose? When you are commanded to love God with all your heart, this surely is not demanding more than you can pay: for if you give it not to him, you will give it to something else, that is far from being so deserving of it.

The law then is not impossible, in a strict and proper sense, even to you. Let me next ask you, Is it unreason-

* II. xliv. 8.

able? Does he ask any more than all your hearts? and are they not his own? Has he not made them for himself? If not, let any rival rise up and plead his title to a share? Does he ask any more than that you should love him supremely? and is he not every way worthy of your love? If he commanded you to love what was not amiable, there would be reason for complaint. By tracing the matter thus to its source, we see the righteousness and equity of the divine procedure, and that the law of God is eternal and immutable, as his own nature. Wherefore, "let God be true, and every man a liar." All the attempts to impeach his conduct as severe, only tend to show the obliquity and perverseness of the depraved creature, and not to diminish the excellence of the all-glorious Creator.

While men continue slaves to sin, it is absurd to suppose they should acquiesce in their Maker's authority: but so soon as any person discovers the infinite amiableness of God, and his obligation to love and serve him, his mouth will be immediately stopped, himself and every other sinner brought in inexcusably guilty. He will see that there is nothing to hinder his compliance with every part of his duty, but that inward aversion to God, which is the very essence of sin. It is of no consequence what your natural powers are, whether those of an angel or a man, a philosopher or a clown, if soul and body, and such powers as you have, are but wholly devoted to God. Do you say this is impossible? where then lies the impossibility of it, but in your depraved inclinations?

But we have not yet done with the objections; the most formidable of all is behind. Perhaps the sinner will say, How unfortunate soever this inclination may be, I brought it into the world with me. I derived it from my parents; it is my very nature; I am not able to resist it. This brings in view a subject far more extensive than to admit of being fully handled here. We may also easily allow, that there is something in it beyond the reach of our limited capacity: but whatever be the nature and effects, or manner of communicating original sin; whatever be the use made of it, in accounting for events as a general cause; if any voluntary agent hath nothing to offer in opposition

to the strongest obligation, but that he finds himself utterly unwilling to obey, it seems to be an excuse of a very extraordinary kind. We are sure that no such excuse would be accepted by an earthly law-giver; nor have we the least reason to think, any more regard will be paid to it by him "who judgeth righteously."

In this, as in most other things, there is a wide difference between the sentiments of a hardened and a convicted sinner. The first, who hath no just view of the guilt of his actual transgressions, is always prone to extenuate them, by introducing original sin as an excuse for his conduct: but a sinner, truly convinced of the evil of his felt and experienced enmity against God, makes use of his early and original depravity for his further humiliation. Thus the psalmist David, when under the exercise of penitence for the complicated crimes of adultery and murder, expresses himself as follows: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*." In whatever way it was first introduced, it is certain that all aversion and opposition to God must be evil in itself, and the source of misery to him in whom it dwells; for all that "are afar off from him" shall certainly perish; and all that continue unlike to him must depart from him. Without perplexing ourselves with debates about the propriety or meaning of the imputation of Adam's first sin, this we may be sensible of, that the guilt of all inherent corruption must be personal, because it is voluntary and consented to. Of both these things, a discovery of the glory of God will powerfully convince the sinner. When he seeth the infinite beauty of holiness, and the amiableness of the divine nature, he cannot forbear crying out of himself, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; or mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts†." As the impurity of his heart, so the irregularities of his life, will stare him in the face: they never appear so hateful, as when brought into comparison with

* Ps. li. 5.

† Is. vi. 5.

the divine holiness; and if he “essay to justify himself, his own mouth will condemn him” as guilty from choice.

Once more, the same view will effectually confute, and shew the vanity of, those pretensions which are derived from our own imperfect and defective obedience. When conviction first lays hold of a sinner, however vain the attempt, he has still a strong inclination that righteousness “should come by the law.” This is not wonderful; for in no other way can he himself have any title to glory, and a thorough renunciation of all self-interest, is too great a sacrifice to be made at once. Hence he is ready to look with some measure of satisfaction on those who have been greater sinners than himself, and secretly to found his expectation of pardon for those sins he hath committed, on the superior heinousness of those from which he hath abstained. Hence also he is ready to hope he may make sufficient atonement for his past sins by future amendment: but a discovery of the holiness of God, and the obligation to love him with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, soon destroys this fond imagination. It shews him that he can at no time do more than his duty; that he never can have any abounding or soliciting merit: nay, that a whole eternity, so to speak, of perfect obedience, would do just nothing at all towards expiating the guilt of the least sin. But besides all this, the same thing shews him, that his best duties are stained with such sins and imperfections, that he is still but adding to the charge, instead of taking from the old score; for “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away*.” Thus, one after another, he is stripped of every plea, however eagerly he may cleave to them, and support or bolster up one, by the addition of another. He sees not only his danger, but his guilt; not only the fearfulness of his state, but the holiness and righteousness of his judge. He lies down prostrate at the footstool of the

* Isaiah lxiv. 6.

Almighty, and makes unmerited mercy and sovereign grace the only foundation of his hope.

S E C T. IV.

Of the degree of sorrow for sin in true penitents.

HAVING thus considered the proper source of genuine conviction and sorrow for sin, it was proposed next to enquire, to what degree it must be, in order to a saving change. The truth is, were not this a question often proposed, and the resolution of it desired by serious persons, the weakest of whom deserve all attention and regard from every minister of Christ, I should have left it altogether untouched. The reason of this observation is, that I am persuaded, and take the present opportunity of affirming it, that the chief distinction between convictions genuine or salutary, and such as are only transitory and fruitless, does not lie in their strength and violence, so much as their principle and source, which has been formerly explained.

There is often as great, or, perhaps, it may be safely said there is often a greater degree of terror in persons brought under occasional convictions, which are afterwards fruitless, than in others in whom they are the introduction to a saving change. It is probable that the horror of mind which possessed Cain after his brother's murder, was of the most terrible kind. It is probable that the humiliation of Ahab, after he had caused Naboth to be destroyed by false evidence, and was threatened with a dreadful visitation, was exceeding great. It is probable that the mere passion of fear in either of these criminals was equal, if not superior, to the fear of any true penitent recorded in scripture. It is the principle that distinguishes their nature. It is the differing principle that produces opposite effects. The one is alarmed and trembles through fear of wrath from an irresistible and incensed God; the other is truly sensible of sin in all its malignity, and fears the sanction of a righteous, but violated law. The one feels himself a miserable creature; the other

confesses himself a guilty sinner. The one is terrified, and the other is humbled.

It is some doubt with me, whether in fruitless convictions there is any sense at all of sin, as such; I mean, as truly meriting punishment from a just and holy God. Such persons ordinarily are displeas'd at the holiness of God's nature, and murmur at the strictness of his law; and therefore, however much they may dread suffering here or hereafter, they cannot be said to be convinced of sin. We have seen some who, when afflictions brought their sins to remembrance, were but driven on, by despair, to higher degrees of guilt, and, the more they seem to fear the approaching judgment of God, only increased in the impatience of blaspheming rage.

However, as there is a great measure of deceit in the human heart, some may be ready to flatter themselves, on the one hand, that they have seen the evil of sin in itself; and some, on the other, to fear that they have not seen it as they ought, because their sorrow has not risen to the requisite degree. Many have expressed uneasiness that they never mourned for sin in a manner corresponding to the strong scripture declarations of its odious and hateful nature, or to the following description of gospel penitents: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born*." For this reason I shall make an observation or two on the degree of sorrow for sin in true penitents, which may enable us to judge in every question of the same nature.

1. One thing, in general, must be carefully remembered, that we ought not to lay down one rule for all persons. We are not to measure the sorrow of any true penitent, and make a standard from it for the effects or expressions of sorrow in any other. The strength of all the passions, and their readiness to express themselves, is greater naturally in some than in others. There is nothing of which

* Zech. xii. 10.

men may be more sensible from daily experience. Love and hatred, joy and grief, desire and aversion, shew themselves by much more violent emotions in some than in others. It would be wrong, therefore, to reduce all to one rule, and none ought to look upon it as a just cause of disquiet, that they have not had the same degree or depth of distress and anguish which others have had, of whom they have read or heard. Another circumstance may also be the occasion of diversity. In some, convictions may have been more early and gradual, and, therefore, less violent and sensible. It is not to be supposed that Samuel, whose very conception was the answer of prayer, who was called from his mother's womb, and served in the temple from his being a child, should have experienced the same depth of humiliation with such as Manasseh, for example, who had been guilty of many atrocious crimes, and continued long in a hardened and insensible state. Therefore,

2. Suffer me to observe, that the great and principal evidence of a proper degree of conviction and sorrow for sin, is its permanency and practical influence. Genuine conviction is not a flash of fervor, however strong, but a deep, abiding, and governing principle, which will shew its strength, by its habitual power over its opposite. Every true penitent will join in these words of Elihu: "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more*." Nothing else will be a sufficient evidence of penitence, where this is wanting; and where this is the case, nothing can be wanting that is really necessary. This may, perhaps, as I observed on another part of this discourse, be thought too general, but I am persuaded it is the only safe ground to build upon, according to the scriptures. Every other claim of relation will be rejected at last by our Saviour and Judge, as he hath plainly told us: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will

* Job xxxiv. 31, 32.

“ of my father which is in heaven. Many will say to me
 “ in that day, Lord, lord, have we not prophesied in thy
 “ name? and in thy name 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*.”

Would any know, therefore, whether their sorrow for sin hath been to the requisite degree, let me intreat them to suffer conscience to answer honestly to the following interrogatories. Has your conviction of sin been such as to make you abhor and hate it in every form? Hath it been such as to make you resolve upon a thorough and perpetual separation from your once beloved pleasures? Does it make you ready to examine the lawfulness of every pursuit, and to abstain even from every doubtful or suspected practice? Is there no known sin that you are desirous to excuse or palliate, studious to conceal, or willing to spare? Remember this necessary caution of our Saviour: “ And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and
 “ cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of
 “ thy members should perish, and not that thy whole
 “ body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand
 “ offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is pro-
 “ fitable for thee that one of thy members should perish,
 “ and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell†.” Is there no sin, however long practised, or however greatly delighted in; is there no sin, however gainful or honorable, but you desire liberty from its enslaving power, as well as deliverance from its condemning guilt? Is there no part of the law of God, of the duty and character of a Christian, however ungrateful to a covetous heart, however despised by a scorning world, but you acknowledge its obligation? Would you, indeed, rather be holy than great? Do you rather choose persecution with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season? See what terms Christ makes with his disciples: “ If any
 “ man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take
 “ up his cross, and follow me: for whosoever will save his

* Matt. vii. 21, 22, 23.

† Matt. v. 29, 30.

“ life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life, for my
“ sake, shall find it*.” Upon the whole, instead of find-
ing fault with the duty or lot of God’s children, can you
truly say, “ O that there were such an heart in me that I
“ could keep his statutes ! The law of the Lord is perfect-
“ ly holy. The paths of the Lord toward me have been
“ infinitely gracious. My heart only is exceeding sinful.
“ O Lord, write thy law in my heart, and put it in my
“ inward parts : give me a new heart and a new spirit, and
“ cause me to walk in thy statutes, and keep thy judg-
“ ments, and do them.”

3. It is an excellent evidence of conviction’s being right both in principle and in degree, when the penitent hath a greater fear of sin than of suffering. As the great source of genuine conviction of sin is a sense of its evil in itself, rather than an apprehension of its consequences even in the life to come, there is no way in which this will discover itself more distinctly, than in the views we have of sin, and suffering in the present state. Whether do you grieve most heartily for sin, or for worldly losses ? Which of them do you avoid with the greatest solicitude and care ? Will not this show what it is that lies nearest your hearts, and hath the dominion there ? Will not this show it in a manner that must be convincing even to yourselves, and leave no room to reply ? Alas ! how heavy a sentence does this carry against many professing Christians ? How great their anxiety about the things of time, how little about the concerns of eternity ? How carefully will they observe the increase or decrease of their trade and opulence ? But how little attention will they pay to the growth or decay of religion in their hearts ? They will dread the arts, and fly from the society of a fraudulent dealer, but will suspect no danger while their ears are drinking in the poison of licentious or impure conversation. The loss of a child, or the loss of their substance, oppresses them with sorrow, while even the commission of gross sin, if concealed from the world, produces a reflection scarcely felt, and speedily forgotten.

* Matt. xvi. 24.

I have said, indeed, above, that all persons are not equally susceptible of violent emotions of any kind. But what shall be said of the same persons, who have the strongest passions on every other subject, and nothing but coldness and indifference in matters of religion? What shall be said of the same persons, who are easily and deeply affected with all temporal sufferings, and yet are but very slightly affected with a sense of the evil of sin? Whose tears flow readily and copiously over a dying friend, but have no tears at all to shed over a dying Saviour? Does this at all correspond with the description given by the prophet, "of mourning as for an only son?" in which penitential sorrow is compared to the most severe and exquisite of all human calamities. I must, however, observe, that temporal sufferings are ordinarily attended and aggravated by sensible images, and are also sometimes sudden and unexpected; on both which accounts they may more powerfully call forth the expressions of sorrow and sympathy. But it is not difficult to judge which of them dwells most heavily upon the mind, which of them would be first avoided by the deliberate choice of the heart. Every true penitent does certainly see sin to be the greatest of all evils, and will discover this by comparison with all the other evils of which he hath at present any knowledge or experience.

4. I shall only mention one other evidence of conviction's being to a proper degree, which is when a sense of the evil of sin is still growing, instead of diminishing. This will be found essentially to distinguish a sense of the evil of sin in itself, from a mere terror of God's power in taking vengeance on the sinner. Time gradually weakens the one, but knowledge, and even the mercy of God, continues to increase the other. When a sinner is brought under great convictions, it is a state so painful and distressing, that it cannot continue long. Some kind of peace must of necessity succeed. Either he stifles his convictions, hides the danger by shutting his own eyes, and returns to his former security and licentiousness of practice; or he does some things for a time, to quiet the cries of conscience, and lay a foundation for future peace; or, lastly, he

returns to God through Christ, by true repentance, and continues to serve him in newness of life.

The first of these cases needs no illustration; the sense of sin in all such persons being not so properly weakened as destroyed. In the second, the sinner is under great restraints for a season, but, when the terror is over, his obedience and diligence is immediately relaxed. This shews plainly, that he had no sincere or cordial affection to the law of God, but was afraid of his power. It shews that his convictions never were of a right kind, and, therefore, it is no wonder their strength should decay. But, in every true penitent, a sense of sin not only continues, but daily increases. His growing discovery of the glory of God, points out more clearly to him his own corruption and depravity, both in its quantity and its malignity, so to speak. The very mercies of God, whatever delight or sweetness they afford, take nothing away from his sense of the evil of his doings, but rather melt him down in penitential sorrow. They serve to cover him with confusion at his own unworthiness, and to fill him with wonder at the divine patience and condescension.

The first work of a convinced sinner is, to mourn over the gross enormities of a profligate life, or a life devoted to worldly pursuits. And his continued employment after conversion is, to resist and wrestle with that inherent corruption which was hidden from his view before, but becomes daily more and more sensible. So true is this, that I have known many instances in which the most genuine expressions of self-abasement happening to fall from aged experienced Christians, have appeared to others as little better than affectation. They were not able to conceive the propriety of these sentiments, which long acquaintance with God and with ourselves doth naturally and infallibly inspire.

From these remarks, let me beg the reader to judge of the reality and progress of the spiritual life. Does your sense of the evil of sin not only continue, but grow? Do you now see sin in many things which you never suspected before? Do you see more of the boldness, ingratitude,

and sottish folly of sinners and despisers of God? Are you daily making new discoveries of the vanity, sensuality, and treachery of your own hearts? Be not discouraged at it, but humbled by it. Let it empty you of all self-esteem and self-dependence, and give you a higher relish of the gospel of peace. The substance of the gospel is "salvation to the chief of sinners, by the riches of divine grace, and the sanctification of your polluted natures by the power of the Holy Ghost."

As I would willingly give as much information and instruction as possible, I shall, before quitting this part of the subject, speak a few words of a pretty extraordinary opinion to be found in some of the practical writers of the last age. It is, that genuine conviction, and the soul's subjection to God, ought to be carried so far in every true penitent, as to make him willing, satisfied, and, some say, even "pleased," that God should glorify his justice in his everlasting perdition. This is so repugnant to nature, and to that very sollicitude about our eternal happiness, by which the conscience is first laid hold of, that it appears to be utterly impossible. There have been many to whom this requisition has given inexpressible concern, has been a daily snare to their conscience, and an obstruction to their peace. There is such an inseparable connection between our duty and happiness, that the question should never have been moved; but, for the satisfaction of those who may have met, or may still meet with it in authors, otherwise deservedly esteemed, I shall make some remarks, which I hope will either explain it in a sound sense, or shew it to be at bottom false.

Men do often differ more in words than in substance. Perhaps what these authors chiefly mean, is no more than what has been explained above at considerable length. viz. That the sinner finds himself without excuse, his "mouth is stopped," he seeth the holiness of the law, he confesseth the justice of the sentence, he quits every claim but mercy. Thus he may be said to absolve or justify God, though he should leave him to perish for ever. So far, I apprehend, it is undeniably just; otherwise, the very foundation of the gospel is overthrown, and salvation is not

“of grace,” but “of debt.” If we impartially examine the word mercy, and the many strong declarations in scripture of our obligations to God for the gift of eternal life, we shall find that they cannot, consistently, imply less, than that the sinner “deserved,” and was liable, to “eternal death.”

But to carry the thing farther, and to say that the penitent must be pleased and satisfied with damnation itself, as he is pleased with suffering in another view, as it is his heavenly Father’s sanctified rod, appears to me to be at once unnatural, unreasonable, unlawful, and impossible. It is plainly contrary to that desire of our own happiness which is so deeply implanted in our natures, and which seems to be inseparable from a rational creature. No such thing is, either directly or consequentially, asserted in the holy scriptures, which so often urge us to a due care of our own best interests. “Wherefore, says the prophet, do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me, hear, and your souls shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”* Further, the proposition seems to me necessarily to imply an impossibility in itself. For what is damnation? It is to be for ever separated from, and deprived of, the fruition of God. Is this then, a dutiful object either of desire or acquiescence? It is to hate God and blaspheme his name, as well as to be banished from his presence. Can this be tolerable to any true penitent? or is it reconcilable to, or consistent with, subjection to his righteous will? Can any creature be supposed to please God, by giving up all hope of his favor? Or is it less absurd than “disobeying” him from a sense of “duty,” and “hating” him from a principle of “love?”

We must, therefore, carefully separate the acknowledgment of divine justice, and most unconditional subjection to the divine sovereignty, from an absolute despair, or giving up all hope in the divine mercy. We have a very

* Isa. lv. 2, 3.

beautiful scripture instance of humble, yet persisting importunity, in the woman of Canaan, who met with many repulses, confessed the justice of every thing that made against her, and yet continued to urge her plea. Neither is there any difference between the way in which she supplicated of the Saviour a cure for her distressed daughter, and the way in which an awakened sinner will implore from the same Saviour more necessary relief to an afflicted conscience. “And behold a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* I shall conclude with mentioning an instance of a similar character in a foreigner of eminent station, who had been a great profligate, and afterwards became a great penitent. † He composed a little piece of poetry after his conversion, the leading sentiment of which was what I have recommended above, and in his own language was to the following purpose: “Great God, thy judgments are full of righteousness, thou takest pleasure in the exercise of mercy; but I have sinned to such a height, that justice demands my destruction, and mercy itself seems to solicit my perdition. Disdain my tears, strike the blow, and execute thy judgment. I am willing to submit, and adore, even in perishing, the equity of thy procedure. But on what place will the stroke fall, that is not covered with the blood of Christ?”

* Matt. xv. 22—28. † Des Barreaux.

S E C T. V.

Acceptance of salvation through the cross of Christ.

THE next great step in a sinner's change is a discovery and acceptance of salvation from sin and misery through Jesus Christ. This is the last and finishing step of the glorious work. When this is attained, the change is completed, the new nature is fully formed in all its parts. The spiritual seed is implanted, and hath taken root; and it will arrive by degrees, in every vessel of mercy, to that measure of maturity and strength, that it pleaseth God each shall possess before he be carried hence.

It is easy to see, that conviction of sin which hath been before illustrated, prepares and paves the way for a discovery and acceptance of salvation by Christ. Before conviction of sin, or when conviction is but imperfect, the gospel of Christ, and particularly the doctrine of the cross, almost constantly appears to be foolishness. Or if, as sometimes happens, education and example prompts the sinner to speak with some degree of reverence of the name, character, and undertaking of a Saviour, there is no distinct perception of the meaning, nor any inward relish of the sweetness of the salutary truths. But those who have been "wounded in their spirits, and grieved in their minds," begin to perceive their unspeakable importance and value. That mystery which was hid from ages and generations, begins to open upon the soul in its lustre and glory. The helpless and hopeless state of the sinner makes him earnestly and anxiously enquire, whether there is any way to escape, whether there is any door of mercy or of hope. He says, with the awakened and trembling jailor, "What must I do to be saved? Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me.* I have no excuse to offer, nor any shelter to fly to: the works, the word, and the providence of God,

* Psal. xli. 12.

“ seem all to be up in arms against me, and have inclosed
 “ me as an enemy to him. O how fearful a thing is it to
 “ fall into the hands of the living God! Who shall dwell
 “ with devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting
 “ burnings? Is there no prospect of relief? Is there no
 “ balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Wonder-
 “ ful has been my past blindness! I have awakened as out
 “ of a dream, and find myself hastening fast to the pit of
 “ destruction. What would I not do, what would I not
 “ give for good ground to believe that my guilt were taken
 “ away, and my peace made with God?”

With what eagerness and earnestness, hitherto unknown, does the sinner now enquire after the way to life? With what solicitude does he “ go forth by the footsteps of the
 “ flock, and feed beside the shepherds tents.” The sab-
 baths, and ordinances, and word of God, are now quite
 different things from what they were before. No more
 waste of that sacred time in business or in play. No more
 serenity of heart, because he had been regularly and con-
 stantly at church, but an astonishing view of the sins of
 his holy things; careless, formal, heartless worship. He
 cries out with the Psalmist, “ Lord, if thou shouldst mark
 “ iniquity, who shall stand.” No more indifferent, sloth-
 ful, disdainful hearing the word. No more critical hear-
 ing the word, that he may commend the ability, or deride
 the weakness of the preacher. With what concern does
 he hang upon the sacred message, to see if there be any thing
 upon which he can lay hold? He then hears that “ God is
 “ in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” The very
 news of salvation, the bare mention of pardon, is now a
 joyful sound. It rouses his attention, it awakens his cur-
 riosity, and he sets himself to weigh and ponder the im-
 portant intimation. He hears that “ God so loved the
 “ world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoso-
 “ ever believeth in him should not perish, but have ever-
 “ lasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world
 “ to condemn the world, but that the world through him
 “ might be saved.* Is there then,” says he, “ hope of

* John iii. 16, 17.

“mercy with God, whom I have so long forgotten, and so greatly offended? hath he indeed loved a guilty world? hath he loved them in so amazing a manner, as to send his only begotten Son to save them from destruction? how great is the giver, how wonderful the gift, and how undetering the objects of his love?”

Here perhaps a difficulty may occur. “It may be so,” says the soul; “but are all the children of Adam the objects of divine love? Shall every sinner be partaker of divine mercy? Surely not. How then are they distinguished? Perhaps he intends only to save a few of the least unworthy, and to glorify his justice and severity in the condemnation of the most eminently guilty. What then have I reason to expect? None, none, none of any rank so criminal as I. I have sinned early, and I have sinned long. I have sinned against the clearest light and knowledge. I have sinned against innumerable mercies. I have sinned against the threatenings of God’s word, the rebukes of his providence, the checks of my own conscience, and the unwearied pains and diligence of ministers and parents. I have burst every bond, and torn in pieces every restraining tie.” How many gracious promises present themselves immediately to extinguish this fear? “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.*— Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.† Wherefore also he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.‡ 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.”|| To these promises may be added many scripture examples of first-rate sinners, saved by the power of God, that none may despair. An idolatrous Manasseh, an unrighteous and oppressive publican Zaccheus, an unclean Mary Magdalene, and

* II. i. 18, 19. † John vi. 37. ‡ Heb. vii. 25. || Rev. xxii. 17.

a persecuting Paul. Then is the soul brought to acknowledge and adore the matchless love of God; to repeat and adopt the words of the apostle Paul; "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 sinner, in such a situation, is wholly employed in alternately viewing his own deplorable character and state on the one hand, and the sufficiency and efficacy of the remedy on the other. As these take their turns in his mind, his hope rises or falls. Perhaps when he again reflects on the infinite number and heinous nature of his offences; when he considers the holiness and purity of God's nature and law, he is ready to bring all into question, and to say, "How can these things be? Is it possible that all this guilt can be passed by, is it possibly that it can be forgiven and forgotten by a holy God? Is he not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Is it not said, that evil cannot dwell with him? That sinners shall not stand in his presence? How then can I presume to approach him? I, who have been so daring and obstinate a rebel? What reception can I expect to meet with but, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

To remove this distrust, and assure his heart before God, he is informed of the foundation of his hope, that salvation comes by a Mediator. He undertook our cause, he purchased redemption by his precious blood. Hear him saying in the councils of the Most high, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened. Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."† Hear also in what manner he executed this gracious purpose. 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was

* Matt. xxii. 13. † Pf. xl. 6, 7, 8.

“ upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*.” Let us also see how this matter is represented in the new testament. “ 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 ; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus†. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him‡.”

It is through this man, and through his blood, that “repentance and remission of sins is preached to all nations.” Is not this a sufficient and stable ground of hope? In the substitution of our surety, we see a way opened for the reception and restoration of sinners, in a perfect consistency with all the divine perfections. The spotless purity and holiness, the strict and impartial justice of God, seem to raise an insuperable obstacle to our admission into his favor; but in the sufferings and atonement of our Redeemer, we see how he may testify his abhorrence of sin, and punish it, and at the same time shew mercy to the sinner. There is a perfect harmony of all the divine attributes in this design, and particularly a joint illustration of mercy and justice. This is the gospel of Christ, the blessed and reviving message brought into the world by the prince of peace. This is “the record which God hath given of his Son.”

How welcome, how reviving this, to the discouraged convinced sinner? His very concern and fear when proceeding upon proper grounds, arises from a view of the infinite evil of sin, so provoking to a holy God. But in this plan laid by divine wisdom, he sees the guilt of sin sufficiently expiated by a sacrifice of infinite value. “For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as

* Eccl. liii. 5, 6. † Rom. iii. 25, 26. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 21.

“ silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ, “ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot*.”

He compares and contrasts, if I may so speak, the greatness of his guilt with the price of his pardon. Then appears, with new and uncommon force, the greatness of this mystery of godliness, GOD manifested in the flesh. A victim no less considerable than the eternal and “ only- “ begotten” Son of God, “ the brightness of his Father’s “ glory, and the express image of his person.” What is it that cannot be purchased by this marvellous exchange? The believer sees with adoring wonder, the justice of God more awfully severe, in awaking his sword against the man who was “ his fellow,” than if the whole race of offending men had been irrecoverably lost. At the same time he sees the unspeakable dignity and majesty of God, in his infinite and truly royal mercy, great in itself, and greater still in the way in which it is dispensed. “ Here- “ in is love indeed, not that we loved God, but that he “ loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our “ sins†.”

I cannot help here observing, that this salvation is so amazing, so wonderful in its nature, and so far removed from any thing we know among men, that we are in danger of being put to a stand, and can scarcely conceive it possible. But on the other hand, when we consider that it carrieth not upon it any of the marks of human wisdom, we are naturally led to say, “ Salvation belongeth “ unto God.—His ways are not as our ways, nor his “ thoughts as our thoughts.” Therefore when conviction of sin makes us feel the necessity, and discovers the glory of our Saviour’s atonement; we may both rest assured of its truth, and triumph in its power. We may say with the apostle Paul, “ Who shall lay any thing to the charge “ of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that “ condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is “ risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who “ also maketh intercession for us‡.”

* 1 Pet. i. 18. † 1 John iv. 10. ‡ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

But, "Pause a little, my soul," saith the convinced sinner, "what tidings are here? What saith the scripture, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? "Unanswerable indeed! Happy, happy, thrice happy they, who are the objects of God's everlasting, distinguishing and electing love. But how can I be sure that this includes, or rather does not include me? Can I ever hope to read my name written in the Lamb's book of life?" No. But when you confess you cannot read any thing there in your favor, who hath authorized you to suppose any thing there to your prejudice? Secret things belong only to God. We are not permitted to search, and we are not able to comprehend or explain the infinite depth of the divine councils. But do not things that are revealed belong to us? And how shall we presume to set at variance the secret and revealed will of God? Is not the commission sufficiently extensive? "And he said unto them, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned*." Is not the call unlimited and universal? "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest†." "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst‡." "And in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink||."

Can you then entertain any doubt of the call reaching to you, or question your title to rest upon this rock of ages? Behold, we preach unto you Christ crucified, a despised Saviour, indeed, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, "and to the Greeks foolishness;" but the "power of God, "and the wisdom of God for salvation to every one that "believeth." There is no guilt so deep, but this precious blood will wash it out. No gift so great, but infinite merit is sufficient to procure it. No nature so polluted, but in-

* Mark. xvi. 15, 16.

† Matt. xi. 28.

‡ John. vi. 35.

§ John. vii. 37.

finite power is sufficient to renew it. Shall we then any more withhold our approbation, or refuse our consent? Shall not every sinner, burdened with a sense of guilt or danger, intimate his compliance and urge his claim, and say, "Thanks, thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. —It is salvation by the death of Christ, and therefore becoming a holy and a jealous God, with whom evil cannot dwell. It is the same unchangeable God, who enacted the holy law, and who publishes this glorious gospel.—It is salvation by grace, otherwise no child of Adam could have had any claim; and it is meet that the lofty looks of man should be humbled, and the Lord alone exalted in that day.—It is salvation to the chief of sinners: I am the man. I hear my character clearly described in the word of God. I can read my name in the general and gracious invitation. I will accept of the offer, I will receive and embrace this blessed Saviour as my Lord and my God, as my life and my all."

Once more, perhaps the believer is still staggered, and his faith begins to fail. Astonished at the greatness of the mercy, "he believeth not for joy, and wondereth." He is ready to say, "Might I but hold fast this beginning of my confidence, I would not envy the greatest monarch on earth his throne, his purple, or his sceptre, but would sing the new song put into my mouth, Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. But alas! are not all the promises of salvation only in favor of them that believe? Here then the conclusion may fail. I am sensible of a lamentable weakness and backwardness of mind; and whilst I think I have no doubt of any of the truths of God, I greatly distrust the reality of my own consent and compliance with his will." Do you then really give credit to all the truths of God respecting your own lost condition, and the only way of deliverance from it? May the Lord himself increase your faith; for if it be so indeed, you are happy and safe. These truths, these alone, are the sure foundation of hope. I am afraid we have all too strong a ten-

dency to look for some encouraging qualification in ourselves, on which we might more securely rest. What is faith? Is it any more than receiving the record which God hath given of his son, believing the testimony of the Amen, the true and faithful witness? Is not your peace and reconciliation with God, and the sanctification of your natures, expressly provided for in the all-sufficiency of Christ, and to him you are assured that you must be indebted for both? What standeth in the way of your comfort then, but either that you do not give credit to the promise he hath made, or that you are not willing that he should do it for you? and this I acknowledge is both unbelief and impenitence.

Complain therefore no more, that you are afraid of yourselves, whilst yet you pretend to have the highest esteem of the blessings of redemption; on the contrary, say unto God, in a thankful frame of spirit, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will towards men. I praise thee for this message of peace. I think I see, in some measure, its necessity, truth and beauty. I see it, I trust to such a degree, that it is the sole foundation of my hope. I renounce every other claim; nay, I abhor the thoughts of any other claim: 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*. It grieves me that there is such a backwardness in me to give glory to thy name, and to be indebted to the riches of thy grace. Subdue my obstinacy, and rule by thine own power. Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

* Phil. iii. 8.

S E C T. VI.

How the believer recovers peace of conscience.

WE have now seen in what way the believer is reconciled to God, and delivered from condemnation. It will not be improper however also to consider how he recovers peace of conscience, and how his heart and life are governed in his after walk. This will serve more fully to illustrate the influence and operation of the truths of the gospel. There is even a necessity for doing so on two different accounts: 1. That, as has been shewn above at considerable length, every true penitent is deeply and inwardly sensible of the evil of sin in itself. He is not merely afraid of wrath, but sees the impurity and pollution of his own heart. Supposing therefore, will the intelligent reader say, this great distinction thoroughly established, his relief is but half accomplished. There may be no more condemnation for him in the law of God, for the breach of which satisfaction has been made and accepted; but he is only so much the more liable to the condemnation of his own conscience. He must still suffer the reproaches and challenges of his own mind, which make so great a part of the misery of a guilty state.

This receives additional strength, from a second consideration, that as he is justified by faith, he hath peace only through the blood of Christ. This is not from himself, and may be thought to leave him, so to speak, in point of state and character, in point of pollution and defilement, just as before; nay, the extraordinary, unsolicited, undeserved grace of God, may be thought to increase his self-condemnation, and set the malignity of his rebellion in the strongest light. And indeed so far this is true, that the free grace of God was intended, and does serve to produce a growing humiliation of mind and self-abasement, as well as an admiration of the love of God in Christ Jesus. As the tenderness of a parent is an image which God hath very frequently made use of, to shadow forth his own infinite compassion, I will borrow from it an illustration of the two remarks just now made. Suppose any child has of-

fended a parent by a gross instance of undutiful behavior, for which he hath been severely reprov'd, and for some time kept at a distance : if the parent forgives him, and receives him again into his favor, does not his being thus freed from the fear of suffering, leave full room for his concern at the offence? And does not a sense of his father's love melt his heart more for having grieved such a parent, than any terror upon his mind for the punishment of the crime? He is immediately covered with confusion; and if there be in him any spark of ingenuity, he is no sooner forgiven of his father, than the tide of his affections returns back with full force, and he can hardly forgive himself.

But notwithstanding this, as Christ by his sufferings and death delivered us from the wrath to come, so by the shedding of his precious blood, the heart is also, as the scripture expresses it, sprinkled from an evil conscience. On this important subject, which leads us to the great principles of the spiritual life, the following particulars are recommended to the serious attention of the reader.

1. Through Jesus Christ, and the whole of his undertaking as Mediator of the new covenant, the glory and honor of God is most admirably promoted, and a perfect reparation made to his holy law which had been broken. This must needs be highly pleasing to every convinced sinner. As the justice of God is thereby satisfied, so conscience, which is God's vicegerent, and as it were pleads his cause, is satisfied by the same means. The ground of a sinner's dissatisfaction with himself, is the dishonor done to God. Must it not therefore please and satisfy him to see this dishonor so perfectly removed, and so much of the divine glory shining in the work of redemption. All the divine perfections appear there with distinguished lustre; and must not this be highly refreshing to the pardoned criminal? The very holiness and justice of God, which before were terrible to him, are now amiable. He also contemplates and adores the divine wisdom, as it is to be seen in the cross of Christ. We are told, that even the celestial hosts have new discoveries of the wisdom of God in this great design of providence. "To the intent that
" now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places,

“ might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of “ God.”* How much more must the interested believer, with peculiar complacency, approve and adore it? But, above all, if that love and mercy which reigns through the whole is glorious to God, must it not be delightful to the Christian? God is love; and his tender mercies are over all his other works; but creating and preserving goodness are shaded and eclipsed by redeeming love. It is the theme of the praises of heaven, where Christ, as the object of worship, is represented as appearing “ like a Lamb that “ had been slain.”

2. Believers have peace of conscience through Christ, as their redemption through his blood, serves for their own humiliation and self-abasement, for the manifestation of the evil of sin, and the vileness and unworthiness of the sinner. Nothing could be so well contrived as the doctrine of the cross, in its purity and simplicity, to stain the pride of all human glory. We are particularly called to deny ourselves, and to derive our worth and strength from our Redeemer, in whom “ it hath pleased the Father, that all “ fulness should dwell,” and from whose fulness all his disciples must “ receive, and grace for grace.” No hope of mercy but through him. “ I am the way, and the truth, “ and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by “ me.”† “ Neither is there salvation in any other: for “ there is none other name under heaven given among “ men, whereby we must be saved.”‡ No access to the throne of grace or acceptance in worship, but through him: “ In whom we have access with boldness and confidence, “ through the faith of him.|| And whatsoever ye do in “ word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, “ giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”* No hope of stability in duty, of usefulness or holiness of conversation, but by the continued exercise of faith in him. “ Abide in me, and I in you; as the branch cannot bear “ fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can

* Eph. iii. 10. † John xiv. 6. ‡ Acts iv. 12. || Eph. iii. 12.

* Col. iii. 17.

“ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.”*

Hard sayings and humbling doctrine indeed! But this is appealing to the conscience; for as conscience condemns us as guilty and undeserving, this condemnation is ratified in every particular by the gospel. These very circumstances in this doctrine, which provoke the hatred, or invite the contempt of worldly men, do but so much the more endear it to the convinced soul; and he says from the heart, “It is highly just and reasonable that God alone should be exalted, and that he, through our Redeemer, should have the whole praise of our recovery and salvation.” Agreeably to this it will be found, that the apostles, in celebrating the grace of God, seldom omit an express condemnation of themselves, and a renunciation of all merit of their own, which indeed in every passage on this subject is manifestly implied: “For by grace ye are 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.† Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”‡

3. Believers have peace from the challenges of an evil conscience, through Christ, as they have an absolute assurance of being delivered from the power of sin, and effectually enabled to glorify him with their souls and with their bodies, which are his. This must be the most earnest desire of every convinced sinner. He breathes after deliverance from the bondage of sin: the more he hath felt the weight of his chains, the more he longs to be free. This is inseparable from genuine convictions, on the principles

* John xv. 4, 5.

† Eph. ii. 8, 9, 10.

‡ Eph. iii. 7, 8.

above laid down. How much must it contribute to compose the conscience, to know that this desire shall certainly be accomplished? However much cause he may have to condemn himself for his past provocations, or to dread the weakness of his own resolutions of future amendment, he knows and trusts in the power of his Redeemer. He knows that henceforth he shall not serve sin, that its dominion shall be gradually broken through life, and entirely destroyed at death. As the end of Christ's coming was to glorify his heavenly Father, he knows that the glory of God cannot be promoted by leaving the sinner under the bondage of corruption, and therefore that he shall be purified, and made meet to be a "partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

If we look with care and attention into the New Testament, we shall perceive that there is a close and mutual connection between our justification and sanctification, and that both are represented as the fruit of our Redeemer's purchase: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death: for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh."* All the blessings of salvation are represented as following one another in a continued chain or series, not one link of which can possibly be broken: "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. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."† There is a cleansing and purifying virtue in the blood of Christ, as well as an infinite value in the way of purchase and atonement: "For if the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh;

* Rom. viii. 1, 2, 3.

† Rom. viii. 29, 30.

“ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through
 “ the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God,
 “ purge your conscience from dead works to serve the
 “ living God ?”*

None but real Christians, exercised in the spiritual life, know the value or necessity of the promises of strength and assistance contained in the scriptures. The glory of their Redeemer's person, spoken of in so magnificent terms, both in the Old Testament and the New, is surveyed by them with the most exquisite delight. The power and efficacy of his administration, is to them a source of unspeakable comfort. Under him, as the Captain of their salvation, they “ display their banners,” and go forth with undaunted courage to meet every opposing enemy, believing that they shall be “ more than conquerors through him that “ loved them.” Among many others, see the two following passages: “ O Zion that bringest good tidings, get
 “ thee up into the high mountain: O Jerusalem, that
 “ bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength,
 “ lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah,
 “ Behold your God. Behold, the Lord God will come
 “ with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: be-
 “ hold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.
 “ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather
 “ the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom,
 “ and shall gently lead those that are with young.†—Fear
 “ thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am
 “ thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee,
 “ yea, I will uphold thee with the right-hand of my righte-
 “ ousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against
 “ thee, shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be
 “ as nothing, and they that strive with thee, shall perish.
 “ Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even
 “ them that contended with thee: they that war against
 “ thee, shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For
 “ I the Lord thy God will hold thy right-hand, saying un-
 “ to thee, Fear not, I will help thee.‡

* Heb. ix. 13, 14. † Is. xl. 9, 10, 11, ‡ Is. xli. 10, 11, 12, 13.

S E C T. VII.

How the Christian is governed in his daily conversation.

BEFORE concluding this chapter, I shall speak a few words of the principles by which a believer is governed in his after obedience. On this the reader may observe, that a change in his whole character and conduct immediately and necessarily takes place. The love of God is “shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost,” and is the commanding principle of all his future actions. It constantly discovers its influence, except in so far as it is resisted and counteracted by the remaining struggles of that “law in his members, which warreth against the law of God in his mind.” By the discovery which he hath obtained of the real nature and infinite amiableness of God, his will is renewed; he approves the things that are excellent, and gets such an impression of the obligation of the law of God, as cannot be afterwards effaced. So long however as he continues under a load of unforgiven guilt, and sees every perfection of God armed with terror against himself, there can be little else than slavish fear: but when he hears a gracious promise of pardon; when on examining the evidence his doubt and uncertainty is removed; when he sees the righteous ground on which this forgiveness is built, he lays hold of it as his own, and is united to God by unfeigned love. This love, though weak in its measure, is, notwithstanding, perfect in its nature, and therefore powerful in its influence; being at once a love of esteem, of gratitude, and of desire.

The love of God is the first precept of the moral law, and the first duty of every intelligent creature; but it is easy to see, that unless our love is fixed upon the true God, it is spurious and unprofitable: and unless the true God is seen in “the face of Jesus Christ,” for any sinner to love him is impossible: but through the glorious gospel, the new nature is effectually produced, and cannot be produced in any other way. It is Christ Jesus who reveals to us the true God, the knowledge of whom we had lost. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son,

“ which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*.” It is he who makes our peace with God, whom we had offended by our transgressions; for “ being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ†.” And it is he who reconcileth our minds to God, by discovering his mercy to us; so that he might well say of himself, “ I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me‡.”

I might easily shew, that the love of God is the source, the sum, and the perfection of holiness. All other duties naturally flow from it; nay, all other duties are nothing else but the necessary expressions of it. But instead of entering into a particular detail, suffer me only to observe these two things; First, that a believer is under the constant influence of gratitude to God; and, secondly, That this includes in it, and will certainly produce, the most sincere and fervent love to all his fellow-creatures.

I. A believer is under the constant influence of gratitude to God, and that not of a common kind. It is not merely thankfulness to a bountiful and liberal benefactor, for mercies which have not been deserved, but a deep sense of obligation to a Saviour, who loved him, and washed him in his own blood from the guilt he had contracted; who saved him by his own death from the dreadful penalty which he had incurred. What the influence of this must be, we may gather from the words of the apostle Paul, “ 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.”

I cannot immediately drop this subject, but intreat the reader to observe how deeply a sense of redeeming love must be engraven on the heart of every believer. On how many circumstances will he expatiate, which serve to magnify the grace of God, and point out the force of his own obligations? The infinite greatness and glory of

* John i. 18.

† Rom. v. 1.

‡ John. xiv. 6.

God, independent and all-sufficient, that he should have compassion on the guilty sinner, and say, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom." O, how piercing those rays of love, which could reach from the Godhead to man! To this he will never fail to add his own unworthiness his numerous, aggravated, repeated provocations. He never loses sight of those sins which first compelled him to fly for refuge "to the hope set before him." His own interest obliged him to remember them before, as exposing him to condemnation, and he is now willing to confess and record them, as serving to illustrate the divine mercy.

And let us never forget the unspeakable gift of God, "that he spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all." How shall we sufficiently wonder at the boundless mercy of the Father, and the infinite condescension of the Son, when we reflect upon his incarnation, and on the astonishing end of his appearance in our nature, that he might "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." Did he overcome all his enemies in his last conflict, and "make a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross?" And shall he not also, by the same means, reign in his people's hearts, and be the sovereign Lord of all their affections?

To all this, I shall only add that glorious inheritance, which is provided for every "vessel of mercy," after he hath passed his preparatory trials. How well may we join with the apostle Peter in this solemn form of thanksgiving, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*." Now, when all these circumstances are considered by the believer, together with such as may be peculiar to himself and his own past conduct, must he not be ready to cry out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do! O that I knew how I might repay some small part of my infinite obligations! O that I knew

* 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

“ by what means, or at what expence I might magnify and
“ do thee honor ! Write thy laws in my heart, and put
“ them in my inward parts, and enable me in every pos-
“ sible way to shew that I love thee, because thou hast first
“ loved me.”

2. This plainly includes in it, and will certainly produce the most sincere and fervent love to his fellow-creatures. As love to God is the first, so love to man is the second commandment of the moral law. We have our Lord's own authority for saying it is “ like ” unto the first ; and that love which “ worketh no ill to his neighbours ” is the “ fulfilling of the law.” Every one is ready to acknowledge, that love to man is an important branch of practical religion. But many great pleaders for this duty do not sufficiently attend to its inseparable connection with the love of God, and in particular with a sense of redeeming love, or the love of God in Christ : Yet is there no such principle of universal love any where to be found ?

In order to take a short view of this, it will be proper to distinguish our brethren of mankind into the two general classes of bad men and good. As to bad men, the same love to God, the same concern for his glory, which fills the Christian with grief and indignation at their most daring offences, inspires the most ardent desire for their recovery and salvation. This is the only love to them, which is either acceptable to God or profitable to themselves. It will shew itself in all the offices of kindness and humanity ; in instructing them where there is ability, admonishing them where there is opportunity, and in pleading for them at the throne of grace, to which there is always undisturbed access. The believer, knowing the danger of sin, and having a prospect of approaching eternity, is moved with compassion for blind and inconsiderate sinners. Their conduct leads him to reflect upon the depravity of his own nature, and earnestly to pray, that they may be partakers of divine grace.

He that loveth God is under little temptation to hate his brother ; or rather, in so far as he loveth God sincerely, he is under none at all. Hatred commonly ariseth from

envy and rival pursuits. But a Christian, more than satisfied with his own portion, hath no occasion to envy others, either what they possess or prosecute. In what a contemptible light does he look upon the honors, riches and pleasures, about which there is so violent a struggle among worldly men? It is impossible, therefore, that he should hate those who do not interfere with him, though in many cases he is disposed heartily to pity their folly and delusion.

Nay, the matter does not even rest here, for the Christian is laid under the most express command to "love his" personal "enemies, to bless them that curse him, to pray "for them who despitefully use him and persecute him." This is the glory of the gospel, which gives the doctrine of Christ a lustre far superior to the most admired systems of human virtue. And however hard a saying it may appear at first view, when we consider the character and hopes of a penitent sinner, and the example of his expiring Saviour, it hath nothing strange or incredible in it at all: That he, who expects from the free grace of God pardon for his innumerable and aggravated offences, should be ready to forgive the far slighter trespasses of his brethren against himself. Or rather, that he should take the highest pleasure, and think it his honor to do so, when he remembers his Redeemer's dying words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

As to good men, there is no manner of difficulty: they are united together by the tenderest and the strongest ties, and love one another with a pure heart fervently. It was no wonder, that when Christianity was in a persecuted state, the heathens should make the remark, "Behold how these Christians love one another!" They had a common character, a common Saviour, common sufferings, and common hopes. And must it not be the same still? for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." If they are not persecuted with the swords, they shall be persecuted with the tongues of men. They have the strongest motives to love one another, and nothing to divide them, for there can be no rivalry or jealousy between those who possess or court the "true rich-

“ es.” There is enough in an all-sufficient God to satisfy the desires of all his saints; and they being intimately united to the one only living and true God, must of consequence be united to one another. This is the tenor of their Saviour’s intercessory prayer: “ That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.”*

C O N C L U S I O N.

I SHALL now close this discourse with some practical improvement of these important truths. Several reflections have indeed already been interwoven with the particular branches of the subject, and the light which they throw on other parts of religion pointed out. I shall therefore at this time only make a few observations upon the whole, and proceed to a serious address to all my readers on this most interesting subject. And,

1st, From the various truths above established, and the order in which they have been opened, we may see the indissoluble connection between salvation by the grace of God, and holiness in heart and conversation. We may see their equal importance and their influence upon one another. There are many who attempt to divide those things which God hath inseparably joined. Many insist only on the duties of the law of God, and our natural obligations to obedience; and are hardly brought to any mention of the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of a sinner’s acceptance before God. Nay, some scruple not to affirm that the doctrine of justification by free grace, or

* John xvii. 21, 22, 23.

a sinner's being found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, weakens the obligation to holiness, and tends to introduce licentiousness of practice. But from what hath been said in the above discourse, we may learn, not only in general the absolute necessity of a change, but how this stands connected with the purchase and gift of salvation, the character and work of a Redeemer. It will plainly appear, that a change in some respects is necessary to bring us to, and in others is the necessary effect and consequence of, the acceptance of salvation.

I have endeavored in the preceding pages to shew, that a discovery of the nature and glory of God, and of the infinite evil of sin, is absolutely necessary, in order to our either understanding or relishing the doctrine of the cross. What is this then, but a change begun? Must not the dominion of sin in every such person have received a mortal blow? Doth any thing more directly tend to holiness, than to see the power and glory of a holy God, and how "evil and bitter a thing" it is to depart from him? On the other hand, is it not necessary to complete the change, that there be a sense of reconciliation and peace? "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Can any person live in the love and service of God, while he conceives him to be his enemy, and supposes himself still the object of his wrath and displeasure? But supposing this reconciliation obtained, let me boldly ask, What motive to holiness in all manner of conversation, equal to the force of redeeming love? Judge, O Christian, will any cold reasoning on the nature and beauty of virtue have such an effect in mortifying corruptions, as a believing view of a pierced Saviour? Where shall we find so faithful, so active, so chearful a servant of God, as one who joins with the apostle Paul in saying, "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."* Faith in Christ Jesus never can take place in any heart, unless there has been an internal

* Gal. ii. 20.

work of the Spirit of God testifying of him ; and there is no effectual principle of new obedience, but faith which worketh by love.

2. What has been said above, will serve to explain some controversies with which the truths of the gospel have been often darkened and perplexed ; particularly those relating to the priority, or right of precedency, so to speak, between faith and repentance. Some make repentance, that is, as they explain it, sorrow for sin, serious resolutions of forsaking it, and begun reformation, the joint grounds of our acceptance with the merit of a Saviour. These, with great plausibility, state the matter thus : That our sincerity is accepted through the satisfaction of Christ, instead of that perfect obedience to which we cannot now attain ; and, when taken in a certain light, this assertion is undoubtedly true. Others, discerning the falshood that may lurk under this representation, and fearing the consequences of every self-righteous plan, are tempted to go to the opposite extreme. That they might shew salvation to be wholly of grace, some have even presumed to use this harsh and unscriptural expression, that it is not necessary to forsake sin in order to come to Christ. I could shew a sense in which this also is true, even as it is not necessary to forsake your disease, in order to apply to the physician. But if it is not necessary to forsake it, I am sure it is necessary, in both cases, to hate it, and desire deliverance from it.

This difficulty will be easily solved from what has been said in the preceding parts of this treatise, and we may learn to preserve the truth, without exposing it to the scorn or resentment of its enemies. The reader may observe, then, that none can see the form or comeliness of a Saviour standing in the room of sinners, and purchasing forgiveness from a holy God, till the glory of this God is discovered, till the guilt of sin lays hold of the conscience, and its power is both felt and lamented. This may, perhaps, be called repentance, and I believe it is called so sometimes in the holy scriptures, particularly in the following passage :

“ Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins
 “ may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall
 “ come from the presence of the Lord.”* But the sinner
 does not so properly forsake sin in order to come to Christ,
 as he flies to him for deliverance from its condemning
 guilt and enslaving power. He is so far from coming to
 God with a gift in his hand, even of his own prayers and
 penitential tears, that his convictions continue to follow
 him, if I may speak so, through every lurking place, till he
 is entirely subjected, till he is stript naked and bare, and
 deprived of every shadow of excuse. Then it is that sal-
 vation through a despised crucified Saviour becomes un-
 speakably amiable in all its parts, sin becomes more per-
 fectly hateful, and an assured prospect is obtained of its im-
 mediate mortification, and, in due time, of its entire and
 complete destruction. Thus faith and repentance are in-
 volved in one another, they produce, and are produced
 by one another. They may be treated of distinctly, but
 they cannot exist separately. So that whenever any of
 them is found alone, or stands independent of the other,
 that very thing is a sufficient evidence that it is false and
 spurious.

3. From what has been said on this subject, we may
 be enabled to judge what are the fundamental and essential
 doctrines of the gospel, to which all others are but subordi-
 nate and subservient. Regeneration, or the New Birth,
 we are warranted to say, after the example of our Saviour,
 is absolutely necessary to salvation: “ Except a man be
 “ born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” If
 any man, therefore, depart from this truth, he makes ship-
 wreck of the faith, and will at last be found to fight against
 God. It is also plain, that the reconciliation of a sinner
 to God must be through the blood of the atonement: “ For
 other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid,
 “ which is Jesus Christ.”† If any man hold by, and
 build upon, this great foundation he shall be finally ac-
 cepted, though many things may be found in him justly

* Acts iii. 19.

† 1 Cor. iii. 11.

blame-worthy. Nor is it easy, indeed, to say what degree of error and misapprehension concerning these truths themselves, may be consistent with abiding by the substance. But certainly all who directly and openly oppose them, may be said “to bring in damnable heresies, even “denying the Lord that bought them, and to bring upon “themselves swift destruction.”*

This may teach us, what judgment Christians ought to form of the many parties and factions which divide the visible church. There may be smaller differences, which keep them asunder on earth, while, in faith and in love to an unseen Saviour, they are perfectly united. We are told that God shall gather his elect from the four winds, and that “many shall come from the east and west, and “shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”† I always think with much pleasure on the perfect union of this great and general assembly of the church of the first born. Then all other distinctions, all other designations shall be abolished, and those shall make one pure and unmixed society, who have received “a white stone and a new “name,” and “whose names are written in the Lamb’s “book of life.” The prospect of this should keep us from immoderate resentment, at present, against any of whom we have reason to think that they hold the foundation, are acquainted with real and practical religion, or have had experience of a saving change.

No man, indeed, can deny it to be just, that every one would endeavor to support that plan of the discipline and government of the church of Christ, and even the minutest parts of it, which appear to him to be founded upon the word of God. But still sound doctrine is more to be esteemed than any form. Still we ought to consider the excellence of every particular form, as consisting in its fitness to promote or preserve the knowledge of the truth, and to carry on a work of illumination, conviction, and conversion, to the saving of the soul. Would any Christian shew that he is of a truly catholic disposition, let

* 2 Pet. ii. 1.

† Matt. viii. 11.

him discover a greater attachment to those even of different denominations, who seem to bear the image of God, than to profane persons, be their apparent or pretended principles what they will. Let us pay some regard to other distinctions, but still the greatest regard to the most important of all distinctions, that of saints and sinners.

4. As this great distinction divides the whole human race, and is so very important in its consequences, let me earnestly intreat every one who peruseth this treatise, to bring the matter to a trial with regard to himself. Answer this question in seriousness, Whether do you belong to the one class or the other? We are dropping into the grave from day to day, and our state is fixed beyond any possibility of change. What astonishing folly to continue in uncertainty whether we shall go to heaven or hell, whether we shall be companions of angels, or associates with blaspheming devils, to all eternity. Nothing, therefore, can be more salutary, than that you make an impartial search into your present character and state. If you have ground to conclude that you are at peace with God, what an unspeakable source of joy and consolation? If otherwise, there is no time to lose in hastening from the brink of the pit. May I not with some confidence make this demand of every reader, that he would set apart some time and apply with vigour and earnestness to the duty of self-examination. Is not this demand reasonable? What injury can you suffer by complying with it; Will conscience permit any to continue unrepented in the neglect of it? Have you read so much on the subject of regeneration, and are you unwilling to reap the benefit of it? Let every one, without exception, take up or renew this grand enquiry, "Am I in Christ? That is, am I a New Creature or not? Am I a child of God? or do I still continue an heir of hell?"

5. As it is more than probable there will be some readers who are, or have reason to suspect, themselves unrenewed, I would now come as an ambassador from Christ, and endeavor to negotiate peace. Wherefore "as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you in Christ's

“stead, be ye reconciled unto God.”* While I attempt this, I desire to do it under a just impresson of the great and principal truths which have been illustrated on this subject. I know that this change is a work of the Holy Spirit of grace; that he only can bring a clean thing out of an unclean; that without his effectual blessing, the clearest and most conclusive reasoning directed to the understanding, the most warm and pathetic application to the affections, will be altogether fruitless. I know that great natural abilities are often perverted and abused, that the soundest reason in worldly things, and the most brutish folly in matters of eternity, are often joined together. That men may be learned scholars, eminent politicians, active merchants, skilful tradesmen, and yet blinded sinners, whom no instruction can enlighten, whom no warning can alarm. But I know and believe, at the same time, that God, “whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,” is able to make “his word quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”† There is an express appointment that the wicked shall “receive warning,” and in this way alone the watchman can “deliver his own soul.” It is also agreeable to reflect, that when God giveth “a door of utterance,” he is also often pleased to give “a door of faith,” which I pray may be the case with many who read this discourse, for Christ’s sake.

Let me, therefore, repeat in your ears this truth, and may God Almighty by his Spirit carry it to your hearts, that “except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Every child of Adam, by nature, is at enmity with God, and must either be renewed in the spirit of his mind, or perish eternally. It is of no consequence what you are as to outward station, if you are not reconciled to God; it is of no consequence what you are as to outward profession, if you are not inwardly changed. God is no respecter of persons, and, therefore,

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

† Heb. iv. 12.

whether you are high or low, rich or poor, whether you are of one denomination of Christians or another, if you have not been the subjects of a renewing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, you are children of wrath, and, if you die in that condition, must "go away into everlasting punishment." To reflect seriously but for a few moments on this truth, and that every one of us is so deeply concerned in it, one would think might be sufficient to alarm us all, either for ourselves or for others, or for both. Who could imagine that this weak flesh, so frail in its nature, and so easily taken to pieces, should yet so harden us against the impression of approaching eternity. But is there any hope of relief? Yes there is, and that as universal as the danger. The commission is unlimited, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the GOSPEL to every CREATURE."*

In order to make this exhortation the more distinct and effectual, I shall endeavor to address it in a particular and separate manner to the following classes: The Rich and the Poor; the Young and the Old; the Self-righteous and the Chief of Sinners.

I would preach the everlasting gospel to the Rich and Affluent, on whom (as the world chooses to express it) fortune smiles, who are well and plentifully supplied with every present conveniency. The prophet Jeremiah, in trying the success of his message, says, "I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them."† It is, indeed, a matter of no small difficulty often to persuade such to hear the truths of the gospel. Let them not be offended while I mention the words of our blessed Saviour, "Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." And again, "I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."‡ When the world is pleasant and inviting, it is ready to ingross our attention, to possess our esteem, and to attract our homage. Worldly grandeur is very ready to inspire the mind with pride and self-sufficiency,

* Mark xvi. 15. † Jer. v. 5. ‡ Matt. xix. 23, 24.

which is, of all other things, the most destructive of real religion, and which is particularly opposite to the humbling and self-abasing doctrine of salvation by grace. The great and fashionable world is still in danger of the offence of the cross. Denying themselves, bearing profane scorn, mortifying the flesh, loving and following a crucified master, are hard lessons, indeed, to men of wealth and affluence.

But suffer me to warn all such, not to “trust in uncertain riches.” Place not your happiness in so unstable a possession. How strong, as well as how just, the wise man’s expressions ! “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not: for riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven.”* Behold, I preach the gospel to you, and offer you the true riches. However pride may make you fondly flatter yourselves, however your greatness or wealth may deter others from treating you with plainness and sincerity, you are sinners of the race of Adam, you are lost in him by nature, you are transgressors in practice, and liable to divine wrath, from which there is no shelter but in the blood of Christ. It is but a very little time that your worldly greatness can endure. Death shall write vanity on all created glory; and nothing else shall screen you from the wrath of the Almighty Judge in the last and great day. There the rich and the poor, the prisoner and the oppressor, shall stand upon a level before the Maker of them all. Embrace then, while you may, the mercy of God. Put on the spotless robe of your Redeemer’s righteousness, and value it more than purple and fine linen, or the most costly attire. Seek the bread of life which came down from heaven, and value it more highly than the most sumptuous and delicate fare. Be not ashamed of a crucified Saviour. Endure with a noble firmness the disdainful smiles of a scoffing world. O! how amiable is the union of high station and piety, honor and humility, wealth and self-denial, with a resolute profession of the gospel! Blessed is

* Prov. xxiii. 5.

the memory of Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable man, and a counsellor, who boldly begged, and honorably interred the body of our Lord, after it had been crucified at the instigation of corrupt priests, and pierced by the inhumanity of brutal soldiers. May the Lord God of nature bless and increase your substance, and make every thing you do to prosper, but in his mercy deliver you from despising the gospel, dying impenitent, and lifting up your eyes in torments.

2. Let me preach this gospel to the Poor. It was the glory of the gospel that it was preached to the Poor, and given by our Saviour himself as one of the marks of the Messiah's arrival, that "the gospel was preached to the poor." Very suitable was this to their state, good news were brought to them in their distress. But think not, my brethren, that your being poor is enough of itself. It may, indeed, preserve you from many temptations to which the rich are exposed, and it ought, one would think, to constrain you to seek to be rich towards God. But, alas! this is not always the case, and, when it is otherwise, how does it make every considerate heart bleed with compassion and tenderness! O! unhappy they who are both poor and profane, miserable in time and miserable to eternity, despised on earth, and outcasts for ever. Pitiab!e case indeed!

But does not the Saviour of sinners beseech you to be reconciled unto God. He intreats you to come unto him that you may have life. He regardeth not the persons of men, but values a precious immortal spirit as much in a mean cottage as in a splendid palace. Your rags and nakedness can be no hindrance to your obtaining his favor. He counsels you "to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed." But O! consider that you are naturally much more loathsome by sin than by poverty. Humble yourselves deeply in the sight of God. Fly for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you. Accept of a free pardon of all your sins through the blood of Christ, and of his Holy Spirit to enable you to love and serve him. Rejoice in your portion as all-sufficient and full, and in

the covenant of peace, as “ordered in all things, and sure.” Go in the spirit of adoption to your reconciled Father in Christ, and ask of him your daily bread. Do not envy the prosperity of others; since it is not material whether you shall live in plenty and sleep on a bed of down, or live in straits and lie on a dunghil, compared to what shall become of you for ever. But, above all, be not so mad as to envy sinners an un sanctified prosperity. Rather, when you see a man of opulence despising the sabbath, or hear a wretch in a gilded chariot profaning his Creator’s name, be ready to say, “Shall I complain of poverty, when my Lord and master had not where to lay his head? No, let me, on the contrary, bless that adversity which caused me to consider. Let me be very thankful for that humble station which gives me access to communion with God, and does not waste my time with crouds of company. Who knoweth whether I should have retained my integrity, if I had been constantly surrounded with profane gaiety, swimming in pleasure, besieged by flatterers, solicited by sensualists, beset with temptations? O that I may be possessed of the pearl of great price, reconciled to God, united to Christ, adorned with Divine grace, and that I may be my Redeemer’s at his second coming.”

3. I would preach the gospel to those who are but yet in the Morning of life. This is the most pleasant and hopeful part of a minister’s work. Happy are you, my dear Children, who have been so early called into God’s vineyard, but infinitely more happy, if you are inwardly and fully determined to comply with the call. I beseech you “Remember you Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when you shall say you have no pleasure in them.”* Early piety is exceeding lovely in the eyes of the sober part of mankind, highly acceptable to God, and will be infinitely profitable to yourselves. Be not enticed with the deceitful promises and false pretences of worldly enjoyments, which are so ready to inflame your

* Eccles. xii. 1,

passions, and so warmly solicit your love. Believe the testimony of all, without exception, who have gone before you, and have left this record written on created comforts, that they are "vanity and vexation of spirit." Believe it, you have entered on a world of sin and sorrow. You may feel the early stirrings of corruption in yourselves, and see its manifest and manifold fruits, both in yourselves and others. Alas! are there not some young persons who learn, as their first language, to blaspheme their Maker's name? Many children who cannot work, are expert in finning. Alas! your hearts are naturally far from God. You "go astray as soon as you are born, speaking lies."

Be persuaded, therefore, to fly to the blood of Christ, the precious blood of Christ, "who loved you, and gave himself for you." He died upon the cross to save you from the hell which you have deserved by your sins; and he graciously invites you, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."* Blessed are those children, who, like their Saviour, advance in wisdom as in stature, and "in favor with God and man." Let young persons in general remember, as they are growing up, that all the early opportunities of instruction which they have enjoyed, especially such as have been brought up under the inspection of pious parents, will greatly aggravate their guilt, if they continue to despise them. For this reason some, I wish I could not say many, are old in sin, when they are but young in years. Wherefore, without further delay, betake yourselves to God in Christ; learn and love your Redeemer's name, and let the life that you live in the flesh, be a life of faith on the Son of God and only Saviour of the world. Your early entrance on a religious life will make you regular, established, useful, fruitful Christians. If you are to continue long in the world, it will greatly contribute to the sweetness and serenity of life; and if it be the will of God that you should die soon, it will make you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. There is something very terrible in the death (often the unex-

* Mark x. 14.

pected death) of young persons, in the bloom or middle of life, plunged in sensuality, inflamed with lust, and bent on sin of every kind. But, blessed be God, there are also some agreeable instances of young saints quickly ripened by divine grace, thoroughly mellowed by early affliction, resigning the world, not with submission only, but pleasure, and taking wing to a land of rest and peace, where “the inhabitants shall not say, I am sick;” and “the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.”*

4. I must now preach the gospel to those who are Old, who having gone through many vicissitudes, are perhaps tottering upon the brink of the grave, and drawing near to “the house appointed for all living.” And I do it because my office obliges me to preach the gospel to every creature. There is but little pleasure in addressing such, because there is but little hope of success. May I not suppose, that some one, or more, may be led to peruse this discourse, who have many years resisted the calls of the gospel, and have been long accustomed to do evil. What cause have you to admire the mercy of God, that you are not now “in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone for evermore?” Have you not followed many of your equals in age to the church-yard, and committed their bodies to the dust? What preparation have you made, in consequence of the reprieve allowed you, and the admonitions given you? Hear then, once more, the joyful sound: Believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may have life through his name. Fly to his blood, that you may obtain the forgiveness of your sins, and an inheritance among them who are sanctified. He, and none else, is able to deliver you. Cry to him, that he may breathe upon the dry bones, and they shall live. Though you are hardened in profanity, though you are besotted in sensuality, though earthly-mindedness has overspread you like a leprosy, his right-hand and his holy arm will get him the victory. He is able to create you anew unto good works; and, as you are already monuments of his patience and forbearance, to make you to eternity the happy monuments of his sovereign

* If. xxxiii. 24.

and almighty grace. Is there now any remaining objection? Is there yet any room for farther delay? Hath not time shed its hoary hairs upon your heads, and drawn its furrows upon your brows? Make haste then, and fly for your lives, lest you lie down in sorrow, and make your bed in hell.

5. Let me preach the gospel to the Self-righteous. By the self-righteous, I mean those who trust in an outward, lifeless form of duties, in a character formed upon worldly prudence, and a few of the most common offices of civility between man and man; especially those, if any such have persisted in reading this discourse to the close, who despise the doctrines of the grace of God. Do any of you lean to the fashionable scheme of irreligious, pretended morality; and when you are at liberty, treat the doctrine of free grace, and of Christ's righteousness and merit, with contempt and scorn. As the full soul lotheth the honeycomb, so the self-righteous soul spurns at the riches of divine mercy, and likes not the incessant repetition of the name of Christ. Your guilt is of the darkest and deepest dye. Your danger it is impossible to conceive or express. What views have you in drawing near to a holy God in solemn worship? Or what meeting do you expect with God, when he sitteth upon the throne of his holiness in the day of judgment? Do you ever, though in the slightest manner, make conscience of the duty of self-examination? May I not have some hold of you by that quarter? What satisfaction have you in your own hearts? Dare you tell us now what passes there? O the power of self-deceit! You would be covered with confusion, did but the world know the foul pollution that lodges within you: how much less shall you be able to stand, the strict and impartial judgment of the great Searcher of hearts?

Do but open the book of God, and what page will not condemn you? This sentence stands uncanceled against you, "Cursed is every one, that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. Out of your own mouths will you be judged, ye wicked servants. Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law, dishonorest thou God?"

Bring forth your boasted morality, and let it be put to the trial. Will you, or dare you say, "I have loved the Lord with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength?" Will you say, I have loved his worship, and served him in public, in my family, and in secret, and I hope he will accept of it? I think I am authorised to answer in his name, "Was it worshipping me to be singing psalms with your mouths, and not once remembering their meaning? to be thinking of an hundred vain things when you were in the house of God? To be praising without thankfulness, confessing without sorrow, and asking blessings without desiring them; and to be more attentive to the faces and dresses of others around you, than to the frame of your own hearts? Was it hearing my word, to be criticising the stile and manner of the speaker, and laying hold, with the utmost eagerness, of every improper motion or ill-chosen expression, as a fund of entertainment for yourselves and your companions over your cups and bowls? Or do you call your careless, hasty, drowsy prayers, with long intermissions, worshipping me in secret?"

But perhaps you will rather choose to trust to the duties of the second table, and what you owe to your neighbor. Perhaps you will say, I have been honest in all my dealings, and never wronged any man: nay, I have been kind and charitable, have dealt my bread to the hungry, and supplied the wants of the afflicted and poor. I answer, in the name of God, "Many have been your defects even in these duties; but supposing it to be so, you have not feared me. It might be from pride, from fear of censure, from prudence; but it was not in obedience to me, for I was not in all your thoughts. Was it your duty to your neighbour, to make a mock at his sins, to lead him into intemperance, to despise him in your hearts, and ridicule him in your conversation?" In one word, do but examine all your "righteousnesses," they will "be found as filthy rags before God." Trust not in such a "refuge of lies.—The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering

“narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.”* Believe it, there is no salvation in any other than in Christ. His atoning blood will reconcile you to God: his grace and love will captivate your souls: his holy and blessed Spirit will write his laws in your hearts. Believe in him, and you will be more holy than ever, and yet stand astonished at your profane and blind pride and vanity. He will create in you a clean heart, and you will then blush at the thoughts of your remaining pollution. You will apply yourselves to his service with zeal and diligence, and yet still say you are unprofitable servants. One view of the cross of Christ will make sin more odious than a thousand fine descriptions of the beauty of virtue, which commonly serve only to nourish and fortify the pride of man. If ever you desire to see the face of God in mercy, or to dwell in his presence, believe in Christ, for there is no other way to the Father.

6. In the last place, suffer me to preach the gospel to the Chief of sinners. It is the glory of our Redeemer, that he saves “to the uttermost all that come to God by him.” The dignity of his person, the greatness of his sufferings, and the infinite value of his atonement founded on both, makes him “mighty to save.” Let such sinners attend to this, who are without excuse, whose hearts have been a sink of the greatest impurity, whose lives are stained with the foulest and grossest crimes, whose sins have been numerous and heinous, and scandalous; who have no plea to offer, but are sensible that they have justly merited the wrath of God in its utmost rigor. Let such attend to this, as are trembling at the thoughts of a righteous judgment, and saying, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.—Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Behold, I bring you good tidings of mercy unmerited, pardon unsolicited, a full and free remission of all your sins. “I have blotted out thine iniquities as a cloud, and as a thick cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.” Receive this testimony, and “set to your seal that God is true.”

* If. xxviii. 20.

Think not to do injury to the grace of God, by weaving a self-righteous cobweb, and refusing to believe, till you have laid down some rules of a new life, and effected some partial reformation, as if you would first save yourselves, that you may be fit for salvation by Christ. These hopes will soon be dashed in pieces. Faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ is the sinner's only plea. The more vile you are in your own apprehension, the more need you have "to put on Christ." The subsequent change of heart and practice must be the effect of his power, is a part of his purchase, and ought to be received as his gracious gift. And I will venture to foretel, that you will make the greater progress in true holiness, the less you are disposed to boast of, or to trust in it.

This, I apprehend, is the gospel itself, filed in scripture, with the highest propriety, the "gospel of the grace of God." "Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If you will rely on him for salvation, he will shed abroad the love of God in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, which will be a powerful and operative principle of new obedience. I beseech you therefore, in the most earnest manner, not to reject the counsel of God against yourselves. Nothing can be more liberal, or more gracious, than the offer of the gospel: "I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." There is no sin of so deep a dye, or so infectious a stain, but the blood of Christ is sufficient to wash it out. There is not any slave of Satan so loaded with chains, but he is able to set him free. If you perish, it is of yourselves. I have given you warning, from a sincere and ardent concern for your everlasting interest; and may God himself, for Christ's sake, by his Holy Spirit, effectually persuade you to comply with it.

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF SALVATION THROUGH
CHRIST.

A
SERMON,

*Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating
Christian Knowledge, in the High Church of Edin-
burgh, on Monday, January 2, 1758.*

A C T S, 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.*

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 present meeting, than the absolute necessity of salvation 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 discredit the cause in the eye of every sober judge.* And indeed the

* 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

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 endeavor 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 Redeemer when he died upon 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 some how 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

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.

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 endeavor 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, "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, "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."†

* Gen. vi. 5.

† Gen. viii. 21.

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 express 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 labored illustration of the guilt and apostacy of all mankind; towards the conclusion of which he thus expresses himself: "For we 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 doth good, no not one."*—And a little after, "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."† To this I shall only add one passage from the same apostle: "Among whom also we 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 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, "For it is not possible that the

* Rom. iii. 9—12.

† Rom. iii. 19.

‡ Eph. ii. 2.

“ blood of bulls and of goats shall 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 “ the desire of all nations.”†

And in the New Testament, at his conception it is said, “ 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, “ 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 counter-part, and often expressly affirmed. Thus the apostle John represents our Saviour himself as teaching, “ 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: “ Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, 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, “ That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the common-wealth of

* Heb. x. 10. † Hag. ii. 6. ‡ Matt. i. 21. || John i. 29.

* John iii. 16. † Mark. xvi. 15, 16.

“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 uninstituted 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 fires upon fabulous deities, or superstitious practices of human invention. But I did not chuse 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 object of the resentment of infidels.† At the same time, many pre-

* Eph ii. 12.

† 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.

tended Christians have, by design or inadvertance, spoke 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, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me."* And the second, which forbids uninituted worship, hath this strong sanction, "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 Paul, this is the leading part or ground-work of the whole, "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.‡—And changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like a 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, "And thou shalt

* Exod. xx. 3. † Exod. xx. 5. ‡ Rom. i. 21. || Ibid. ver. 23.

“ 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 be-
fore the Lord, to enter into his covenant, it is said,
“ 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 turn-
“ eth away this day from the Lord our-God, to go and
“ serve the gods of these 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 chil-
dren of Israel: “ 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 se-
“ parateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in
“ his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his ini-
“ quity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to en-
“ quire 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, em-
bracing the gospel of Christ, and continuing stedfast in
the faith, is required as absolutely necessary to salvation;
“ He that believeth on the Son, hath' everlasting life; and
“ he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but

* Deut. xxviii. 14. † Deut. xxix. 16, 17, 18. ‡ Ezek. xiv, 6, 7, 8.

“the wrath of God abideth on him.”* The importance of holding the truth without mixture, is plainly declared in the following passage: “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 way, 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, unfocial spirit of the Jewish first, and afterwards of the Christian religion? And how often are these contrasted with the mild and afflicting temper of the Heathen worshippers? Among them is implied no absurdity, that different nations should have different gods, and different forms of worship; nay, they often intermixed, compounded, and mutually adopted each others 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, dishonorable to God, and unprofitable to men. This has been the case in every step of its progress, from its first 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,

* John iii. 36.

† James v. 19, 20.

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. This 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 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.† 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.‡ 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,

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

† See Deut. xxix. 18, 19. Numb. xxv. 1, 2. ‡ See John viii.

31, 32. Id. xvii. 17. 2 John ver. 4. Col. i. 5, 6.

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, "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, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, 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

* John xiv. 6. † 1 Cor. x. 20.

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 as 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 directly 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 writing 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, "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.* 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, "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment 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: "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."||

* Rom. iii. 20. † Ib. ver. 24, 25. ‡ Chap. v. 18.

|| Phil. iii. 8, 9. 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: "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, "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 is a much more plausible plea of merit in favor of works of obedience to the moral, than the ceremonial law; the first are at least as much excluded as the last by the apostle's reasoning.‡

* Rom. iii. 27, 28. † Rom. iv. 4, 5.

‡ 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 of the age, to give large encomiums upon charity, when the design is to level truth and falshood; 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 favorable judgment of the opinions of

Thus I have endeavored 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

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 denominated, that a favorable judgment of errors fundamental, or defective 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 judgment; 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 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 things really indifferent in their nature. (See the xivth and xvth 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 of the apostles, on the hatefulneis 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 bid-
deth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."

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, 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, "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."† 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

* Rom. iv. 3.

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

neglect of God: "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.* 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: "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

Acts xiv. 17.

† Rom. i. 19, 20.

‡ Rom. ii. 12.

shew at great length : at present I content myself with the few following reflections. 1st, 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 endeavored 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 : “ His name shall endure forever : his name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in him ; and 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 forever ; 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

* Psal. lxxii. 17, 18, 19. † See an instance of the first of these, Eph. iii. 17. and of the last, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

in the Scripture-language on this subject, when used by some persons agreeably 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, is a tacit confession and acknowledgment of this truth.

But, besides the mercy of God to the world in general in sending his Son to redeem us who were sold 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: "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 com-

* Acts xxviii. 28.

† 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, 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

ing 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 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 consi-

much physical or natural necessity as any other. And the distinction thus explained, or perverted, is utterly useless, when applied to morals.

derations? 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?*

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 in 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 inform that he had granted a free pardon to some, and left the rest to suffer the just punishment of their crime; 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

* It 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 disposed to lessen the glory of our Redeemer's person; least most to, or judge most favorably of the Socinian or Arian hypothesis.

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 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, "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 judgments, 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

* Rom. xi. 32, 33.

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

1st 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 men "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 endeavor 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 beneficence 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 endeavors 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, suppo-

ing 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 judgment ; 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 lives 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 endeavor 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 represented 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 sinners, 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 neighbor, 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 the night with 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 favored 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 judgment 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 their 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 improper, 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 acknowledgment 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 favor, 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 judgment. Oh! 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-abhorrence 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 judgment? 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 absolutely 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 shown 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 judgment. 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? "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."*

* Psal. ii. 10, 11, 12.

THE TRIAL of RELIGIOUS TRUTH BY ITS
MORAL INFLUENCE.

A

S E R M O N,

*Preached at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and
Ayr, October 9th, 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, what-

ver 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 show, 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 show, 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 a 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 suitable 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 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, "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?"* It is true, in

* John vi. 30.

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, "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, "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, "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 judgment 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 its favor, 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 is this, though deserving particular

* John xiv. 11. † John xv. 24. ‡ John iii. 2.

mention, is included in, or is but a part and branch of the other. To pass a judgment 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, 1st, Its certainty. 2dly, 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 his being, that the glory of God chiefly consists, but in his immaculate holiness and spotless purity. Each part of the divine character, in-

deed, 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 endeavoring to discover, to communicate, or to 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.* But it is of importance in the present argument to observe, that every one is able to pass a far surer judgment on the moral character of another, than his own. The pollution of the heart brings a corrupt bias on the judgment, 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 characters 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 honor 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

* Rom. i. 20.—ii. 14.

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 itself 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 ability.

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 unfavorable 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, “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, “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 ré-

* 1 Cor. i. 26.—29.

† Luke x. 21.

ligion, 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 enquiry. All color 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, “ He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in “ himself.”* This is common to all real believers of

* 1 John v. 9.

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, "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 implied that those doctrines, or that those other pressing doctrines and those practices, which are supposed 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 determines the judgment. Let it be admitted, that

* Matt. xvi. 17.

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 away 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 judgment, upon the very rule which I have endeavored to show 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 acted 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 comparison faithfully made between the several motives of choice in different classes, there would be no great cause of triumph. When we consider how unfit the plurality of mankind are to judge in an intricate debate, darkened, perhaps, by the art and subtilty of those who handle it, we shall find they are little, if at all, to blame. In one view, no doubt, they may be said to be acted by implicit faith, but in truth, and at bottom, they are following the wisest and most salutary of all moral maxims.

A survey of the history, either of religion in general, or of the Christian religion in particular, would set this mat-

ter in the clearest light. But little of this kind can come within the limits of a single discourse. I shall not therefore stay to mention the retired manner of life, and pretended sanctity of the inventors of the heathen idolatry, though it may be applied to this subject; and would serve to shew the universal sense, and general expectation of mankind. There is a saying of an eminent and violent enemy of the Christian faith, "That gravity is of the very essence of imposture." This is nothing else but a perverted view, and malicious representation of the general truth, that apparent sanctity is necessary to establish any sacred authority. But is there any thing more unquestionable, or that hath been more frequently observed, than that the victory of truth over error, in the first ages of Christianity, was much more owing to the shining piety of the primitive Christians in general, together with the patience and constancy of the martyrs, than to any other means. Reason 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 foever. 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 enquiry, and appear with increasing evidence. Different parties and denominations prevail in different places: and wherever any party or denomination greatly prevails, the effect 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 opposed 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 endeavor 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 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 judgment of the people.

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 examples seem to stand in opposition one to another, and to lead to different conclusions, it is not from one or two that a judgment 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 therefore proper to preserve or-

* 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 imposers.

dinary 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 very 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 commerce 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 disclaim 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 unto the destructive path 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 hath 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.*

* I am sensible it is often pretended, that several infidels have been men of unblemished morals. Collins was a good man, says some, and Shaftesbury was yet a better man. Perhaps, these individuals might not be chargeable with the most open dissolution, 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 reprehend others, with insincere, hypocritical, and faint-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.

In the 2d place, since not only religion is 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 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 enquiry 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 to 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 villify 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, reproving, 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 effect 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. "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 3d 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 mi-

* 2 Cor. v. 14.

nisters 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 judgment 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 as 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 blameworthy, 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 judgment on the other. It hath been sometimes observed, that the multitude or 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 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 subject) 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, endeavor to "make our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."*

In the 4th 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 enquire, whether ministers are not, in a good measure, chargeable with the low state to which religion is at present reduced. May I not say without offence, that an eminent, 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 me-

* Matt. v. 16.

lancholy 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 other 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 shows 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 neighbor 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 show it to be less criminal than the other. We are not yet so much hardened in this sin as many in our neighbor 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 so heavy 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 not 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 judgment, 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 enquiry, a thing excellent in itself, no regular exercise of the right of private judgment 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 for 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 fashion? Should we be told by an historian of credit, 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 judgment of charity, which be-

lieveth 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 fairly 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 endeavor 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 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 these 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 cloathing 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 south, shall meet, and join in their Creator 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, “ And there shall in no wise enter into it
“ any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abo-
“ mination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written
“ in the Lamb’s book of life.”*

* Rev. xxi. 27.

The CHARGE of SEDITION and FACTION against good MEN, especially faithful MINISTERS, considered and accounted for.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached in the Abbey Church of Paisley, on Thursday, September 7th, 1758, at the Ordination of Mr. ARCHIBALD DAVIDSON, as one of the Ministers of that Church. To which is subjoined, the charge to the Minister, and the Exhortation to the People. Published at the desire of those who heard it.



A C T S xvii. 6. last clause.

These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.

MY BRETHREN,

YOU have had, of late, frequent opportunities of hearing discourses on the ministerial character and office. These subjects, indeed, have, on occasions of this and a similar nature, been so often and so well handled, that it is hard to say any thing on them, which shall not be either bare repetition, or an alteration very much for the worse. I have therefore made choice at this time of a subject somewhat different, but the usefulness of which, both to ministers and people may be easily discerned.

A great part of the sacred volume consists of history. And, as the knowledge of past events, and the history of mankind in general, is an improving study; so there is no object of study more pleasant or more profitable, than that extensive view of the great plan of Providence which

is exhibited to us in the word of God. There we have access to observe the power, the wisdom, and the grace of the various revelations of the divine will, given in successive ages, their correspondence one to another, and how well each is suited to the season, and other circumstances of its discovery. Above all, it is useful and delightful to observe, the perfect union and harmony of the whole, and the several striking and distinguishing characters that are to be found on all the works of the one, eternal and unchangeable God.

This uniformity is in nothing more remarkable, than in the sufferings of good men, and their causes. True religion being the same in substance in every age, we may expect to find a very strong likeness in all the real servants of God, however distant the periods in which they make their appearance. A conformity of state also may be expected, as well as a similarity of character. They have the same end in view, they tread in the same path, and therefore must meet with resistance from the same enemies. There was from the beginning, and there will be to the end of the world, a strife and conflict between the righteous and the wicked, between "the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent." And, in particular, it is natural to suppose, that slander and calumny will be always one of the weapons used by the enemies of the truth. We have no reason then to be surprised, that every good man should have occasion to say with the Psalmist David, and with a greater than he, the Son of David, "They laid to my charge things that I knew not."

This was the case with the apostle Paul and his companion, in the passage of history of which my text is a part. But the nature of the accusation here brought against them seems to be singular, and to merit particular attention. They were the servants and the ministers of the Prince of peace. Their office was to preach and publish the gospel of peace. Their doctrine was full of meekness and love. They discovered the love of God to men; and, after the example of their master, they charged men to love one another. They were mean in their outward appearance, and neither possessed, nor claimed

any earthly dominion. In one word, they had nothing about them that one would think could give jealousy to the civil power, that could seem formidable or dangerous to any character or class of men. Yet here they are charged as seditious, as disturbers to the public peace, as enemies to the government. "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.—These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, That there is another king, one Jesus." What sort of an accusation is this? not only false but improbable. Does not the arch-enemy, the accuser of the brethren, seem to have failed in his usual skill? Is there the least prospect of success in so groundless a charge?

But what shall we say, if, upon an accurate examination it be found, that the same charge hath been brought against the servants of God in every age? That none hath been advanced with greater boldness, and none with greater success? Nay, perhaps, that it is the single standing charge, from which their enemies have never departed since the beginning of the world, and which, of all others, hath been most readily and most universally believed. In other instances, the reproaches thrown upon the children of God have been opposite, and mutually destructive of each other. Christ himself, when his zeal in his Father's business made him forget to eat bread, was said to be beside himself, and mad. At other times he was called a cunning deceiver and master of the curious arts. But in this, his enemies, and those of his people, have never varied. And their success has been equal to their malice. They crucified him as an enemy to Cæsar, with the title of usurpation written over him; and they have compelled all his disciples after him, to bear his cross, and to groan under the weight of the same unjust and slanderous charge.

There are few subjects more worthy of the serious attention of those who firmly believe the word of God. None which will afford greater occasion to adore the mysterious depth of divine Providence, or furnish more instructive lessons to such as desire to hold on with steadiness in the paths of true religion. Above all, this subject may be

useful to ministers of the gospel. It will contribute to ascertain the character which they ought to bear; to direct them in their duty; to prepare them for, and fortify them against the trials which it is impossible they can avoid.

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

I. By a short historical deduction, chiefly from the holy Scriptures, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.

II. To enquire, and endeavor to point out, what it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

In the last place, To make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I return to the first of these, viz.

I. By a short historical deduction, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.—It would not be difficult to point out something of this spirit prevailing in the world, from the life of almost every good man, whose name stands upon record, however short and general the account be, that is given of many of them in Scripture. But, as much of what might properly enough fall under this head, will be necessary in the illustration of the second; to prevent confusion and repetition, I shall content myself with some leading instances, in very different ages, from the earliest to the latest times.

The first I shall mention is, a passage as extraordinary in its nature, and as singular in its circumstances, as any that history affords. It is the meeting of Ahab and Elijah, in the time of a great famine in the land of Israel. Ahab, that profane prince, had by his apostacy and idolatry, brought down the judgment of a righteous God, both on his kingdom and on his house. We

are told, "That he did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him."* He had persecuted the worshippers of the true God with unrelenting violence; and, as it was natural to expect, he hated with uncommon rancor, and distinguished by uncommon severity, all the prophets who continued stedfast in the cause of truth. As many of them as he could lay hold of, he had put to death. He had hunted for Elijah, not only through all the kingdom of Israel, but through the neighboring nations, as we find related by Obadiah his principal servant, "As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation that they found thee not."† After all this severity on his part, when Elijah, by the command of God went out to meet him, see the form of his salutation; "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"‡ To this the prophet makes the following strong and just reply, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, have troubled Israel, in that thou hast forsaken the commandments of the Lord; and thou hast followed Baalim."

Another instance similar to the former may be found in Jehoshaphat's and Ahab's consultation before going out to battle. "And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man (Micaiah the son of Imlah) by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."|| Here, you see, Micaiah was the object of hatred and aversion, because he denounced the judgment of God against the king's wickedness. That vengeance which he himself not only merited but solicited by his crimes, was attributed to malice in the prophet.

* 1 Kings xvi. 33.

† 1 Kings xviii. 10.

‡ *Ibid.*, ver. 17.

|| 1 Kings xxii. 7, 8.

See an instance of a general accusation of this kind against all the worshippers of the true God, by Haman in the book of Esther. “And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king’s laws; therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them.”*

The prophet Jeremiah met with the same treatment at different times. Neither prince, nor priests, nor prophets, were able to bear without resentment, the threatenings which he denounced in the name of God. “Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets, and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant, and all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.†— Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.”‡ We find him afterwards expressly accused of treachery on the same account. “And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans.”||

The prophet Amos is another instance, precisely parallel to the last. Because of his fidelity to God, he was invidiously represented as an enemy to the king. “Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.”*

* Esther iii. 8. † Jer. xxvi. 8, 9. ‡ Ibid. ver. 11.

|| Jer. xxxvii. 13. See also chap. xxxviii. 4. * Amos vii. 10.

Our blessed Lord and Saviour fell under the same accusation. However plain and artless his carriage, he is called a deceiver of the people. "There was much murmuring among the people concerning him, for some said, he is a good man; others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people."* His enemies endeavored to embroil him with the civil government by this insidious question, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?" And that which brought him at last to the cross was the same pretended crime. "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar."†

I shall close this view of the Scripture history, with the passage of which my text is a part. The whole crime of the apostle Paul, and his companion, was preaching the doctrine of the cross of Christ, his great and darling theme. We are told, he "opened" and "alleged, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead." Then the Jews, to whom this doctrine always was a stumbling-block, were "moved with envy," and endeavored to inflame the resentment of the idolatrous multitude: they took for their associates the most wicked and profligate, "Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort:" They "set all the city in an uproar:" And as, no doubt, the friends of Paul and Silas would endeavor to protect them from the injurious assault, their enemies very gravely charge them as the authors of the confusion, both there and elsewhere, "They that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also."

Having produced these instances from the holy Scriptures, which are liable to no exception, I shall say but little on the subsequent periods of the church. Only in general, the same spirit will be found to have prevailed in every age. Whoever will take the pains to look into the history of the church before the reformation, cannot fail to observe, that when any one, either among the clergy or laity, was bold enough to reprove the errors in doctrine,

* John vii. 12.

† John xix. 12.

or the ambition, luxury, and worldly lives of his cotemporaries, he was immediately branded as a factious and disorderly person, and often severely punished as an enemy to the peace of the church.

That this was the case with the first reformers, both at home and abroad, is too well known to need any proof. And we have had still more recent examples of it in both parts of the united kingdom. The noble struggle which many in England made, about an hundred years ago, for their liberties sacred and civil, still bears the name of the grand rebellion. And it is remarkable, that, however just a title they had to stand up for their rights as men and Christians, yet their doing so at that time, was in a great measure owing to the fury and violence of their enemies, who were, in every respect, the aggressors. A very judicious historian says on this subject, "That which, upon the whole, was the great cause of the parliament's strength and the king's ruin, was, that the debauched rabble through the land, took all that were called Puritans for their enemies; so that if a man did but pray in his family, or were but heard repeat a sermon, or sing a psalm, they presently cried out, Rebels, roundheads, and all their money and goods that were portable, proved guilty, how innocent soever they were themselves. This it was that filled the armies and garrisons of the parliament with sober pious men. Thousands had no mind to meddle with the wars, but greatly desired to live peaceably at home, when the rage of soldiers and drunkards would not suffer them."*

And in Scotland, after the restoration, though there was no struggle for civil liberty, all who chose to obey God rather than man, either in the substance or circumstances of religious duties, were charged with treason, and suffered as rebels. They were expelled from the church; yet censured as schismatics. They were harrassed, fined and imprisoned, when living in peace, without any fault but "concerning the law of their God;" and yet complained of as troublesome. They were banished, excommunicated

* Calamy's Life of Baxter, Chap. IV.

ted, and denied the common benefits of life; and yet, when the extreme rigor of their oppressors compelled them to take up arms in self-defence, they were condemned in form of law for resisting that government which had denied them its protection.

I forbear to add any more particular examples; but from the deduction above given, it will plainly appear, that worldly men have been always disposed, first to oppress the children of God, and then to complain of injury from them, that by slander they might vindicate their oppression. Their slander too, hath still run in the same strain; troublers of Israel, deceivers of the people, enemies to Cæsar, and turners of the world upside down, have been the opprobrious titles generally given to the most upright and most faithful men, in every age and country.

We proceed now,

II. In the second place, To enquire, what it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

That there must be something of this kind is very evident. So uniform an effect, could not take place without an adequate cause. And, to a serious and attentive observer, I am persuaded it is not difficult to discern. The general cause of this effect is, that, in an equivocal sense, the charge is just. True religion does, indeed, give trouble and uneasiness to wicked men, while they continue such; and it cannot be supposed, but they will deeply resent it. In order to illustrate this a little more fully, I beg your attention to the three following observations.

I. The example of the servants of God, is a continual and sensible reproach, to the contrary conduct of the men of the world. Nothing can preserve peace to any man, but some measure of self-satisfaction. As a deceived heart turns the wicked aside, so the continuance of self-deceit is necessary to his tasting those pleasures of sin in which his mistaken happiness is placed. To reproach his conduct, therefore, is to disturb his dream, and to wound his peace, And as pride, however finely disguised, has the dominion in every unrenewed heart, how offensive must every spe-

cies of reproof be, to men of this character? Now, is not the example of every good man, a severe and sensible, though silent, reproof to the wicked? With whatever specious arguments men may sometimes plead for sin, with whatever false pretences they may often excuse and palliate it to their own minds, when it is brought into one view with true religion, it is not able to bear the comparison. The example of good men to the wicked is, like the sun upon a weak eye, distressing and painful. It is excellent in itself, but it is offensive to them. If I may speak so, it flashes light upon the conscience, rouses it from a state of insensible security, points its arrows, and sharpens its sting. What else was it that produced the first act of violence that stands upon record, the murder of Abel by his brother Cain? Of this the apostle John speaks in the following terms, "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

And, as every worldly man's own conscience is thus made troublesome to him by the example of the children of God: so it tends to set sinners at variance with one another, and exposes the conduct of each to the censure of the rest. Sin, however universally practised, is yet generally shameful. Conscience though bribed, and comparatively blind in a man's own case, is often just and impartial, at least under far less bias, in the case of others. It is in this way, and in this way alone, that the public honor and credit of religion is preserved, amidst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. Must not then, the example of a strict and conscientious person, set in the strongest light the faults of those who act a contrary part, so often as they happen to fall under observation together. Nay, does it not open the eyes of the world upon many lesser blemishes which would otherways escape its notice? The degree of shame that attends any practice, is always in proportion to the sense which the bulk of mankind have of the evil of it. And this sense cannot, by any means, be more strengthened, than by an example of what is good; as deformity never appears so shocking as when

compared with perfect beauty. Thus, a truly pious man is, by every instance of his visible conduct, exposing to reproach some one or other, and by consequence provoking their resentment.

It is for this reason that men discover such a proneness to disparage every profession of piety superior to their own. How common is it to ascribe every such appearance to weakness or hypocrisy. In the generality of wicked men this is not so properly malice as self-defence. If they should allow the excellence of such a character, it would be condemning themselves out of their own mouths. Their inward reflection, in all probability, is perfectly similar to that of the Pharisees, when Christ asked them, Whether the baptism of John was from heaven, or of men? "They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven, he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?" In the same manner, should any confess the excellence of a conduct opposite to their own, it would be impossible to avoid saying to them, Why do ye then so sin against light?

Every one will see, that this must necessarily hold most strongly in the case of those whose office, or whose work, is of a public nature. They are like a city set on an hill. As their character is most conspicuous, it is, by necessary consequence, most useful to the good, and most provoking to the wicked. Faithful ministers of Christ, for instance, are the lights of the world, and, by their piety and diligence, are a standing reproach to the world lying in wickedness. But, in a particular manner, they must be the objects of the hatred and resentment of those of their own order, who will not follow their steps. This is an evident consequence of the principle above laid down. As their character suffers most by the comparison, their passions must necessarily be most inflamed. Let a minister of Christ be ever so guarded in his speech, ever so inoffensive in his carriage, ever so distant in reality from injuring others; if he is more frequent or more affectionate in preaching, if he is more assiduous in the duties of his function, this must naturally excite the resentment of the

lazy, slothful part of his profession. This of itself, is injury enough to those who love their worldly ease, and have more pleasure in the possession of their benefice, than the exercise of their office. Is this surprizing? Not in the least. His conduct does indeed molest their quiet: it either forces them to greater diligence, or holds up their real character to light, and exposes them to contempt and scorn.

In order at once to confirm and illustrate this truth, be pleased, my brethren, to observe, that the force and malignity of envy in defaming of characters, is always in proportion to the nearness of the person to whom the character belongs. Distance, either of time or place, greatly abates, if not wholly extinguishes it. Suppose the character of a person drawn, who lived many ages ago, or even at present in a very distant country; suppose him represented as eminent in virtue of every kind, as remarkably diligent, as indefatigably active in doing good; there are few who shew any disposition to call in question the fact, or impute it to sinister motives. But let the same be the apparent character of any man among his contemporaries, and how many are immediately up in arms against him? How implicitly do they believe, and with what pleasure do they spread every idle calumny to his prejudice? How is his piety immediately converted into hypocrisy, his zeal into faction and ill nature, his fervor and diligence into affectation and love of popularity; and, in a word, every valuable quality into that vice, by which it is most commonly or most artfully counterfeited.

That this difference of judgment is entirely owing to the reason I have assigned, will further appear, if you consider, that so soon as a connexion of the same nature happens, by any accidental circumstance to be established, the same invidious resentment immediately takes place against the most distant characters. What inveterate prejudice do infidels generally shew, against the characters of the Scripture saints, and those of the fathers of the Christian church, because the establishment of such characters does necessarily and manifestly infer the overthrow of the cause in which they are embarked. In the mean time, the wise

men of the heathen nations are suffered to possess, without contradiction, all the reputation which their countrymen in after-ages have thought fit to bestow upon them. Nay, sometimes to serve a certain purpose, their character is increased and magnified beyond all reasonable bounds. What pains have been taken by those Christians, who patronize the modern inventions and improvements in theology, to undermine the characters of the most eminent champions of the ancient faith? What would some persons teach us to believe of Athanasius and Augustine in earlier, Calvin, Luther and Melancthon in later times? Not that we have not well attested evidence of their piety and integrity, but that, being of different sentiments from their accusers, the excellence of their character is too good a support to their cause.*

2. Another reason why the servants of God are represented as troublesome is, because they will not, and dare not comply with the sinful commandments of men. In matters merely civil, good men are the most regular citizens and the most obedient subjects. But, as they have a Master in heaven, no earthly power can constrain them

* I take the opportunity here to add, That the principle above laid down, will plainly account for the great and unassaulted reputation, which the Monks and retired devotees so long enjoyed in popish times, It was their reputation, indeed, which upheld for so long a period, that immense load of idolatrous superstition, the Romish religion; and it was not lost, till they were grossly corrupted, and convents were become receptacles of the most shameful impurity and lust. These persons were separated from the world. No frequent, and few near comparisons, could be made between them and others. Nay, their character was voluntary, and peculiar to themselves, containing no pretence of an obligation upon all others to imitate it; and therefore, they were suffered to live unenvied. But if any persons of piety towards God, and fidelity to their Master's cause, live in the world, and refuse to be conformed to it, they must expect the same treatment that he met with. This he hath told them himself, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*—The servant is not greater than the Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."†

* John xv. 18.

† Verse 20.

to deny his name or desert his cause. The reply of Peter and John to the Jewish rulers when they were commanded "Not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus," was in the following terms, "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."* With what invincible constancy and resolution did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? The case of Daniel was perfectly similar, whom even the king's commandment could not restrain from prayer to God.

When good men are unhappily brought into these circumstances, their conduct is an apparent contradiction to authority. How ready are lordly and oppressive tyrants to style it obstinacy and pride? And when are there wanting slavish and submissive flatterers near every inferior tribunal, to aggravate the crime, and to cry, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend?" It is not to be imagined, indeed, but such as are strangers to true religion, must be greatly provoked at those who will not comply implicitly with their commands. There is a remarkable passage in a letter of Pliny the younger, to the emperor Trajan, which plainly points out the sentiments entertained by many on this subject. He was a man in other matters abundantly humane, and yet hear his own account of his treatment of the Christians when brought to his tribunal. "I asked them if they were Christians; if they confessed, I asked them again threatening punishment. If they persisted, I commanded them to be executed; for I did not at all doubt but, whatever their confession was, their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished."

There is a love of dominion natural to all men, which is under no controul or restraint in those who are void of religion. This must naturally dispose them to carry on their schemes, and to insist on having them universally complied with. It frets and provokes them, therefore, to find any who will not be subservient to their pleasures. A refusal to obey, on a principle of conscience, is expressly setting bounds to their authority, and saying, Hi-

* Acts iv. 19.

therto shalt thou go, but no further. How few are able to bear this with patience, the history of the world in every age is one continued proof.

Such refusals also, do always reflect some dishonor upon the measures to which they stand in opposition. Whatever any person refuses to do, he, as far as in him lies, represents as wrong and sinful; and, in some respects, unworthy or unfit to be done. Thus it comes to be considered not only as withdrawing his own allegiance, but as corrupting and seducing others. And no doubt, it tends to draw the attention of the world to the disputed command, and makes some, perhaps, sift and examine what they had before blindly gone into without suspicion. Hence it naturally follows, that whenever such interference happens between human and divine authority, good men must be considered as disorderly and troublesome; and those of them of all others most troublesome, who with the greatest constancy adhere to their duty, or who, with the greatest honesty and boldness, resist and oppose corrupt measures.

It is less surprising to find instances of this between heathen and Christian, between the professing servants and open enemies of the true God. But it is astonishing to think, how often the same thing has happened between Christian and Christian, who ought to have been better acquainted with the rights of conscience, the measures of submission, and the duty of forbearance. Not only all the persecutions, but many, if not most, of the schisms and divisions that have fallen out in the Christian church, have arisen from the rigorous impositions of usurped authority. Unjust authority is the very essence of popery. The church of Rome has expressly claimed a power of making laws to bind the conscience, distinct from the laws of God; and severely punishes all who call this authority in question. Nor hath this been confined to them: protestant churches, though their separation is founded upon the very contrary principle, have yet often in practice acted in the same arbitrary manner. They insist upon obedience to all their appointments, however sinful in the judgment of the subject: and, as a good man will not com-

ply in such cases, how often doth it happen, that, after they have expelled him from their society, stript him of his office, and robbed him of his maintenance, they also cast out his name as evil, loudly charge him as seditious and troublesome, and the author of all that confusion which their own tyranny occasions.

3. One other reason why the servants of God are accused as troublesome, is, because they are, in many instances, obliged, to bear testimony against the sins of others, and openly to reprove them. Reproof is plainly, of all others, the greatest offence and provocation of the proud, and draws down their heaviest resentment: and yet it is often unavoidable. There are some cases in which every Christian without exception, must feel the constraint of this divine law. "Thou shalt in any wise re-buke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him."* Some sins are so flagrant in their nature that, even to witness them with silence, would imply some participation of the guilt. In such cases it is the glory of the poorest and meanest servant of God, to resent the dishonor that is done to his name, and reprove the most exalted sinner.

But this duty, and the odium arising from it, falls most frequently to the share of the prophets and ministers of God, who have received a commission to speak in his name and to plead his cause. The faithful discharge of their duty, includes in it plainness and boldness in reproofing sin of every kind. They must assert and maintain the truth, and point out the errors opposite to it, with all their guilty fruits, and all their dreadful consequences. How offensive this to human pride? It must certainly either convince or provoke, reform or inflame. When righteous Lot says, in the mildest terms, to the lustful Sodomites, "I pray you brethren, do not so wickedly," how fierce is the answer? "And they said, stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge."†

How many martyrs to truth have there been since the world began? Without mentioning those in the Old Testa-

* Lev. xix. 17. † Gen. xix. 9.

ment, you see John the baptist lost his life by reprov-
 ing the incestuous adultery of Herod and Herodias. Our
 blessed Saviour gives the following account of the hatred
 of the world to him, and the contrary reception it gave to
 his temporising brethren, "The world cannot hate you ;
 "but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works
 "thereof are evil." By consulting the history of the gos-
 pel you will find, that what gave rise to the conspiracy of
 the Scribes and Pharisees against him, was his dragging
 off the mask under which they lay concealed, and disco-
 vering the errors of their doctrine, and the licentiousness
 of their practice. When they "perceived that he spake
 "against them,—they took counsel against him to put
 "him to death;" and accomplished it so soon as they
 could do it with safety. But there cannot be a better exam-
 ple, or indeed, a more lively and well drawn picture of the
 effect of plain and just reproof, than in the case of Stephen,
 when pleading his cause before the Jewish rulers. "Ye stiff-
 "necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do al-
 "ways resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do
 "ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers per-
 "secuted? And they have slain them which shewed before
 "of the coming of the just One; of whom you have been
 "now the betrayers and murderers.—When they heard
 "these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnash-
 "ed on him with their teeth."* It is plainly for this
 reason that the apostles, in their prayers for assistance, do
 almost constantly ask, that they may be endued with a proper
 degree of boldness and resolution, "And now, Lord, be-
 "hold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants
 "that with all boldness they may speak thy word."†
 Many other prayers are to be found in the apostolic writings
 which run in the same strain.‡

It is very natural for every one at this distance, to
 imagine, that he could have been in no danger of making
 such an obstinate resistance to the truth, or persecuting,
 with such implacable enmity, those who espoused it. But,
 my brethren, all worldly men, in every age, have still the

* Acts vii. 51, 52, 54. † Acts iv. 29. ‡ See Eph. vi. 19. 2 Theff. iii. 2.

same abhorrence of the faithful servants of God ; the same impatience of reproof, when it touches themselves. Our Saviour draws their character with great beauty, in speaking to the Pharisees ; “ Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous ; and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.”* It is very delicately hinted in this last verse, that they were of the same nature, that they grew, as it were, upon the same stock, and therefore it might be expected that they would bring forth the same fruit. I cannot but here mention a remark of a very eminent writer upon this passage ; “ That all nations partake much of this disposition of the Jews, to honor the dead saints, and persecute the living.”†

I have taken notice above, that in every period of the church, the most faithful of the servants and ministers of God, have, in fact, been counted troublesome by corrupt and worldly men. The same passages of history constantly shew, that this has arisen chiefly from their attempts to stem the tide of prevailing vice ; from their boldness and faithfulness in reproofing fashionable crimes. In the twelfth century, Arnulphus, a devout man, and excellent preacher, speaks thus to the clergy : “ I know that you seek my life, and will shortly kill me : But why ? I speak the truth to you, I reprehend your pride and haughtiness, avarice and luxury : therefore I please you not.”‡ And in the fourteenth century, an ancient writer speaks of the court of Rome in the following terms : “ For what can you conceive will happen where virtue was long ago extinct and buried ? There surely truth is the highest crime, and of itself sufficient to procure the hatred of many. For how can we expect but that should happen, where a true word cannot be spoken

* *Matth.* xxiii. 29, 30, 31.

† Tillotson.

‡ *Whitby's App.* to his book on *Host-worship*.

“ without a great reproach, where the worst of men are promoted,—where simplicity is esteemed madness,—where good men are rendered ridiculous, inasmuch that now scarce any of them doth appear to be laughed at. These few things truth itself hath dared to speak, whence you may gather what you are to think of many others, which fear doth force me to conceal.”* It is unnecessary to cite many passages to this purpose; I shall therefore conclude this head with the following just reflection of the pious, diligent, and catholic Mr. Baxter; “ I see there is no help for it, but we must offend wicked men. It is impossible to avoid it, but either by our silence or their patience. Silent we cannot be, because the word of God commands us to speak; and patient they cannot be, because sin has the dominion in their hearts.”

We now proceed, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

In the first place, You may learn from what has been said upon this subject, the just and proper answer to an objection against the gospel, much insisted on by its enemies, viz. That it has introduced persecution for conscience sake, with which the world was in a great measure unacquainted before. There are few subjects, on which infidels enlarge with greater pleasure, than the cruel hatred and animosity that has prevailed; the bloody wars that have been carried on; nay, the savage and inhuman massacres that have been perpetrated on a religious account, since the publication of the gospel. I think this objection is but seldom answered as it might be. It is usually indeed, and justly observed, that whatever may have been done by those professing the gospel, there is no countenance given in it to such a spirit and practice. But the objection is not wholly removed, while infidels are allowed still to contend, as if it served their own cause, that persecution has been its constant attendant and inseparable effect. We ought therefore, to wrest this argument out of their hands, and first to produce this fact as an accomplishment

* Petrarch's Ep.

of our Saviour's prediction; "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."*

Having gone thus far, we have reason to contend that the disciples of Christ have always suffered, and never inflicted the injury, though they have often been obliged to bear the blame. The multitude of heathen religions, though not always, yet did generally agree together: and well they might, for they were all from the same author. None of them, however, could agree with the gospel: for this plain reason, that "no lie is of the truth." But from what quarter did the violence proceed? Did not the dreadful persecutions against the Christians, in the three first centuries, proceed from the heathens? Did the Christians commit any other crime against them, than pointing out the sin and danger of their idolatrous worship, and immoral practices? Was not this alone sufficient to raise a cry against them, as turning the world upside down? And in all the subsequent persecutions among professing Christians, was it any thing else than the proud, violent, and worldly spirit of those who made a gain of godliness, oppressing the few real believers of every denomination? There is an antichristian spirit in every church that shews itself in persecution, in a greater or lesser degree. But there can be nothing more unjust, than to attribute the persecution of Christ's disciples by his enemies and theirs, to the spirit of his religion.

Is it then boldly affirmed by some, that the Christian is the only religion in the world that leads to persecution? I answer, on the contrary, It is the only religion that has suffered persecution from all its numerous enemies: and at the same time, it is the only religion in the world that requires, and points out the obligation, of mutual forbearance, and makes the just and proper division between the things that are Cæsar's, and the things that are God's.

* Matt. x. 34, 35, 36.

That it is often blamed as persecuting others, is a proof and illustration of this truth. For all is of a piece, and the false accusation arises from the source which I have opened up above, and confirmed by examples produced from history. To these I shall now only add one observation, which comes in with peculiar propriety here; That innumerable instances may be given, in which those very persons who were ready to lift the secular arm against good men, have loudly complained of the exercise of discipline, and the censures of the church upon their crimes. These they often style persecution, and always affirm to flow from a persecuting spirit. But as they are often necessary, so even when they are unjustly applied, it is plain from their very nature, that if they be groundless, they must be perfectly harmless.

Thus the state of the world is so far from being an objection against, that it is a proof of the truth of the gospel. True Christians have suffered from every quarter; from within and from without; from open enemies and from false brethren. They have been first persecuted, and then slandered as persecuting others; nay, obliged to bear the odium of that very oppression under which they groaned. Of all this they are fairly fore-warned by their Saviour, who says, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." They are exposed to injurious treatment from many, and may expect to suffer without cause. None however make so cruel a havoc, as those wolves who put on sheep's clothing; and yet, of all their cruelty, the poor suffering sheep must bear the blame.

2. From what hath been said, you may see the guilt and danger of those who falsely accuse the children of God. Perhaps you may be ready wholly to refuse the charge, and to say, Where is the necessity, where is the propriety of this at present? Have we not all civil and religious liberty? and are not religion and its ministers in esteem and repute? I answer, It is never unnecessary. The fault I complain of is no part of the peculiar degeneracy of this age. It is not confined to any one age, country, or profession, but is common to them all: and we would but deceive ourselves, should we fondly fancy we are exempt,

ed from it. Nay, our present state as a church and nation, seems to render such a warning peculiarly seasonable. We have long enjoyed outward peace. In every other country this has introduced a worldly spirit, ambition, luxury, and sloth. And is there no vestige of these characters among us now? Who will pretend it? Are there not some who cannot endure such strictness as is inconsistent with conformity to the gay and fashionable world? Do not all such incline to charge every profession of piety with hypocrisy? Do they not consider every faithful reprove, as an enemy to their peace? Do they not hear with secret pleasure, and spread with apparent triumph, every report, to the prejudice of such troublers of Israel?

This then is the character; and as many of you as conscience charges with the guilt, may see your danger. You may see whose cause you plead, and whose reward you shall share. What inward enmity do you discover against the spirit and power of true religion? You are of the number of those who "Hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest your deeds should be reprov'd." You are of the number of those who say "to the seers, see not, and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, and prophesy deceit." You will not "endure sound doctrine," but love and follow only that which will exercise and amuse your imagination and fancy, sooth and gratify your pride and vanity, or make and keep you at peace with yourselves. You are asleep in security, and will avoid every thing that may tend to disturb or interrupt your dangerous repose. And how hurtful is your conduct to others? You blast the characters and lessen the usefulness of the ministers of Christ. You bring an evil report upon the truth, by rendering them odious or contemptible who bear it,—And if we, my brethren, who are ministers of the gospel, imitate this example in any measure, if we discover a suspicion and jealousy, or an aversion and hatred, at all who are more diligent than ourselves, what dishonor must fall upon our profession, what a hindrance is it to the edification of others, and what guilt do we bring upon our own souls,

3. If this has been the constant lot of all the servants of God, to be accused as seditious and troublesome, let every cautious person beware of being misled by the persecuting cry. I ask any man who is conversant in the world, if he hath not, in many instances, been insensibly taught to form a hateful idea, or to entertain a despicable opinion of many ministers, without the least personal knowledge, the least satisfying evidence or proof. What is the reason? Why, he hath been told, that they are proud, hypocritical, factious, censorious, troublesome men. Well, the thing is possible, no doubt. But, in the mean time, it is far from being certain; and this sort of character industriously propagated, is no evidence of it at all, or rather is a presumption of the contrary. You see, from the instances produced above, that this is a reproach perpetually thrown upon the most upright and faithful of the servants of God; that it may very naturally arise from their fidelity itself; and that it cannot be avoided by those who resist the corrupt measures, who reprove the public vices, or who shame the criminal laziness, and negligence of others. An ignorant, vicious, worthless minister, is envied by no body. He is therefore quite safe from all the poisoned arrows which fly from that quarter. He is rather a foil to many, to set off and illustrate their own comparative excellence. He is therefore often pardoned, pitied, and protected. Whereas a faithful minister, who openly dares to bear witness against the apostasy of others, is traduced and slandered, loaded with imaginary crimes, and often falls a martyr to the sinking cause of truth and righteousness.

4. Since the world is so prone to receive the accusation of faction against the children of God, let them be careful to give no real ground for it. Unjust calumny has sometimes the contrary effect. When men find, that it is impossible to please a capricious world, or wholly to escape slander, they are apt to give up all solicitude upon that head, and take no farther pains to avoid suspected appearances. This I take to be, precisely, what the Scripture calls being "overcome of evil." But how much better is it "to overcome evil with good? Let us, as often as possi-

ble, confute the accusation by an unblameable carriage ; and when we must suffer, let us be careful that we suffer, not as evil doers, but for well doing. For this purpose I would humbly offer to ministers the two following directions, which I esteem of great moment.

(1.) Let all our zeal for the glory of God be conducted not only with steadiness, but with meekness. Let us ever remember, that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Let our language be always strictly guarded, and free from expressions of rage and fury. If we are faithful to our duty, it will sufficiently provoke sinners, we need not add to it by any mixture of human passion. What noble and effectual principles are we furnished with in Scripture, for avoiding every dangerous extreme ? Love to God, and love to man, make up the sum of practical religion. These are the immediate fruits of faith, and all the truths of the gospel tend to strengthen and improve them. And as love to God produces indignation against sin, resolution and boldness in opposing it ; so, love to man will naturally produce the deepest compassion for the miserable state of every enemy of God, and prevent firmness from degenerating into violence.

(2.) The other direction I would offer upon this subject is, that ministers take care to avoid officiously intermeddling in civil matters. A minister should be separated and set apart for his own work ; he should be consecrated to his office. It is little glory to him to be eminently skilled in any other science, except such as may be handmaids to theology, and are by him habitually turned into a divine channel. Ministers giving themselves to worldly employments, have been commonly of bad fame ; and, where there is a sufficient provision made for their maintenance, seems to be an unjust alienation of their time and talents. But it is still more sinful and dangerous, for them to desire or claim the direction of such matters as fall within the province of the civil magistrate. When our blessed Saviour says, " My kingdom is not of this world," he plainly intimates to his disciples that they have no title to intermeddle with state affairs. Nay, he expressly warns them against a lordly and arbitrary dominion.

even in their own proper sphere. "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."* I cannot help mentioning here, that this is one of the things, for which our worthy ancestors of the church of Scotland (now despised by many) deserve the highest commendation. It was an invariable principle with them, to be against the civil power and places of kirkmen. And surely, if ministers confine themselves entirely to their own proper duty, they will be much less liable to exception than otherwise. They may then, warrantably use the greatest fidelity in reproving, and the greatest strictness in discipline; and though the wicked slander and oppose them, the good will defend them, and God will support them.

5. In the last place, Since the charge of faction and sedition has been always brought against faithful ministers, let us learn to bear it with patience, and never dissemble the truth, or depart, in any measure, from our duty, in order to avoid it. A person of a generous mind feels a wound in his reputation more deeply, than almost any other injury. We are still apt fondly to flatter ourselves, that as religion is truly amiable in itself, and ought to make no enemies, that therefore we shall have none. Some are very apt to omit, or slightly to perform, several parts of their duty, through that "fear of man that bringeth a snare." They are unwilling to forego the hope, that by certain prudent compliances they will conciliate and preserve the favor of every man and every party. But the expectation is wholly vain. The experience of many ages hath proved it so. Let us therefore bear with patience the false accusation. It hath been the lot of the best and worthiest men in every age. It was the lot of our blessed master, and shall we refuse to bear his cross? Is it not "enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant that he be as his Lord?" The triumph of sin-

* Luke xxii. 25, 26.

ners is but very short. In a little time all earthly relations shall be dissolved. Then high and low, magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. He shall "render to every one according to his deeds." There the great and noble shall find no partial favor; there the poor and mean shall not escape observation; and there the lying slanderer shall be put to eternal silence. He shall openly acknowledge every faithful servant, and "bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon day."

T H E

C H A R G E.

S I R,

AS you are now ordained a minister of Christ, and have received the charge of this congregation, I hope you will bear with me a little, while I offer you a few advices as to the discharge of your important trust. And I cannot help beginning by congratulating you on the unanimous call you have received from this people. However despised by some, I count it a most happy circumstance both for you and them. It introduces you with great advantage. It gives you a fair and impartial hearing; and, if you do not preserve their esteem and love, it will probably be, in a great measure, owing to yourself.

I must first of all beseech you, in the most earnest manner, to be strict and frequent, in enquiring into the truth and reality of religion in your own soul. Personal religion is the foundation of all relative duties. They can scarcely be performed in any tolerable measure without it. It is equally necessary to your usefulness, and to your comfort. It is a difficult thing, and it is a dreadful thing, to preach an unknown Saviour. Examine, therefore, whether you are “born again;” whether you have “passed from death to life;” whether you are united to Christ by faith; whether you know by experience, the difference between a state of nature and a state of grace, or not. While I speak this, I assure you, I do not mean it, and I hope none will interpret it, as any reflection against, or implying any suspicion of you, who have given me no cause. I speak it from a deep impression of its importance to us all. How miserable a case is it, to have it as our business to bring others to the kingdom of heaven, and

be ourselves at last thrust out. A minister is as much liable to self-deceit as any other, and in some respects more so. We are in danger of thinking ourselves too easily safe, by comparing that outward regularity, to which our office itself, even from secular motives, obliges us, with the licentious extravagance of prophane sinners. We may also mistake our frequent thinking and speaking of the "things of God," in the way of our calling, for an evidence of true religion in ourselves. Nay, we are in danger of mistaking those gifts, with which God furnisheth us for the benefit of his own people, for the fruits of the Spirit, and gracious dispositions in our own hearts. Maintain, therefore, a holy jealousy over yourself. "Give diligence to make your calling an election sure." And, if you save your own soul, you will probably carry many others with you to a better world; and be able to say, after the example of Christ, "Behold I, and the children whom God hath given me."

As to the duties of your office, see that you preach the pure and uncorrupted doctrine of Christ. Preach Christ crucified, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life;" and without whom "no man can go unto the Father." You will never be able to make men truly good, till you convince them of their lost state by nature; and thence make them see the necessity of justification by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of Christ. If you would know what place Christ ought to hold in your preaching and scheme of doctrine, observe what room he fills in the oracles of truth. To the cross of Christ give all the prophets witness. The cross of Christ is the sum and substance of the New Testament. The cross of Christ is the Christian's hope. The cross of Christ is the Christian's glory. You see, by a serious perusal of the New Testament, that the sacred writers largely illustrate the several parts of his character and office, and seem with pleasure to embrace every opportunity of speaking to his praise. They show how much we are to depend upon him for strength in the discharge of our duty; and enforce all their exhortations by motives drawn from what he hath done, and is still doing, for his church and people. You

will soon find from experience, that no cold reasonings on the nature and beauty of virtue, can have such influence in mortifying corrupt affections, as a believing view of a pierced Saviour. For this very reason many detest the doctrine of the cross. It gives a mortal blow to every darling lust. It gives such a view of the holiness and justice of God, as is intolerable to all those who cannot think of breaking their attachment to sin and vanity.

There is one particular reason why I have mentioned this at present, and insisted on it at some length. It is ordinary to meet with serious persons who complain much, that from many pulpits they hear little or nothing of the doctrine of the grace of God; that the grand and leading truths of the gospel are either flatly contradicted, or kept entirely out of view, and something else substituted in their place. I am far from saying that this is indeed the case. On the contrary, I tremble to think that it should be but barely possible; for all these doctrines are clearly contained in the Confession of Faith, which every minister in Scotland has subscribed. If, therefore, there be any one among us, who doth not preach the doctrine of original sin, of Christ's imputed righteousness, justification by free grace, the necessity of regeneration, and the operations of the Spirit, he is guilty of perjury of the worst kind, for which I know no excuse. Such a person is not only chargeable with departing from the faith, but with an absolute prostitution of conscience, and a whole life of hypocrisy and deceit. I am indeed entirely at a loss how to account for this apprehension in the people, of a difference in doctrine; but as there certainly is such an apprehension, I think I cannot discharge my duty on this occasion, without exhorting you to be clear and explicit upon these heads. The truth is, they are of so general consequence, and have so necessary a connexion with every other part of religion, that, be the subject what it will, where they are firmly believed, I should imagine the manner of thinking and speaking would be such, as to leave no jealousy of an intended omission.

This leads me to exhort you, to preach plainly, or in a way that may be level to the capacities of the hearers,

both as to sentiment and expreffion. God forbid, that I fhould defire you to ruff into a pulpit without preparation, to preach in a diforderly method, or in a mean, flovenly or indecent fyle. All pains fhould be taken to feek out fit and "acceptable words." But there cannot be a greater abfurdity in fpeaking to a multitude of common people, than to difcourfe in fuch a ftiff and abftract way, as it is plainly impoffible for them to comprehend. Nor is it any lefs abfurdity to drefs up an harangue with exceffive elegance, and a vain, ornamented foppery of fyle. Some difcourfes may very well be likened to painted windows, which, with fine colours upon themfelves, keep out the light, and make the houfe comfortlefs and dark. Such conduct is ordinarily followed by thofe, who would willingly recommend themfelves to perfons of better tafte ; but it muft evidently render them contemptible to every perfon of found judgment. However, it is much worfe than abfurd ; for it is very wicked, when the ever-lafting falvation of finners is at ftake, to fpeak in fuch a manner as they cannot underftand, or fuch as tends only to amufe their fancy, and never can reach their hearts. If we would know what is a proper and juft manner of fyle and compofition in preaching, let us confider how any man would fpeak, if he was on trial for his own life. Would he not fpeak with great plainnefs, earneftnefs and force ? And is not the falvation of fouls of infinitely more moment than any man's life ? And fhould it not, if we believe the Scriptures, be more regarded by every faithful minifter ?

You muft alfo take care to preach experimentally and particularly. You will foon find that this is the only profitable way of preaching, and that, unlefs you apply general truths to the feveral claffes and characters in your audience, they will make but a forry improvement of the beft inftruction. The ignorant cannot, and the wifer will not apply them to themfelves. Befides, the general way is not only ufelefs, but pernicious and hurtful. Suppofe I fhould make an encomium on the wife, juft, and gracious government of God over his rational creation, and obferve what reafon all have to rejoice under his admini-

stration. Should I say so to this audience without distinction, it would be to many a dangerous and stupifying poison. A just and holy God, is a consuming fire to all the workers of iniquity. Those who are still in their sins, should tremble to think of the government of God.

Besides public preaching, you must be diligent among your people "from house to house." You must not neglect family instruction, and personal admonition or reproof. This is, if not the most useful part of a minister's work, at least absolutely necessary to the success of his preaching. It is also by far the most laborious part, from which slothful men are most apt to excuse themselves. A man may gratify his vanity by preaching, and public performances; or, the neglect being visible, he may be compelled to regularity by fear of reproach or prosecution. But diligence in private, can scarcely arise from any thing but a sense of duty, and of the presence and observation of God.

The exercise of discipline is another part of your duty which must not be omitted. It is of very great moment to the interest of religion. It is a saying of one of the first reformers, "They that desire to banish discipline, desire to banish Christ from his church." There must needs be offences in the Christian church. But when discipline is neglected, then the offence becomes unspeakably more dangerous, especially to the young and weak. It makes them think lightly of the character and privileges of a Christian, when there is either a promiscuous admission to church-communion, or when openly wicked persons are suffered to continue without censure. When you come to instruct young persons, in order to renewing their baptismal engagements in the Lord's supper; or, if ever you have occasion to instruct a heathen in order to baptism, I can assure you, from experience, you will find the unhappy effect of the low state of discipline among us. It will immediately strike yourself, and these catechumens will soon betray, by their discourse, how hard it is to have a just sense of the sanctity of the Christian character, while so many prophane persons are suffered to be called Christians; and not a few whose con-

duct is very exceptionable, continue to be admitted at stated times, to the seals of God's covenant.

How inexcusable are we in this neglect? If the first Christians, without the help or sanction of an establishment, kept so strict a discipline, what might we do, who have the countenance and approbation of the civil power. In discipline then, be strict, regular, and impartial. Especially be impartial. It is commonly want of impartiality, that makes us fail in strictness. You will have many enemies to impartiality in discipline. You will have the great and wealthy, many of whom, though they live in open defiance of the laws and ordinances of Christ, yet will be much offended, and complain of it as a grievous injury, if by a judicial sentence you deprive them of his name. Nay, you will find in every congregation some professing piety, who, though they are well pleased with, and commend the strict exercise of discipline in the case of others, yet when it comes to touch themselves, or their own relations, will use many arts to evade it. But if you be firm and unbiassed in so good a cause, it will have a sensible effect.

This leads me to exhort you in the whole of your work, public and private, to beware of the sin of man-pleasing. I do not say, beware of popularity: because, in the sense to which common language hath confined that word, it is but one half of the snare. Besides, in propriety of speech, popularity should signify only being accepted and beloved, which in itself is neither duty nor sin, but a blessing. Man-pleasing signifies, in Scripture, having this as the end and motive of our actions, rather than being acceptable to God. You ought, indeed, for edification, to avoid displeasing any without necessity. But as in this, so in every other thing, you should have a far higher principle, than merely courting the favor either of great or small, good or bad. It is, doubtless, a mean and despicable principle, to act only with a view of gaining the applause of the vulgar and ignorant. But I have often wondered, how some should so boldly and uncharitably lay this to the charge of their brethren, without considering how easy it is, with at least,

equal justice, to presume that they are under the influence, and acting with a view to please the great. I am sure, there is a much stronger temptation to this than the former. And, if am not mistaken, fawning and fervility hath been the road, in which ambitious and corrupt churchmen have travelled to preferment in every age. The truth is, they are equally detestable in the sight of God. But the last is much more destructive to the interest of religion than the first. The favor of the multitude can scarcely be obtained, without either the truth or the appearance of piety ; but the favor of the great is often obtained by silence, and suffering them in their crimes, being assistant in their pleasures, or subservient to their political designs.

To deliver you, Sir, from both, remember the condition on which you hold your office. “ Son of man, “ I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel : “ therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them “ warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou “ shalt surely die ; and thou givest him not warning, nor “ speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save “ his life : the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, “ but his blood will I require at thine hand.”* Forget then the foolish accusations of popularity or vanity ; and consider, that your people are daily carried to their graves, and you must give an account of every soul that perishes through your neglect.

To conclude, be much in earnest prayer to God, that he would fit you for your work, and crown your labours with success. Prayer is absolutely necessary to the steadfastness and growth of every believer, and especially to a minister. If you believe the gospel, you will believe that “ every good gift cometh from above ;” that God only can make you an able and useful pastor ; and this will make you importunate with him for a plentiful measure of the Holy Spirit to fit you for his service. And I desire to join in praying, that God, for Christ’s sake, would make you an “ able minister of the New Testament,”—and help you to preach the gospel, not with the wisdom of “ words,”—but with “ the Holy Ghost sent down from “ heaven.”

* Ezek. iii. 17, 18.

EXHORTATION

TO THE

P E O P L E.

MY BRETHREN,

YOU have heard the charge given to your minister. Are there then, so many duties incumbent on him by his standing in the relation of a pastor to you? is not the relation mutual? And are there not several correspondent duties incumbent on you as his people? I beg your patience, while I put you in mind of a few of the most important and necessary.

In the first place, It is evidently your duty diligently to attend upon his ministry. It is plainly impossible that you can profit by him, if you do not hear him. I am sorry that there are many in these days, who pour contempt upon the ordinances of Christ's institution. But in particular, there hath been, of late, a great and remarkable desertion of public worship by those of higher rank. There is a happy opportunity in this case to put all such among you in mind, that having subscribed a call to their minister, they stand bound by consent to attend upon him. Is it not surprising to think, that any should forget the terms in which that invitation runs. You intreat him "to take the charge of your souls, and promise him all due obedience and submission in the Lord." Can a man honestly subscribe this, who seldom comes within the walls of any church? One would be counted infamous in the world, who should act in the face of a signed obligation, in any other matter, or who even should falsify a solemn promise. And, is it less criminal, because it relates to

religion and the service of God? It is indeed seldom re-sented or punished by men, because the offence is not immediately against them, but it remains to be punished by that righteous God, "To whom vengeance belongs,—
"and who will not be mocked."

In the next place, my brethren, let me intreat you to be tender of the character of your minister, and of ministers in general. As their office makes the guilt of their sins great, and as a stain on their character is most hurtful to religion, on both accounts, you ought not rashly to receive an accusation against them. I do not mean to ask indulgence to the unworthy, I give them up freely to that reproach and contempt which they justly deserve. But let it fall upon the person, and not upon the office. Do not transfer the faults of particulars to the whole order. It is easy to observe the different reception which the faults or miscarriages of ministers meet with, from persons differently disposed. The good are affected with grief and concern for the offence, or filled with zeal and indignation against the sinner. But loose and careless persons disparage the profession, and bless themselves in their own uniformity and consistency of character. You may spare your reflections, "That ministers are but men, ministers
"are but like other men," and the like, when, I assure you, we deny it not. We have all the same great interest at stake. We often speak the more earnestly to you, lest, while we preach the gospel to others, we ourselves should be cast-aways; and many times describe the workings of a deceitful, wandering, fleshful, worldly mind, by taking the copy from our own.

It falls very properly in my way on this occasion, to take notice of a reproach thrown upon ministers, by the mistake or perversion of two of the questions usually put at an ordination, and which you have just heard put to your minister. They are supposed by many to be such as no man can answer with truth, and so quite improper to be put at all. The first of them is in the following terms, "Are not zeal for the honor of God, love
"to Jesus Christ, and desire of saving your souls, your

“ great motives, and chief inducements, to enter into the “ function of the holy ministry, and not worldly designs “ and interests.” This is maliciously interpreted to suppose, that a minister in accepting of a fixed charge, hath no view or intention, primary or secondary, of being provided of a maintenance. This would be both unnatural and unreasonable. “ They that serve at the altar, must live by “ the altar.” The plain meaning is, That the great motives of a minister, in consecrating himself to this employment, and accepting the particular station assigned him, ought to be the honor of God, and interest of religion, as expressed above. And surely, that this should be case, hath nothing in it incredible in our country, the provision for the ministry not being so large, but a man of tolerable abilities hath a much greater hazard of rising to wealth and dignity in many other employments. But alas ! how ignorant are they who cavil at this question ? Do they not know that every Christian is bound habitually and supremely to regard the glory of God in all his actions. This is not peculiar to ministers, except so far as they ought to be exemplary in every thing. Wo to every man in this assembly, be his employment what it will, if he does not habitually point his whole actions to the glory of God. “ Ye are “ not your own ; ye are bought with a price ; therefore “ glorify God with your bodies, and your spirits, which are “ God’s.”*

The other question is this, “ Have you used any undue “ methods by yourself or others, in procuring this call ?” It is impossible to find fault with this question, but by leaving out the word, undue. And indeed, it is so far from being wrong, that there would be no harm if it were more particularly explained. It was probably intended to discourage all briguing and solicitation, other than a man’s real character does for itself, or the free unbiassed judgment of others, inclines them to do in his behalf. I apprehend it does not reach a reproof to all those, who either promote or hinder settlements from political connections, or in expectation of temporal favors : and to those who, by promises or threatenings, endeavor to influence their inferiors

* 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

in such a cause, In the mean time, I dare say it will be allowed, that any thing of this kind done by a minister himself, or at his direction, in his own favor, would be very wrong: and, blessed be God, it is at present among us considered as highly indecent and criminal.

I must also put you in mind of the great duty of family instruction and government. Heads of families must prepare their children and servants for receiving benefit by public instruction, and endeavor by repetition to fix it in their minds. It is our duty to speak plainly, no doubt: but it is impossible, preserving the dignity of the pulpit, to speak in such a manner as to be understood by those who have had no previous instruction in a familiar way. It is like casting seed upon an unopened, unprepared soil, which takes no root, and brings forth no fruit. Is it not hard, that, when many are so ready to find fault with every neglect of ministers, and sometimes expect more work from one than ten can perform, they should take so little pains in their families, these smaller districts, which are committed to their own charge.

To conclude all, Strive together with your minister in your prayers to God for him. There is no way more effectual to prepare him for serving you in the gospel, and there is no way more proper for preparing you to attend upon his ministry. If you make conscience of this duty, you will come to receive the answer of your prayers, and indeed to hear the word of God. Alas! that there should be so few of our hearers of this charitable, sympathizing kind. We have some stupid and insensible hearers, some proud and disdainful hearers, many criticizing and censuring hearers, but few praying hearers. Let all that fear God give themselves to this duty. And let them not only remember that corner of God's vineyard in which their own lot is cast, but the kingdom of Christ in general; and pray, that his name may be great, "from the rising of the sun, unto his going down." Amen.

PRAYER for NATIONAL PROSPERITY and for the REVIVAL of RELIGION inseparably connected.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached on Thursday, February 16, 1758, being the day appointed in Scotland for the late Public Fast.

ISAIAH, li. 9.

*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD:
Awake as in the ancient days in the generations of old.
Art not thou it that hath cut Rabah and wounded the dragon.*

MY BRETHREN,

WE are this day called by our sovereign to the duty of solemn fasting and humiliation, and to earnest prayer for the blessing of God on his councils and arms. Religion and humanity conspire in urging us to a hearty compliance, especially while public affairs wear so threatening an aspect. It ought also to awaken the attention, and increase the seriousness of every particular worshipping assembly, that they are joining with so many others in intreating deliverance from these national calamities, in which all are equally concerned.

We have often, for some years past, professed to humble ourselves in the sight of God, and have done it, alas! with a shameful coldness and indifference, or with an hypocrisy still more criminal. But it is remarkable, that such is the situation of affairs at present, as hath given an alarm

even to some of the most insensible, and constrained them to consider this duty as now somewhat more than a form. There has been for some time past, such a continuance and increase of public judgments, such a series of abortive projects, and broken disconcerted schemes, as makes the most obstinate and inconsiderate stand and pause, and seriously ask, Is there not a cause?

Our setting apart this day, and applying ourselves to the duty of fasting and prayer, implies a confession of the power and providence of God.

It implies, that we believe in him, as the Almighty Creator, and righteous Governor of the world; the supreme Disposer of every event, and sovereign Arbitrer of the fate of nations. How were it to be wished, that there was a just sense of this truth on the minds of all of every rank! And that, in all who are in any measure sincere on this occasion, the impression may not be transient and partial, but lasting and effectual! It should excite us to a holy jealousy over ourselves, that we have so often essayed the like duty without any apparent success. "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" The fault, doubtless, lies in ourselves. Our fasts have not been such as God has chosen, and therefore he hath refused to hear our prayers.

In general, no doubt the evidence and the effect of an acceptable fast, is repentance compleated by reformation. Where this is wanting, we are justly liable to the charge brought by the prophet Isaiah against the children of Israel, "Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. 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 ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."* There is no question but the unrestrained flood of impiety which has overspread this nation,

* Isa. i. 13, 14, 15.

folicits divine vengeance, and prevents the efficacy even of the sincere prayers that are offered up for deliverance and mercy. But as, with respect to particular persons, every error or defect in practice is the consequence of an erroneous or defective principle, as every vicious action proceeds from an impure heart; so, in a national capacity, I am persuaded that our fasting and prayer has been fundamentally wrong, or essentially defective in itself, and therefore, has been followed by little or no sensible fruit; or rather that impiety, which it should have removed, it hath only contributed to increase.

For this reason my intention at this time is to point out to you what is the just and proper object of prayer for divine aid in a time of public calamity, as well as the great encouragement to its exercise. For this there is a proper foundation in the passage of Scripture just read in your hearing. In the former part of the chapter, the prophet had pronounced many gracious promises, of inward and spiritual prosperity, and of outward protection and security to the church, though surrounded and threatened, by enemies to her interests in both respects. He then changes the form of his discourse, personates believers, and in their name, as one of them, addresses to God the prayer in the text, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord: awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old: art not thou it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?"

The beauty and strength of this language, the justness and force of the figures here used, it is almost impossible to overlook. The prophet prays for such a display of divine power and mercy as might be signal and sensible. "Awake, awake, put on strength," that is, exert thy power, discover thy glory in such a manner, as that thy present forbearance may be like the vigor of a waking man, compared to the defenceless and inactive state of one that is fast asleep. "O arm of the Lord." This expression the arm of the Lord, with the addition of making bare his holy arm, is frequently used in Scripture; and it is so strong, and at the same time, so intelligible a figure, that it is impossible to amplify or explain, without weak-

eing it. In the last part of the verse, he animates his own faith, and enforces his request, by calling to remembrance past transactions, and former displays of the power and grace of an unchangeable God. By Rahab and the dragon we are to understand Egypt and her king, as appears by comparing other passages of Scripture, particularly by *Pf. lxxxvi. 4.* and *Ezek. xxix. 3.* the last of which runs thus: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers: which hath said, my river is mine own, and I have made it for myself."

In discoursing on this subject, what I propose, through the assistance of divine grace, is,

I. To point out to you the import of this prayer in the first part of this passage, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."

II. To consider the encouragement included in the last part of it, "Awake as in ancient days, in the generations of old: art not thou it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?"

III. To apply the subject to our present situation.

And we are to consider,

I. The meaning and import of the prayer: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." And in this I have no hope either of instructing or persuading any but those who have some measure of real religion, who do unfeignedly believe, and will, when called upon, recollect the constant superintendency of Divine Providence. These only will be sensible that, as every event is directed and over-ruled by the Almighty, so there are righteous, wise and gracious purposes to be served by them. All men it is true, are ready to complain under distress. The most wicked and profligate, "when the waters are gone into their soul," when they feel their misery, will cry for relief. And, as they will turn them on every hand, and lay hold on every twig that may afford the least prospect of

saving them from sinking, so the terror of divine power, with which public calamity is sometimes accompanied, will even make them cry unto God. But there is a great difference, between this complaint of the miserable, and the prayer of faith, which proceeds upon just views of the nature and government of God, and is assured of success. It may sometimes please God to make use of desolating judgments or alarming public strokes to awaken a secure thoughtless generation; but dutiful, acceptable and successful prayer for their removal, can only be the work of his own children.

Perhaps it may be thought unnecessary to direct persons of this character to the proper object of their prayers, as they must be supposed habitually to flow from right principles, and to point at just and warrantable ends. But it is certain, that, when wickedness and profaneness greatly and universally prevail in any nation, the real servants of God are not only few in number, but even this little flock, always receives some degree of infection. This we are taught to expect by our blessed Saviour, who says, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." They may both be negligent and defective in their duty, restraining prayer before God, and may be in a great measure unmindful of the great and principal views with which they ought to offer up their intercessory requests. But, hoping that all such among you as are justly liable to this charge, will discern the light, and feel the force of divine truth, it is my desire to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

And, in general, such a petition as this, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord," suggests to us, that our prayers for divine interposition and deliverance from public calamities should be supremely directed to the glory of God. This, as it is, upon the whole, the leading purpose of every real believer, so it ought to hallow every single action, and purify every particular desire. Therefore our prayers must be conceived in such a manner, and our desires after deliverance must be so qualified, that the supreme honor due to God may be preserved inviolate, that duty may

maintain its precedency before interest, and sin may be still more feared and avoided than suffering. The great end both of personal affliction, and national correction, is to weaken our attachment to present and temporal enjoyment, by staining its glory, and convincing us of its vanity. 'If then our chief or only aim, in asking deliverance from outward calamity, is that we may again recover the ease and quiet of security, and the pleasure of plenty, though we may seem to honor God by imploring his aid, yet is our homage really given to a sensual idol.

That this is neither impossible nor unfrequent, is plain from the history of the children of Israel. They often applied to God in their straits: "When he slew them, then they sought him, they returned and enquired early after God."* But this sort of seeking, merely for present relief, or temporal mercies, was far from being acceptable to him. We are told, that it was tempting God, thus "to ask meat for their lust."† In opposition to this, let us look into the grounds assigned in Scripture for God's granting deliverance and thence learn with what views we ought to implore it. The Psalmist says, "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known."‡ And the prophet Ezekiel, "But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the Heathen among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known to them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt."

But, in order to illustrate this a little further, observe, that a just regard to the glory of God, in our prayers, implies the two following things. In the first place, That we expect deliverance from God alone, desire that it may be attended with such circumstances as his hand and power may be seen in it, and are willing to acknowledge him as the supreme and only Author of it. This is plainly included in the words of the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." As if he had said, In thee alone is our hope; "curled be the man that maketh flesh his arm." A prophane irreligious people are al-

* Psal. lxxviii. 34.

† Psal. lxxviii. 18.

‡ Psal. cvi. 8.

ways prone, in undertaking any enterprize, to put their trust in human prowess, to glory and boast in the greatness of their strength. And when they are disappointed in their expectations, they are ready to dwell so much upon second causes, that they entirely overlook, or are with great difficulty brought to acknowledge the supreme agency of God. We may, however be sensible, by his taking to himself so often, in Scripture, the title of the Lord of hosts, "great in might and strong in battle," that such conduct is robbing him of the glory that is justly his due. Many are the warnings we have in the word of God not to place too much confidence in any human means of safety. "Put not your trust in Princes (says the Psalmist) nor in the son of man in whom there is no help.* There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety, neither can he deliver any by his great strength."† And there is no Scripture truth more frequently, or more sensibly confirmed in the course of providence. How often do we find, both in former and in later ages, the events of war diametrically opposite to the greatest human probability, and the most confident human expectation?

Now prayer for divine interposition should always be made under a deep impression of this truth. And indeed we shall never come to importunity and fervency in prayer for such a mercy, till we are somewhat affected with it. All the honor that is given to man is taken from God. All trust and dependance on human means as such, or on their own account, divides and weakens our reliance on God. But when he is considered as the single and only source of relief, we apply with that ardor and earnestness which necessity and extremity suggest. This doth not hinder the diligent use and application of outward means, but keeps them in their proper place, induces us to ask the divine blessing upon them, and prevents us from provoking the divine jealousy by idolizing and trusting in them.

* Ps. cxxi. 3.

† Ps. cxviii. 16, 17.

It ought also to be our desire, that the glory of divine power may visibly shine in our deliverance; not only that his hand may do it, but that his hand may be seen in it, and, if possible, to the conviction of all. Nothing is more impious, and nothing more provoking to God, than when men arrogate to themselves the honor of what they have done by his help, or acquired by the bounty of his providence. Hear the language of the proud monarch of the east, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of MY power, and for the honor of MY majesty?"* But mark the unexpected change by the more powerful word of the King of Kings. "When 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."† How often in Scripture is the destruction and punishment of kings and princes ascribed to their self-sufficiency, insolence and pride? Thus in that remarkable prophecy against the king of Babylon: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee, shall narrowly look upon thee and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms? That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?"‡ How strongly does this prove, that in order to pray acceptably for the interposition of divine Providence, we should be willing that God alone should have the honor entire and undivided. "That the lofty looks of man should be humbled, and the haughtiness of man should be bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted in that day."|| Was it not thus that the ancient warriors of the holy nation fought and prospered? In confidence of divine aid, or

* Dan. iv. 30. † Ver. 31. ‡ Is. xiv. 13, 17. || Is. ii. 11.

reigned to the divine will, they went out and played the men for their people and the cities of their God. And when they had done so, they acknowledged that his right hand and his holy arm had gotten HIM the victory. See the song of Moses on his victory over the Egyptians. "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power : Thy right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee : Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble*."

I cannot conclude this branch of the subject without observing, that we have had in the course of Providence a very recent instance, both of a singular appearance of the hand of God in defence of a righteous cause, and a modest ascription of it to the power of the Highest. That prince, who appears now to be the chief outward support of the protestant cause in Europe, has been enabled literally (according to the ancient promise) "with five to chase a hundred, and with a hundred to put ten thousand to flight." The greatest earthly potentates had combined against him and conspired his ruin. Assured of victory, they were forging chains for his followers, and dividing his inheritance by lot. But in the name of the Lord he set up his standard. The Lord turned the counsels of his enemies into confusion. His victories have been numerous, extraordinary and important. And he hath all along avoided boasting and vain-glory, and piously acknowledged that "Salvation belongeth unto God."

- In the second place, in applying to God for an extraordinary interposition of his providence, we ought also to pray for a dispensation of his grace and mercy. When we pray that the arm of the Lord may awake and put on strength, it should be that a revival of religion may accompany temporal relief, and that by a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit many sinners may be delivered from the worst of bondage, and brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God. As this should be in itself the object of our desire, so it should be inseparably joined

* Ex. xv. 6, 7.

with the other, and their mutual connection still kept in view. Temporal mercies to a nation, as well as to particular persons, ought always to be made subservient to the promoting of truth and righteousness. It is remarkable, that these two things are always joined in Scripture. And, indeed, if temporal mercies be considered in the light I formerly mentioned, it is impossible that they can be asunder. Let any one consult the intercessory prayers in which deliverance from external calamity is intreated, the prophecies in which it is promised, or the songs of praise in which it is celebrated, and he will find, that the purity and spiritual prosperity of God's heritage is still kept in view. They are considered as involved in one another, and the one, as only valuable, because leading to the other. Instead of enumerating many passages, I shall only mention one of the prophet Isaiah. "And I will turn mine hand upon thee, and purely purge away all thy dross and take away all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: Afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness."

And, my brethren, is not the arm of the Lord and the glory of his power particularly displayed, when the influence and dominion of error is destroyed, and the obstinacy and rebellion of sinners is subdued? This is a more extraordinary, as well as a more excellent effect of power, than producing the greatest changes in our outward state and condition. It seems to be on this account that, in Scripture, the Saviour of sinners, the king of Zion, is so often represented as glorious in his person, and great in his power, "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.* Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty: with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because

* Isaiah, ix. 6.

“ of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.”* These and a multitude of other passages plainly show that the conversion of sinners, and defeating the powers of the princes of darkness, requires an exertion, and is a signal display of the strength of the divine arms.

But as it is a matter of the utmost importance and propriety at present, I must beg your patience, while I endeavor a little to illustrate the necessity of joining earnest intercession for the revival of religion and the glory of Christ's kingdom, with our prayers for a recovery of national prosperity.

For illustrating this let us attend to the three following particulars.

1. We have no warrant to ask the last of these without the first.

2. We have no reason to expect that it will be separately bestowed.

3. If it should, in any degree, it would not be a blessing but a curse.

First, we have no warrant to ask national prosperity without a revival of religion. Our prayers are then only warrantable when we adjust and proportion our esteem of the mercies of God to their real worth, and desire them for their proper ends. Now, a love to one's country, and a desire of its outward welfare, is, no doubt, an excellent and an amiable disposition. But it is much more so to be concerned for their everlasting interest. Why doth the love of our country merit any praise, but because it is a disposition and tendency to communicate happiness? But what is temporal to eternal happiness? What is a fruitful field to a renewed heart? Peace at home to peace with God? Security from an earthly oppressor to deliverance from the wrath to come? A compassionate heart bleeds for the misery of his fellow-creatures in poverty or bondage; but a sanctified heart is still more deeply affected with the ignorance and guilt of others, and their endless consequences. Now is it a warrantable manner of offering up our desires to God, to admire or ask a share in the

* Psa. xlv. 3, 4.

bounty of his providence, while we despise and trample upon the riches of his grace?

But that such prayers are unwarrantable, doth not only appear from the unjust preference given to lesser before greater mercies, but from their being a total perversion of our desires from the great point in which they ought to centre. The gifts of God are intended to lead us to the giver; the events of his providence to be subservient to the methods of his grace. When, therefore, we ask temporal prosperity, without an equal, or rather superior sollicitude for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, we are alienating his mercies from their proper use, turning them into weapons of rebellion against him, and cherishing that love of the world which is destructive of the love of God.

Secondly, As all such desires are unwarrantable and disorderly, so we have no reason to expect that they shall be granted. Let us recall to mind this important truth, that God is the supreme Disposer of all events. Every prosperous event is the effect of his bounty. Every calamity is the rod of his anger, and carries his commission. Are there not then wise ends to be served by every thing appointed by him? Affliction springeth not out of the dust. National calamity is not the rigor of an arbitrary tyrant, but the wise chastisement of a gracious father, or the punishment of a righteous judge. He ruleth the nations "fitting upon the throne of his holiness;" and, unless when he hath a mind to "make a full end," of a people ripe for destruction, gives them for a season into the hands of their enemies to bring about their reformation. If then public calamity bears a commission for this purpose from him whose work is perfect, what reason is there to expect, that it will be removed before it hath attained its end? Will he not repeat the stroke, and increase its severity, till it procure submission? It is true, we cannot precisely say how far the forbearance of God may go, or how long his patience may endure. There may be a remission, or suspension of the final stroke, for their farther trial. But it is certain that when there is no returning to God by re-

penitance, there can be no reasonable ground to hope that his displeasure will cease, or its effects be removed.

Thirdly, Though temporal deliverance were granted to a nation, in any measure, without a dispensation of the Spirit and revival of religion, it would be no blessing but a curse, and could not be of any long duration. It would be giving them up to themselves, to fill up the measure of their iniquities, that, when the appointed time of vengeance should come, their destruction might be more terrible and signal. It is remarkable, that this is found among the judgments of God, and reckoned one of the most dreadful, when he ceases to strive with a people, and gives them up to themselves. Thus he says, by the Psalmist, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would have none of me, so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels."* So also saith the prophet Hosea, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."† The consequence of this is the continuance and increase of all manner of wickedness. Then spiritual judgments come in the room of temporal, which, though they are less sensible, are but so much the more fatal. Blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and an obstinate contempt of instruction, are the usual consequences of un-sanctified prosperity. In such circumstances a nation may exult, and bless themselves in their abundant wealth; nay, they may be the envy of their foolish and short-sighted neighbors; but to the eye of faith their condition is most wretched and deplorable. To what a pitch of impiety they may proceed when all restraints are withdrawn, some nations recorded in history are a standing and melancholy proof. And the sudden desolation sometimes inflicted, after long forbearance, by the Lord of nature, on cities and kingdoms, by fire from heaven, by earthquakes, pestilence, or the sword, is a fearful presage of the fate of all, who, in the day of recompence, shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

All these things are plainly founded on the word of God

* Psal. lxxxi. 11, 12.

† Hos. iv. 17.

and manifest consequences of the divine government. They will, however, make very little impression on a thoughtless and secure generation, plunged in sensuality and lust; and least of all on those, who have expressly lifted themselves under the banner of infidelity, and learned to be profane upon principle. This is one of the worst symptoms of our present condition; the greater our guilt, and, therefore, the nearer the danger. Nothing was less looked for by the Babylonian monarch, in the height of his riotous midnight feast, than his kingdoms being taken from him. And yet how speedily was it accomplished, and in how short a time was this superb and opulent city, the "beauty of the Chaldees excellency," turned into a ruinous heap?*

I proceed now to the second general head, which was :

II. To consider a little the encouragement to prayer, contained in the last part of the text: "Awake as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old," &c.

In this the prophet animates his faith, and encourages his own dependance and that of others upon the promises of God, by celebrating the greatness of his power, as manifested in former memorable deliverances granted to his chosen people. He continues his address to the arm of the Lord: and, instead of an enumeration of the mighty acts of this arm in ancient days, and the generations of old, he fixes upon one signal and leading display of divine majesty and power, in the destruction of the Egyptians, and the deliverance of Israel from that subjection and bondage in which they were formerly held by that people. This is done with the highest propriety; for the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage was most remarkable and extraordinary in its circumstances, and the hand of God did most eminently appear in it. Thus the prophet says, in the verse immediately following the text: "Art not thou it, which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the deeps of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" From this appearance in behalf of Israel, God often takes his designation: this chiefly constituted the special relation between him and

* See Isaiah xiii. 21, to the end.

the people of Israel ; and on this their obligation to obedience is founded in the preface or introduction to the moral law ; “ I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” And indeed this deliverance is often considered and justly, as typical of the still more important deliverance of the elect of God from sin and misery.

Now let us consider a little the effect of such a view upon the mind, and its influence in prayer. This, I think may be included in the two following particulars :

First, it satisfies us of the power of God, and his ability to save. There can be no prayer addressed to God for relief and deliverance in an acceptable manner, but what proceeds upon a confidence in his power. And there is in men, for the most part, on this subject, a very imperfect and wavering persuasion. Nay, there is often a greater degree of unbelief, than they themselves are sensible of, or distinctly apprehend. They are often so held captive by sense, and their attention so much taken up and engrossed by outward means and instruments, that they are backward to believe, or rely even on an almighty, because an invisible power. This was the case often with the children of Israel, even after repeated proofs of the strength of the divine arm. Thus says the Psalmist : “ How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert ? Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.”* Against this unhappy tendency, God, by the prophet, warns his people, a few verses after the text : “ I, even I, am he that comforteth you ; who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass. And forgetteth the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth ? And hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy ; and where is the fury of the oppressor ?”† And indeed nothing can be more supporting under such fears, than to

* Psal. lxxviii. 40, 41, 42.

† Isa. li. 12, 13.

remember the instances in which God hath formerly made his power known. It is, as it were, realizing the divine perfections, and making us to see him who is invisible. In this very way does the Psalmist recover from a disconsolate state, and dark discouraging views of divine providence. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious; hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of thy doings."*

In the second place, the same view serves to ascertain us of the mercy of God, and his readiness to help us in distress. It is not enough that we have ever so unshaken a persuasion of the power of God, unless we have some ground to believe that it shall appear in our behalf. Now former instances of extraordinary providential deliverance not only afford a proof of divine power, but shew us in what cases we have reason to expect that it shall be exerted. That part of the providence of God which is already open to our view, enables us, from analogy, to infer what shall be his subsequent conduct; at least so far as to direct and encourage us in our own duty. We know for example, that he is a refuge in times of trouble to those that are in distress: and that in extremity, when all human help fails, then is deliverance more to the glory of God. By this very argument does Jehoshaphat conclude and enforce his prayer. "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee."†

We know also that his faithfulness is engaged to hear those, who, refusing to lean on any broken reed, or trusting any refuge of lies, place their confidence in him alone; and that the glory of God is immediately and chiefly concerned, in the support and preservation of his own people. They see that he hath, in all ages, counted this his own cause; and therefore they say with the Psalmist:

* Psal. lxxvii. 9, 10, 11, 12. † 2 Chron. xx. 12.

“ They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, “ for thou Lord hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”* In fine, former instances of extraordinary deliverance point out the great end and design of such interpositions. That they are for promoting of truth and righteousness, and to make those who are the objects of them, cheerful and willing servants to God ; not only partakers of the bounty of his providence, but monuments of the riches of his grace. “ In that day shall this song be sung in the land “ of Judah. We have a strong city, salvation will God “ appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, “ that the righteous nation, that keepeth the truth may enter in.† Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, “ wasting and destruction within thy borders ; but thou “ shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise.”‡ From all which it appears that, in prayer properly warranted, and rightly directed, it must give unspeakable confidence and hope, to survey the remarkable instances of divine providence, and thence take encouragement to commit our cause to, and rest our hope on, the same unchangeable God.

I conclude this head with observing, That in the expression of the prophet, “ Art thou not it that hath cut “ Rahab and wounded the dragon,” he hath a particular view to the eternity and immutability of God. “ He is “ the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” If he hath done great and marvellous things in the most distant ages, “ his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his “ ear heavy that it cannot hear ;” his strength is not impaired by exercise, nor his fulness wasted by communication. Such an argument would not hold with regard to man, whose power is so exceeding mutable, and his strength so exceeding liable to decay. It is recorded in history, that an old Roman, Milo, who in his youth was a prodigy of strength, happened to live to old age ; and that he used often to weep when he looked on his arms, his once nervous and vigorous arms, and saw the wrinkled and decayed sinews, and the weak, feeble state to which they were reduced by time. But this is not, cannot be

* Ps. ix. 10. † Is. xxvi. 1, 2. ‡ Is. lx. 18.

the case with the arm of the Lord. His strength and stability, particularly as opposed to created weakness and frailty, is often declared in Scripture. Thus in the following sublime passage of the prophet Isaiah. "And the voice said, Cry. And he said what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."*

I proceed now in the last place to apply the truths you have heard on this subject to our own present situation, as to public affairs.

And first. Is not our state, both as a nation, and as a church, exceedingly fallen and low; and have we not the greatest need to address this prayer in the text, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord?" May we not take our low and fallen state as a nation from the universal confession of all without exception, however opposed in sentiments or interest? Every class and denomination of men among us, every party and faction, however unwilling each may be to acknowledge its own share of the guilt, and however prone to load its adversaries with the blame of procuring it, is yet willing to acknowledge that we are at present in a distressed, and in a contemptible state.

And indeed the thing itself speaks. We have of late suffered under a variety of public strokes. (We have not only had, for some time past, repeated threatenings of scarcity and dearth, but vast multitudes have been afflicted with famine in its rigor, which is one of God's " sore judgments." Through the mercy of God this is alleviated in some measure at present, but far from being entirely removed. We have also been long engaged in war with a powerful and politic enemy. And has not the providence of God sensibly frowned on us, and visibly frustrated almost every one of our attempts? This hath been the case to a degree hardly known in any former instance. We have " turned our backs faint-hearted before our ene-

“mies,” in almost every encounter; and the greater and more formidable our preparations for any enterprize, the more pitiful the issue, and the more shameful our defeat and disappointment.) Has there not been an obstructed trade, a loss of territory, a loss of honor, and expence of treasure? (Is not this nation, once in a manner the arbitress of the fate of Europe, now become the scorn and derision of her neighbors and all that are round about her? What weak and divided councils among those that preside? Instead of any genuine public spirit, a proud and factious endeavor to disgrace each other’s measures, and wrest the ensigns of government out of each other’s hands. How numerous and expensive, but how useless and inactive have been our fleets and armies? And how deplorable is the condition of our colonies abroad? They are the chief theatre of the war, because, indeed, they are the subject of the contest. And surely it is affecting to think of the unnatural barbarity and cruelty that there is often exercised, when no age or sex is spared. It is true, the distance of the place may probably make us less sensible of their misery. But if it please God to suffer our enemies to continue their progress, it is hard to say how far the desolation may extend, or how universal it may prove.)

Are we not also in a very low and fallen state as a church, or a nation, still retaining some profession and form of religion? This will be found to correspond with the other, as the cause with the effect. How have all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, corrupted their ways? How gross and prevalent is infidelity, undermining the principles of natural, with the same zeal and eagerness, with which it formerly endeavored to weaken the foundations of revealed religion? How many of high rank have wholly deserted the house and worship of God, nay, openly and boldly treat his service and servants with contempt? How often do we observe such, with a criminal and insolent self-contradiction, trample upon the very laws against profaneness which they contribute to make? And, with how much zeal and diligence does the lower part of the nation emulate the higher, in that which is the reproach of both? So great is the preva-

lence of irreligion, contempt of God, sensuality and pride, that many of the grossest crimes are not only practised but professed, not only frequent but open, not only permitted in but gloried in and boasted of: insomuch, that it requires no small degree of fortitude and resolution, steadfastly to adhere to the principles and character of a disciple of Christ, in opposition to the spirit and strain of fashionable conversation.

It is not, indeed, to be wondered at, that not only this nation, but the protestant states of Europe in general should be brought under the rod, as they have so shamefully departed from that purity of faith and strictness of morals which was the glory of the reformation. How many have of late been ashamed of the cross of Christ, and the doctrine of the grace of God? And what hath been substituted in their room? A pliant and fashionable scheme of religion, a fine theory of virtue and morality. A beautiful but unsubstantial idol, raised by human pride, adorned and dressed by human art, and supported by the wisdom of words. And hath it not, in this, as in every preceding age, in this, as in every other christian country, wherever it gained any credit, been the fore-runner and brought fast at its heels a deluge of profaneness and immorality in practice? Can any of these things be called in question? And are not they, as well as many more which might easily be enumerated, the melancholy proofs of our degenerate and corrupt character?

In the second place. From what hath been said you may see what wrong measures we have hitherto taken for removing these evils, so far as we have been sensible of them. Our gracious sovereign hath, indeed, been pleased to point out our duty, by calling us annually to fasting and humiliation. But with the far greater number it hath been no more than an unmeaning and lifeless form: and they have continued still in the same forgetfulness and contempt of God. You have heard above that nothing is more contrary to the genuine spirit of intercessory prayer in public calamity, than putting trust in an arm of flesh. And yet, is there any thing with which this nation is at present more justly chargeable? Nothing is more appa-

rent from the very face of our common channels of intelligence. In the case of disappointments, on the one hand, are we not ungovernable and head strong in our resentment against men? and equally foolish and sanguine on the other, in our hopes of those who are substituted in their place? We give pompous details of armaments, and prophecy, nay, even in a manner describe their victories, long before the season of action; and incautiously celebrate the characters of leaders, while they are only putting on the harness, and going into the field. What proud and arrogant sentiments do we often express on the subject of our national courage, and ancient British fire, as it is called? In short, we seem to have got entirely into that vain-glorious, ostentatious system, with which we used to upbraid our neighbor and rival nation; and they seem to have given it up in our favor, and to have adopted the wiser and more profitable method of putting deeds for words.

And how negligent have we been of promoting, or praying for the interest of religion? You have heard, that when the arm of the Lord puts on strength, it must be to appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks to a people. But how few discover any concern upon this subject? The want of public spirit, in those who retain any sense of religion, is an evidence of its low and languishing state. When it is lively, it will always be communicative. Love to God and love to man, the two great branches of practical religion, necessarily imply a concern for its progress. And yet, so rare is any thing of this kind, that when it appears as a sort of prodigy, it is looked upon, by most, as romance and extravagance. Let experience tell, if this is not often the case. When any one appears, in imitation of the Scripture saints, to grieve for the sins of others, or discovers any more than ordinary concern for their reformation, are not all his endeavors immediately resisted and resented as troublesome, or branded with every name of contempt, as visionary frenzy and enthusiasm?

In the third place. From what hath been said on this subject, you may learn what ought to be the great aim

of every serious and sensible Christian among us, at present in his intercession at the throne of grace, viz. That the power of the Almighty may appear in behalf of this nation, in such a manner, as all may be obliged to say, "This is the doing of the Lord." That, as he useth to do on extraordinary occasions, he may raise up instruments for this purpose, who may be as polished shafts in his own hand, and may have a single eye to his own glory. That not for our sakes, who have deserved to be cast off for ever, but for his own name's sake, he would support those who still adhere to the protestant cause. And, in a particular manner, for this end, that he would discover his power and glory in an eminent and remarkable revival of religion among all ranks. That our blessed Redeemer, the king of Zion, who reigns to all generations, who hath ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, would send forth his Spirit in a large and plentiful measure. That his work and power may appear in all his gracious influences, convincing and converting sinners, sanctifying, quickening and comforting believers. That this may be a common blessing on all corners of the land, on persons of every class and denomination, of every rank and degree, from the highest to the lowest, of every station and office, civil and sacred. Above all, that he would "cloath his priests with salvation, that his saints may shout aloud for joy." O when shall the time come, when "the Lord of hosts shall be for a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people;" when, instead of fine schemes spun for the honor of their makers, those who are called ministers of Christ, shall preach the gospel, "with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven?" When the truth of God, by its simplicity, majesty, force, and efficacy, shall make its way into the hearts of the most obstinate, and Satan's kingdom fall as lightning before it. Plead, my beloved hearers, that protestants in general may be brought back to their first faith and their first love; that the unhappy divisions among us may be abolished; and that the bond and centre of union may be Christ crucified, the only author of salvation: that men may be no longer ranked in par-

ties, and marshalled under names, but the great and only strife may be, who shall love our Redeemer most, and who shall serve him with the greatest zeal.

And in this critical conjuncture, when the bloody sword is threatening so many nations, and when there is so general a combination of anti-christian powers, be earnest in prayer, that it may please God to subvert their schemes, and turn their counsels into foolishness; and that he, with whom is terrible majesty, may consume “the man of sin with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy him with the brightness of his coming.”—Pray for our gracious sovereign king George, under whose mild and legal government, we have long enjoyed as much happiness as our national guilt would allow: that God, by whom “kings reign and princes decree justice,” would give him a wise understanding heart in his fear, protect his person, direct his councils, and prosper his arms: and long preserve his numerous issue, as happy pledges of the security of our civil and religious liberty. Let us also, while we give thanks to God for raising up an eminent prince in Germany as the head of the reformed interest, and signally supporting him hitherto, pray, that he may continue his protection to him, encourage his heart, and strengthen his hands, and fight his battles. In fine, let us pray for the speedy accomplishment of the prophecy, whoever shall be the instrument of it, of the downfall of Antichrist, when the cry shall be heard, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and shall arise no more.”

In the last place. For our encouragement in this duty, let us remember, that we serve an unchangeable God, the rock of ages. We pray for the appearance of the arm of the Lord “as in ancient days, in the generations of old,” when it “cut Rahab and wounded the dragon.” Review the history of his conduct to the church and people of Israel, how, with a mighty hand and out-stretched arm, he delivered them from bondage, and humbled their proud oppressors. And remember how often, in succeeding ages, he has appeared in behalf of his own people, and supported his own cause when at the very low-

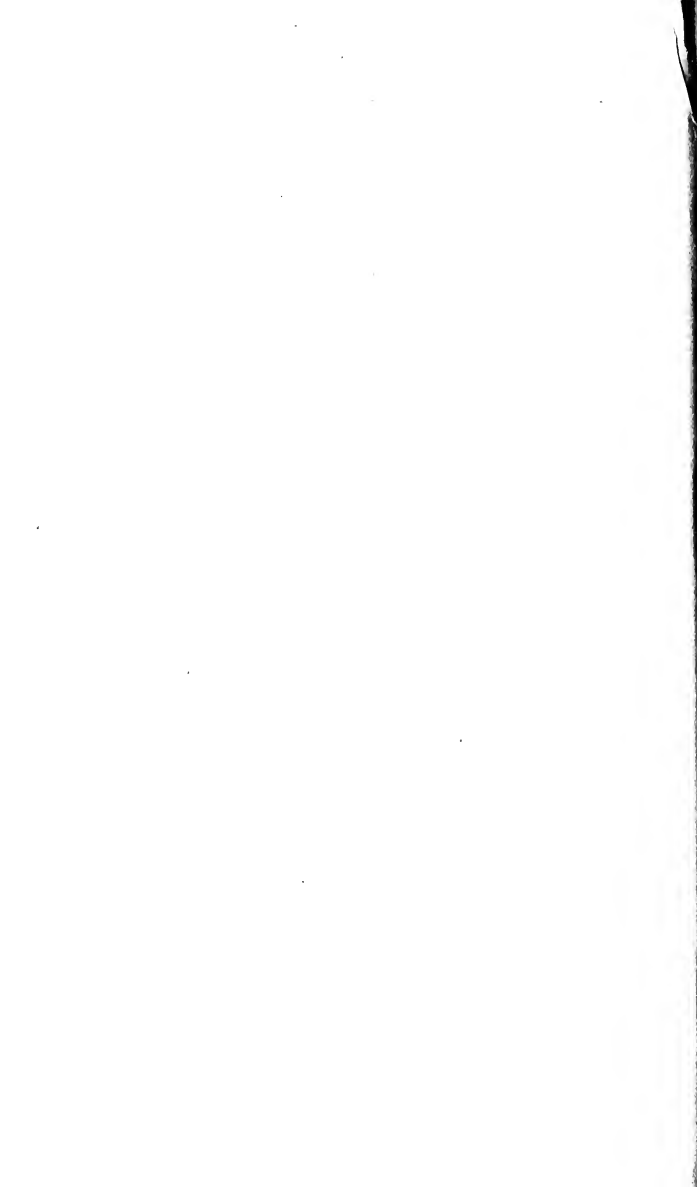
est, and as it were in an expiring state. How low was the interest of Zion at the reformation, when all the kings of the earth served the "scarlet whore," and "were drunk "with the wine of the wrath of her fornication?" How thick the darkness that overspread the nations, and how universal the dominion of error? And yet, in opposition to all the cunning of earthly policy, in opposition to all the fury of persecuting cruelty, he enabled a few plain men, lovers of the truth, to assert, to defend and to spread it.

(The most remarkable times of the revival of religion, in this part of the united kingdom, immediately succeeded times of the greatest apostacy, when truth seemed to be fallen in the streets, and equity could not enter. This was the case immediately before the year 1638. Corruption in doctrine, looseness in practice, and slavish submission in politics, had overspread the church of Scotland. And yet, in a little time, she appeared in greater purity, and in greater dignity, than ever she had done before, or perhaps than ever she hath done since, that period. In the same manner, immediately before the happy revolution, how desperate in appearance was the situation of this church? When all the best, as well as many of the noblest persons in the nation, were chased as fugitives from their dwellings and considered as unworthy of an abode on earth! When many of our worthy ancestors fell in battle, died on a scaffold, or were murdered in the fields by the unrelenting rage of ecclesiastic tyranny. And when worshipping the Lord God of our fathers, according to his own word, was a capital crime! Yet our captivity was brought back, and "we were as men that dreamed," so unexpected was the mercy.)

Let no Christian therefore give way to desponding thoughts. Though infidelity unresisted spreads its poison, though profaneness and enmity to religion and seriousness every where abound, though there are few to support the interest of truth and righteousness, (though we have seen a new thing on the earth, a minister of Christ leaving the pulpit for the stage,) let us not be discouraged. We plead the cause that shall finally prevail. Religion shall rise from its ruins; and its oppressed state at present should not

only excite us to pray, but encourage us to hope for its speedy revival. While every one is diligent in his own sphere, and in his proper duty, and earnestly pleading for the revelation of the arm of the Lord, let us recollect his favor and protection to the church in every time of need, and his faithfulness which is to all generations. Let us say with the Psalmist, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death."*

* Pf. xlviii. 12, 13, 14.



The NATURE and EXTENT of VISIBLE RELIGION.

A

S E R M O N.

M A T T H. v. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

THERE are two different divisions frequently made of practical religion. One, into our duty to God, and our duty to man. Not as though every part of our duty were not to be ultimately referred to God, and to be done from a regard to his authority enjoining it; but because there are some duties, of the performance of which the Lord our maker, and some of which our neighbor is the immediate object. Another common division is into the hidden and the apparent part; the inward frame and temper of the mind, and the outward life and conversation. These two divisions, though they are near a-kin to one another, and often by indistinct speakers in a great measure confounded, yet are by no means one and the same; and when the difference is not sufficiently attended to, it is followed by many bad consequences. It is undeniable that God is chiefly delighted with truth in the inward parts; yet there are many of the duties we owe to God, which ought to have an outward expression, which without it will not be acceptable to him, but which are greatly neglected by those who imagine that a good life and conversation implies no more than the performance

of a few of the most obvious and necessary social virtues. The truth is, there are few things that seem to be less understood than the nature, extent, and obligation of visible religion. Some lean to one extreme, and some to another. Reproaches are mutually thrown upon one another. Some are blamed for too much profession; and they are ready to retort the charge, and blame their accusers with at least equal justice, for too little, or none at all. In the mean time there are too few of any sort who have such a conduct and character as really adorns the doctrine of their Saviour, and serves for the instruction of sinners, or the edification and comfort of those who fear God. For this reason I have chosen to insist a little upon these words of our Saviour to his disciples, in his excellent sermon on the mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I am sensible that some, and particularly one commentator of great eminence, understand these words as addressed only, or chiefly, to the twelve apostles; and that by light is to be understood their doctrine, which they were to let, or to suffer to shine; freely to communicate, as they had freely received it. This they presume to have been intended, in opposition to the Heathen philosophers and the Jewish teachers, who confined their instructions to their schools, and imparted what they esteemed their most valuable discoveries only to a few select disciples. To support this interpretation, it is alledged, that the metaphor of light is constantly used in Scripture to signify knowledge; and that of darkness, ignorance. But though this be the primary intention of the metaphor, it is surely sometimes carried on to express the effects of knowledge; and not only walking in the light (as 1 John i. 7.) but shining as lights in the world, (as in Phil. ii. 15.) an expression almost the same with that in our text, is used to signify holiness of life. Besides, I do not think the above interpretation can be made, without some constraint, to agree with the expression in the last part of the verse, "that they may see your good works." I understand the words, therefore, as originally addressed to all who then heard our Lord's

discourse, and now to all professing Christians; and by the expression, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works;" that the holiness and purity of their conversation should be visible and eminent; that men, by observing it, might be constrained to acknowledge the truth and power of the principles which produced it, and persuaded to yield themselves also to their government.

In discoursing upon this subject, what I propose, through divine assistance, is, 1. To illustrate the meaning and extent of the exhortation, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*: 2. To illustrate the motives with which it is enforced, as they are contained in the text, the glory of God, and the good of others: And, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I. In the first place, then, let us consider the extent and meaning of the exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." This, in general, includes the whole of visible religion; every part of the duty of a Christian, to which his neighbors are or may be witnesses. And here it is of importance to observe, that though the inward temper of the mind is not in itself and immediately the object of human observation; and though there may be, and there is, much hypocrisy in the world; yet every disposition of the heart hath a natural and genuine expression, and may be more clearly or more obscurely discerned by some outward symptoms. There are therefore few grosser mistakes than to suppose, either that no conclusions will, or that none ought, to be drawn by the world about us, concerning our inward dispositions, from our outward carriage. So established is the connection between them, that hypocrites are usually much more successful in deceiving themselves than the world. On the other hand, those who, from a real or pretended fear of the imputation of hypocrisy, put off all outward appearances of devotion, and abstain from all expressions of the inward exercise of their souls, will hardly persuade any

impartial person, that the hidden source is strong and plentiful, when the streams which should issue from it are so easily concealed. Other natural affections of the mind, as sorrow, anger, and joy, do immediately discover themselves in the countenance and carriage; and though they may be restrained and moderated, can scarcely be wholly or long concealed: Why then should it be otherwise with religious affections, which are at least as just in their nature, and much more noble in their object? I am afraid we may say, with too much truth, that there is but little real religion in the world at present; and yet even that little is often, in a most shameful and cowardly manner, dissimulated or denied.

But because the impression of general truths is but seldom strong or lasting, I shall add a few particular observations, for opening the meaning and extent of this exhortation, *Let your light shine before men.*—And, in the first place, If you would make your light to shine before the world, you must be careful of the practice of such duties as are most *rare* and *uncommon*; and that whether their being so arises from the difficulty of the duties themselves, or from the peculiar degeneracy and contrary practice of any particular age or place. The metaphor itself will teach you this. Nothing can be said to shine, but that which throws out a distinguished lustre, in comparison of other objects. Those who are but as other men, and do no way excel the world about them, cannot possibly bring any honor to their profession, or be properly said to make their light to shine. Thus our Saviour argues, in recommending a very rare and eminent virtue,* “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.—For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?”

I observed, in entering upon this particular, that the practice of some duties may be uncommon, either from the difficulty of the duties themselves, or the peculiar de-

* Matth. v. 44, 46, 47.

generacy of any particular age or place. The first of these happens in all those cases in which the law of God, from its purity and spirituality, is most immediately contrary to the bent of carnal affection. For though it be true in general, as the apostle Paul tells us,* that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be;" yet this enmity is much stronger in some cases than in others. Some of those gracious dispositions which shone in the man Christ Jesus when he dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and which he so ardently recommends, such as, contempt of the world, and heavenliness of mind, meekness, humility, the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies, are much more opposite to the tendency of corrupt nature than some other parts of the moral law. Or, to speak more properly, it is only by an obedience to the will of God, carried to this degree, and manifestly flowing from such principles, and such an inward temper, that we can make our light to shine in the view of an observing world.

I took notice also, that whether any duty be difficult or easy in itself, if it is neglected, or brought into contempt, by the peculiar degeneracy of any age or place, he who would make his light to shine before men, must, with boldness and resolution, with steadfastness and constancy, adhere to the practice of it. If in any place, or in any age, the very outward attendance upon the ordinances of Christ's institution is made light of, or despised, by many of every rank; if the name of God is profaned and abused by unholy conversation; it is then the duty of every real servant of God, publicly to manifest his esteem and love for divine ordinances, and to maintain the highest reverence for the holy name of God in his discourse and language. And, if I am not mistaken, the very meaning of making our light to shine before men, is, to be doubly watchful in all such cases, not only on our own account, but upon account of others; or, as our Saviour expressed it, that they may see our good works: For instance, not only to esteem the institutions of Christ in the gospel, for their tendency to promote our sanctification

* Rom. viii. 7.

and comfort, but even when these purposes might be at least as well obtained in another way, at particular times; yet to attend carefully upon public ordinances, that we may contribute our part to preserve the respect that is due to them: or, in the other case supposed, when profane swearing is common and prevalent, to discover the deeper reverence for the holy name of God, and use the utmost caution in the whole of our conversation, to avoid every doubtful expression, or any thing that may have a tendency to ensnare the unwary, or confirm the wicked in an evil course. You will probably conclude, that my mentioning these two instances arises from a persuasion that these sins prevail remarkably among us in the present age, and your conclusion is just. I shall add one more to them, viz. voluptuousness; either excessive sensuality and intemperance, or at least a pleasing of the flesh, with a total neglect of mortification and self-denial. And be assured, my brethren, you are particularly called upon, by the exhortation in the text, in these and every other instance of the like kind, not to lose your horror of sin by the frequency of it, but, according to the exhortation of the apostle Paul,* to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

In the second place, In order to make your light shine before men, you must act an unexceptionable part in all such cases as your conduct falls most *immediately*, and most *fully*, under the *observation* of others. I have said above, that the exhortation, in its full extent, includes the whole of visible religion. But there are some cases in which our conduct is comparatively more visible than in others, and more immediately subjected to the examination of the world. As there are some places more conspicuous and exposed to public view than others, so are there also some persons in the whole of their deportment, and some actions of the same persons. It is the last of these that chiefly relates to my present subject. Are you not sensible then, that in those actions which fall most

* Phil. ii. 15.

immediately under the observation of others, the greatest caution and circumspection is necessary? It is from these that the judgment of men is chiefly formed of professing Christians, and the character fixed which they must bear in the world. With respect to other actions, men proceed more upon conjecture, and therefore will not, ever themselves, lay so much stress upon their observations; but in such as are wholly subjected to their view, their conclusions are peremptory. If you ask, what are those actions that fall most immediately under the observation of others? I answer, they are many. Most of those of which our neighbor is the object; particularly all relative duties, and also the government of the tongue. Although those who are conversant with you, may make shrewd guesses, by what they see in your outward deportment, whether you are constant in secret devotion, or serious and fervent in public, they must still labor under much uncertainty. But a neighbor will quickly and certainly know, whether you are friendly or selfish, forward or peaceable; a wife must know, whether she hath an affectionate husband, and a husband whether he hath a dutiful wife; a servant must know, whether he is under a reasonable and gentle, or a capricious and cruel master; and a master, whether he hath a submissive and diligent, or an idle and slothful servant. The same thing holds with respect to every other relation. And as to the government of the tongue, the world must know whether your conversation is pure and inoffensive at all times, and profitable, as opportunities present themselves; or if it is frothy, unprofitable and vain, rash, peevish, passionate, unchaste, or censorious. As therefore, in the language of our Saviour, a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid; so a Christian, in these cases, cannot be concealed. And I hope I may be allowed to say, without being thought to put the shadow of religion for the substance, or preferring the form to the spirit, that he ought, in all such cases, to be particularly watchful that nothing may escape him, which may, in its consequences, tend to the dishonor of God, or the ruin of the souls of men.

In the third place, In order to make your light to shine before men, you must be careful in the discharge of such duties as are most *acceptable* to others. It is self-evident, that if there are some of the duties which we owe to our neighbors more acceptable to them than others, nothing will more recommend religion to their esteem, which is the design of a shining conversation, than the faithful discharge of such duties. Now, that there are some duties more acceptable to mankind than others, is very evident; and none will call it in question, who reflect upon the different reception given to those duties which promote men's temporal interest, and those which restrain or punish their crimes. The one class of these procures the love and esteem of all without exception, whether good or bad; the other often provokes the resentment and inflames the passions of the vicious, who make so great a part of the world. Reflect also what a different reception is usually given to a covetous hard hearted oppressor, or to a fraudulent unjust man, on the one hand; and to a profane swearer, a drunkard, or despiser of religion, on the other. The first is hated and fled from by all; the last is freely carested by many, and indeed often by those from whose profession a more equal and impartial detestation of vice and wickedness might have been expected. This is easily to be accounted for, if we consider that worldly interest is the idol of by far the greatest part of men, and that there is too strong a bias to it in the very best.

From this it is plain, that he who would make his light to shine before others, must be extremely careful of such duties as are most acceptable to them, particularly justice and integrity in all his dealings; and such justice as, if possible, may be beyond dispute, and to the conviction of all. There was a very great beauty and dignity in the language of Samuel to the children of Israel, when he was able to appeal to themselves, as to the unblameableness of his conduct among them in a public station: “ *Behold, “ here I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose

* 1 Sam. x'i. 3.

“ asfs have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom
“ have I oppreffed? or of whose hand have I received any
“ bribe to blind my eyes therewith? and I will reftore it
“ unto you. And they faid, Thou haft not defrauded us,
“ nor oppreffed us, neither haft thou taken ought of any
“ man’s hand.” Mercy and charity alfo to thofe in diftreff
is univerfally acceptable: this is ftill more acceptable to
mankind in general than juftice alone. The reafon is,
they think they have a claim to juftice, and, in many ca-
fes, can obtain it by compulfion, when it is not willingly
given them. Befides, that worldly wifdom may eafily be
conceived the principle of juft dealings, through fear of a
difcovery, and its confequences: but charity and compaf-
fion to the neceffities of others, is looked upon as the free
unconftained exertion of good difpofitions. The apoftle
Paul fupposes a difference in the eftimation of the world,
between a merely righteous or juft man, and a good or
merciful man, when he fays,* “ for fcarcely for a righte-
“ ous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man
“ fome would even dare to die.”

The fame selfish bias in men to their worldly intereft
will indeed fometimes carry them fo far, as to make them
exceffive and unreafonable in their expectations. The
world feems not only to expect, that thofe who profefs to
fear God fhould be juft and upright in their dealings, mer-
ciful and charitable to proper objects; but that they fhould
be at all times ready to yield up their own rights to the ex-
travagant demands of worldly men, and give fuch eviden-
ces of felf-denial, as are neither confiftent with wifdom nor
with piety. Thefe exceffive expectations of the world,
which it is found by experience impoffible to gratify, are
too apt to make fome, in peevifhnefs and difpleafure,
throw up all hopes of, or endeavors after, avoiding its
reproaches. This is to difobey God, becaufe it is impoffi-
ble perfectly to pleafe men. The more ready they are to
take offence without reafon, the more watchful ought the
confcientious Chriftian to be, that he may give no juft
ground for it. And undoubtedly the private example, or

* Rom. v. 7.

the public endeavors of any person for reformation, bid much fairer for success, when his conduct is such in the particulars above-mentioned, as the world in general must confess to be amiable and excellent.

I shall only add one consideration more to shew the necessity or propriety of shining in such duties as are most acceptable to others. It is, that usually the loose or profane part of the world, in order to prevent or wipe off in some measure, the reproach which their conduct, in other instances, brings upon them, pretend to glory in the justness of their dealings, their generosity and charity; and this often not without insinuations, that those who appear to be religious, are not so strict in point of moral honesty. It is therefore incumbent on every servant of God to make his practice a continual and visible refutation of this calumny; and to shew, that none can, to such perfection, discharge any moral duty whatever, as those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, and having the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, must of consequence love their brethren also.

In the fourth and last place, If you would make your light shine before men, you must be diligent in the practice of such duties as are most profitable to others. It will not be difficult to determine, what are the duties most profitable to others, if we only consider what has the most immediate tendency to promote their spiritual and eternal interest. Of this kind, there are many incumbent on persons of every station, and in every situation of life; though the obligation of them is little thought of, for the most part, and the practice generally neglected: such as, private and personal instruction, tender and affectionate counsel, faithful admonition and reproof. Every one of us knows the persons to whom his influence extends, when any scheme for his worldly interest and advancement, or that of his friends, or the power and credit of his party, is at stake; but few think of using the same interest for the glory of God, and the salvation of deluded sinners.

Of this kind are all the duties of superiors to their inferiors; as parents and heads of families, teachers of youth, ministers of the gospel, magistrates and rulers. These every

one, in their several capacities, are obliged, either more directly, or by consequence, to promote the everlasting interest of those who are under them; and nothing will make their light more to shine, nothing will contribute more to adorn and illustrate their Christian character, than a faithful, zealous, and diligent discharge of the duties of these stations.

Perhaps it may be thought, that the reasoning on the former particular is contrary to this; and that if these duties, which are acceptable to others, make a Christian's conversation to shine, the practice of such as men are averse from submitting to, must have an opposite effect. But this is far from being the case: for though some sins are contrary to other sins, religion is consistent throughout; and every part of it, instead of obscuring, throws a lustre upon another. This will easily appear, if you consider, that however unwilling men are to be instructed in their duty, or restrained and limited from their irregular indulgence; so soon as the endeavors used for that purpose are successful, they will, with the highest thankfulness, acknowledge the care bestowed upon them. Though a child may, at first, and for some time, be impatient of the father's authority; if it is attended with success, he will ever afterwards reckon it one of the greatest blessings of his life; and the memory of such a parent will be infinitely more dear, than of one who has shown the most partial and indulgent fondness.

Further, such duties, though they may be harsh and unpleasant to those who are the immediate objects of them; yet as they are unquestionably good and useful in themselves, they must command the esteem and approbation of every impartial observer. It is indeed by this means alone, or chiefly, that the public honor and credit of religion is preserved, amongst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. What they would hate and resist, or perhaps revile, in their own case; when others are concerned, conscience constrains them to bear a clear and strong testimony in its favor. Nay, not only so, but the most wicked and profligate, though they hate religion

and righteousness in itself; yet are they sufficiently sensible of the connection between a religious profession and its proper fruits, and sufficiently apt to reproach those in whom they observe the deficiency; and that in such cases as the performance would be painful, and not acceptable to themselves. Thus a child of a slothful parent, a subject of an unfaithful magistrate, if their profession is such as to make the neglect scandalous, shall despise them in their hearts, and sometimes go so far as to reproach them by their words, even where their own ease and security is wholly owing to that very criminal indulgence. From all which it evidently appears, that a conscientious discharge of such duties as are most useful and profitable to others, is highly proper to make our light to shine before men.

I am sensible, my brethren, that these classes into which I have divided our public and visible duties, viz. such as are most rare and uncommon, such as are most subject to the observation of others, such as are most acceptable, and such as are most profitable to them, are not so entirely distinct one from another, but that there are many parts of the duty of a Christian, which fall under more than one of these divisions, and some that may perhaps fall under them all; yet I have mentioned them separately, because each of them hath some duties which do peculiarly, or at least eminently belong to itself: and as every one of them contributes to shew us the extent of our duty upon the whole, so they, at the same time, serve to set the obligations to it in a striking light.

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was, briefly to illustrate the two motives added in the text to enforce the exhortation; and these are, the glory of God, and the good of others.

I. The glory of God. The glory of God is the supreme and highest aim of every real Christian, to which every other design is subordinate and subservient. I am not ignorant, that profane and worldly men are apt to decide this language, of the glory of God being the highest aim of a Christian. It is not however the less agree-

able to truth, that it is contrary to the spirit of the world :
“ * For the natural man receiveth not the things of the
“ Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; nei-
“ ther can he know them, because they are spiritually
“ discerned.” It might be sufficient to support this man-
ner of speaking, to say, it is agreeable to the word of
God, which is a much surer test of truth, than any max-
ims established by human wisdom. But for silencing
gainfayers in some measure, though their conviction
(without a change of heart) cannot be hoped for, I would
observe, that it is the character of a Christian to love God
above all : and is it not a natural consequence of supreme
love, to be jealous of the honor and zealous in the inter-
est and cause of the object of our esteem ? Real love can-
not, even in imagination, be separated from this its natu-
ral effect and expression.

Now, if this is once admitted, there is no way in
which we can so well, or rather there is no way in which
we can at all promote the glory of God, but by a holy
and unblameable conversation. As the works of creation
are said to shew forth his glory, because they point out his
natural perfections exerted in their formation ; so his rea-
sonable creatures glorify him, when his image, or some
resemblance of his moral excellence, and this as his own
workmanship, is discerned upon their hearts.

It is no doubt, in one view, difficult for us to conceive
how the glory of God, who is perfect and unchangeable,
should at all depend upon our conduct ; yet as this is the
light in which he hath represented it to us himself, so it
is necessarily felt in this manner by every one of his ser-
vants. Indeed we see, that the unholiness or the un-
guarded conduct of those who profess to serve God, and
stand in an apparent relation to him, has the greatest ten-
dency to dishonor him, as far as that expression hath any
meaning or propriety in it. The state of the world may
easily convince us of this ; for as no argument has been
oftener used against the gospel, so none ever gave it a
deeper wound, than the wicked lives of its professors. As
many, therefore, as have any regard to the glory of God,

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

or the honor of the Redeemer's name, must carefully endeavor to make their light shine before men, "that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven."

2. The other obligation contained in the text, to an useful or shining conversation, is the good of others. As some degree of love to mankind is naturally implanted in every heart, and as love to others is the second commandment of the law, and a necessary effect of the love of God; so it is impossible but this love, if it be real, must, in every believer, evidence itself in a deep concern for and conscientious endeavor after, the salvation of others. Whomsoever we love, we naturally express this love, by endeavoring to avert from them those ills which we most fear, and to procure for them those advantages which to ourselves appear most valuable: and therefore, the looking upon sinners with indifference, and not using the means in our power for their recovery and salvation, is the most unquestionable evidence, either of our not believing the important truths of religion, or being altogether void of good-will to our fellow-creatures, or rather of both; because they are essential branches of the same character. A parent who should profess, from his own experience, to have the greatest apprehensions of the danger of a certain practice, and yet should freely suffer or encourage his children in the same practice, would give good ground to judge, either that his fears were wholly affected, or that he was altogether destitute of love to his children, or concern for their welfare.

Now, how can any man more effectually promote the real, that is, the everlasting interest of others about him, than by a shining example of piety and usefulness of conversation? A blameless life, such as becometh the gospel, is a more effectual reprimand to vice, and a more inviting argument to the practice of religion, than the best of reasoning. Reason and argument, to pattern and example, is but as an uninformed picture to a living man. The most part of mankind are best instructed by their senses, and are both unwilling to attend to, and incapable of perceiving the force of speculative reasoning; but a good life

answering to what their own consciences declare to be right, is a sensible representation that never fails to make an impression, both on the memory and heart. As the impression on the wax is more discernible than the engraving on the seal, though this last be just and perfect, whereas many accidents may render the impressed image faulty and defective; so though a just and complete view of the doctrine of Christ is only to be had from the scriptures of truth, yet the general integrity and uprightness of a good man is more legible to the bulk of mankind; and being the character of a man originally of like passions with themselves, engages them to imitate it. From all this I conclude, that the love of God, and the love of our neighbor, jointly concur in laying the strongest obligation upon every Christian to make his light shine before men.

III. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

First, From what has been said, you may see in what respect alone it is our duty to aim at the approbation of others, and from what principle it ought to flow. We are bound so to order our outward conversation, as that it may on the one hand, contribute nothing to the corruption of others, but rather that they may be invited to the practice, and persuaded of the excellence and amiableness of true religion. There is no character against which our Saviour pronounces a severer doom, than that of being religious that we may be seen of men; that is to say, when the view is only to procure their applause to our own character as a gratification of vanity. Such persons have their reward. But when the design is, to watch that the name of God be not blasphemed on our account, to bear much fruit that God may be glorified, there are few things more useful and important. For this reason, the friends of religion owe no thanks to those who glory in a contempt of what others think or say of them, who are at no pains to avoid the appearance of evil, but freely indulge themselves in whatever they can, with any plausibility, alledge to be lawful in itself. They may cry out, as much as they will, against the uncharitableness and censoriousness of the

the world ; but they themselves are acting in downright contradiction to the exhortation in our text, and neither show regard to the will of God, nor compassion to the souls of men. In opposition to this, the Christian who would make his light to shine, in obedience to his master's command, must use the utmost tenderness ; and circumspection, not lest his own reputation should be wounded, but lest religion should suffer through his unguarded conduct. Such an one hath this advantage, that though perfectly to please a capricious world is impossible, he may yet obtain mercy of God to be faithful ; and though there is a wo to the world because of offences, he may escape the wo of that man by whom the offence cometh.

In the second place, What hath been said upon this subject serves to reprove the sin, and shew the danger, of all those who are notoriously deficient in the practice of the duty recommended in the text. Indeed you may see from the extent of it, that it affords ground of humiliation for all without exception ; and, like every other precept of the pure and holy law of God, shews plainly, that a perfect righteousness is not to be found in ourselves ; and that, for our final acceptance, we must be indebted to the free grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. But, in a particular manner, this reproof is directed to two sorts of persons.

First, Those who are wholly unprofitable to others, and altogether insensible of their obligation to profit them. There are not a few in the world who openly justify themselves, and extenuate their sins by this pretence, that they do no harm to others ; that, if they do evil, none suffer but themselves. This is the usual pretence of dissolute liveries, who are plunged in sensuality. Let such consider their entire neglect of the command of our Saviour in the text ; let them consider their obligations to serve God, and the account they must render to him. Let me suppose any of you had a servant who should altogether neglect your business, and, upon your reproving him, should make this excuse, I have done no harm, I have put nothing out of order, I have not hindered the other servants in their work ; how would you be satisfied ? or rather

with what indignation would you receive the shameless pretence? Let this then convince you of the justice of the sentence that shall at last be pronounced by our Supreme Master upon all such: * “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness, where there shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” But the worst of it is, this excuse, weak as it is, is not true; for all those who are not profitable, must be hurtful to others. Drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, and the whole tribe of those who pretend to do harm to none but themselves, pollute and corrupt, by their example and influence, all that come within their reach: so that, for the hazard of infection, thieves and robbers are less dangerous companions.

But, secondly, This reproof ought to be directed to such as are further chargeable with the actual guilt of seducing others. How many are there who, by the contrary methods of flattering insinuations, or derision and insult, as they expect from the dispositions of the persons the one or the other will be most successful, endeavor to banish a sense of religion from the minds of others, and gradually to involve them in sin and guilt? This is the immediate tendency of all that conversation, which, with a malicious pleasure, enlarges upon the real or supposed miscarriages of the people of God, and charges every profession of religion with hypocrisy. How aggravated is the guilt of all such, and how dreadful will be the punishment! They are eminent and faithful agents for the devil. The works of their father they do, and his reward they shall share. As the union and mutual love of the saints in heaven will increase the happiness of every particular member of that blessed society; so we must suppose, that the mutual reproaches of the damned and miserable spirits in hell, accusing each other as the authors of their destruction, will greatly sharpen their anguish. The fear of this seems to have alarmed the rich man, even in torments, lest his brethren should come to the same place. What must a child, for example, ruined by the neglect of restraint, or pernicious example of a parent, think of or say to the author of his misery? Oh! unmerciful monster, and not a parent,

* Matth. xxv, 30.

who, instead of correcting, sported with or encouraged the first instances of impiety : who taught me, by example, to profane my Creator's name, and to neglect his service ; and who, though ambitious of making me rich and great for a few days in a transitory world, hast contributed to bring me to, and fix me forever in this place of torment ! Take warning then, I beseech you, all of every rank, and increase not your own condemnation by the guilt of seducing others.

In the third place, what hath been said upon this subject will enable you to try the purity and sincerity of your outward conversation. An inquiry here is of the more consequence, that we are in great danger of deceiving ourselves, because both a truly serious and a worldly motive may lead to many of the same outward actions. For this purpose let me ask you, whether it is the glory of God, and the good of others, that makes you watchful of your conduct ; or a tenderness of your own reputation ? This may be, in a good measure, discerned by the faithful search and trial of your own hearts ; and particularly by observing, whether the injuries and reproaches of wicked men excite in you a greater resentment of the offence, or compassion for their folly. Again, I would ask you, whether you are equally conscientious in such duties as may be painful and troublesome, and may expose you to the reproaches and insults of the ungodly, as in those that immediately tend to your outward honor and credit ? I have shown above, that it is necessary to make your light to shine, by the first as well as the last. Is then your concern equal and impartial to fulfil the duties of your station, whatever they are, whether agreeable or mortifying to the flesh ? or are you most careful when you will reap the greatest present reward ? By examining into these particulars, you may be enabled to judge of the purity of your intentions.

In the last place, suffer me to improve this subject, by an earnest exhortation to all who now hear me, to the practice of the duty recommended in the text, to " make your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

That this may be the more distinct and effectual, I shall address it to three different classes.

First, To those who are the professed advocates of good works. Every one who hath any experience of, or commerce with the world, must know, that there is a set of men who profess to love and esteem those discourses only that teach and recommend good works ; and that in order to state a distinction where there ought to be none, between the truths of the glorious gospel, and the doctrines of morality. I intreat all of you to consider what hath been said of the great extent of visible religion, and it will have a greater tendency to humble you, and excite you to seek the sanctifying grace of God as the source of true holiness, than to glory in the excellence or perfection of your moral character. Take heed also, that you fall not into the shameful inconsistency too common in the world, of being the strongest pleaders for moral preaching, and the least tender of moral practice. What a shame and scandal is it, and how pitiful in the eyes of those who understand what true and undefiled religion is, to hear one who is unwilling, unable or ashamed to worship God in his own family, who is but rarely to be seen in the public assemblies of God's people, who hardly ever gave child or servant a serious advice, but whom they have often seen guilty of drunkenness and excess ; to hear, I say, such an one rise up as an advocate for morality ; to hear him crying out, morality is the whole of religion ; and therefore that he cannot endure such stuff as conviction and humiliation, conversion or regeneration, flying to, embracing, or relying upon a Saviour ; phrases which, among too many, are now going into desuetude ; whether they retain their important meaning, I shall leave to the judgment of another day. Nay, I am afraid we might produce more instances than one, capable of saying, upon hearing a discourse of the love of God, " Such things are not to be understood ; 'twere pity but ministers would satisfy themselves with preaching plain morality ;" as if the love of God, which is the sum and substance of the moral law, were no part of it at all. To such may it not justly be

said, “ * Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God ?” Let all such of you, therefore, be exhorted to act up to their character, “ If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” But be sure you understand what these commandments are : and then, if you can maintain before God, who is greater than your hearts, that you have kept these perfectly in thought, word and deed, you may rest your salvation upon it ; for it not only was, but continues to be a certain truth, that “ the man who doth them shall live in them.” But it is greatly to be feared, that this is a source of life, by far too deep for any of the children of Adam to draw it out.

In the second place, I would address this exhortation to all who have, or profess to have a high esteem of the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Extremes commonly beget one another ; and so the ill-founded zeal which despisers of the gospel sometimes pretend for good works, makes others state themselves in opposition to them, and makes the word itself to have an unacceptable sound. But, my brethren, beware of being thus overcome of evil. Remember the words of our Saviour, “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.” Hear also the apostle Paul “ † This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.” You cannot more effectually bring a reproach on that holy name by which you are called, and in which you glory, than by being enemies in word or in deed to holiness and purity of conversation, or by not being even apparently and visibly holy. For though you must lay your account with the reproach of men, and hatred of the world in many cases, wo is pronounced against you, if you do not “ love them that hate you, and bless them that persecute you.” Let therefore your conversation be without offence. Neglect not any part of your duty in the sight of the world, and be the more watchful, that, on account of your profession, they will be the more diligent in observing, and the more severe in censuring

* Rom. ii. 23.

† Titus iii. 8.

your conduct. Whilst therefore you remember that faith in Christ is the only source of new obedience, remember also, that faith without works is dead, being alone.

In the last place, I would address this exhortation to all such in this audience as, by their office or station, or wealth or character, are raised above others. You will surely be sensible of the propriety of this exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." You are placed in a conspicuous situation, exposed to public view, and your influence will be great, whether it be profitable or hurtful. You ought not to count your higher station in life a favor blindly bestowed on you for your pleasure only, but a trust committed to you for which you must render an impartial account. How should this repress and restrain all vain-glorious ostentation of the temporary differences between man and man, and excite to a diligent improvement of your talents against the coming of your Lord, when the highest shall be upon a level with the lowest. I hope it will contribute to enforce the exhortation, that, in this age, the declining state of religion loudly calls for the assistance of all to its revival, but particularly for eminent and shining examples. How hard is it, that when vice and infidelity have so many advocates in writing and conversation, there should be so few exerting themselves in their station, for the promoting of truth and righteousness! And let none excuse themselves for their own neglect of duty, by throwing the blame upon others, and holding up to light the sloth or wickedness of those who are most eminently guilty. Let none say, "Alas, my sphere of usefulness is very narrow, my influence is very small; but if those who are in more eminent stations, and whose stations, give them greater weight, would but exert themselves, the effect would be sensible." Remember your stations are just what God hath assigned you, and for these, and these alone, you are to be called to an account. The less important they are, the duties are the more easily fulfilled, and the neglect, in one respect at least, (though I cannot say in all,) more criminal and inexcusable. To conclude, Let the wise and powerful magistrates, ministers, parents,

and heads of families, be diligent in discharging the duties incumbent upon them, and join earnest prayer to God, that he would arise and effectually plead his own cause. Amen.

All MANKIND by NATURE under SIN.

A

S E R M O N.

ROMANS iii. 23.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

THE whole revelation of the will of God to mankind, both in the Old Testament and the New, proceeds upon the supposition that they are sinners; that is to say, transgressors of his law, and liable to the stroke of his justice. This only can give meaning to the doctrine of *redemption*. None can understand, at least none can relish or embrace it, unless they believe, and are persuaded of this preliminary truth.

What I have now said, appears from many express passages of the holy scriptures; and is particularly evident from the general strain, and from the very structure of the epistle to the Romans. In it the apostle, who had never been at Rome, gives a full and particular account of the doctrine of Christ; and he lays the foundation for this by a distinct and labored proof, that all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, are *under sin*. In imitation of his example, I intend to begin my discourses on practical religion, by endeavoring to impress your minds with a sense of the same truth. This must lead the way to the saving knowledge of the Redeemer; and as he only can build securely, who takes care that every part of the superstructure rest immediately or ultimately upon the foundation, it is as necessary to be remembered by saints, as to be received by sinners.

It may perhaps, on a slight view, appear to be superfluous. 'All mankind,' some will say, 'are ready to acknowledge that they are sinners; and there is great reason to believe they are sincere in this confession.' But, my brethren, a little reflection may convince you, that this general acknowledgment is either very insincere, or very imperfect and defective. It is plainly a light sense of sin that enables the multitude to sleep in security. It is plainly a light sense of sin that betrays men into the commission of it, and emboldens them to continue in it. It is plainly a light sense of sin that blunts the edge of all the threatenings in the word of God, and the admonitions of his providence. Is it not from a light sense of sin, that when the preaching of the gospel is not wholly deserted, its inestimable truths are received without thankfulness, and heard without profit?

For these reasons, I propose, through the assistance of divine grace, to discourse a little on the words of the apostle now read: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:" And, in so doing, shall

1. Endeavor to confirm the truth contained in them, That all mankind are sinners, or transgressors of the law of God, and liable to his righteous judgment. And,
2. Shall make a practical improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place, then, let us endeavor to confirm the truth contained in the text, That all mankind are sinners, or transgressors of the law of God, and liable to his righteous judgment. And here, my brethren, it puts me a little to a stand, in what manner to handle this important subject; whether in the way of reason or affection; whether in the way of cool and conclusive arguments directed to the judgment, or pointed interrogatories directed to the conscience. Many, nay, innumerable, are the cavils that have been brought by men of corrupt minds against this fundamental truth. The father of lies, indeed, seems to consider it, and justly, as the corner-stone of true religion, which, if he is able to weaken or undermine, it must end in the fall and ruin of the whole fabric. If there be any among you, as possibly there are, infected with the poison

of infidelity, all exhortation and warning will be treated by such with disdain, while their objections, however weak, have not been brought into view. On the other hand, there are multitudes of sinners borne away by lust and passion, who are incapable of understanding the force of speculative reasoning, and who have an unhappy tendency to overlook, as what does not concern them, every thing that is treated in that way. I shall be obliged, therefore, to have an eye to both: and oh! that it may please God to enable me so to propose to the judgment, and so to press upon the conscience, this necessary truth, as that some careless persons may be awakened, and brought to an attention to the one thing needful; and that if any have hitherto taken up with imperfect notions of religion, and built their hope upon the sand, they may be persuaded in time to distrust that dangerous situation, and to found it upon *the Rock of ages*.

For the reason above assigned, it is difficult to determine, what use is to be made of scripture-testimony on such a subject. The charge of guilt upon the sinner, seems to be only preparatory to, and must, as it were, pave the way for the reception of scripture-truths. If the testimony of God in scripture is to be rested on, this one passage is sufficient: but the unbelieving heart is ready to challenge and call in question every such scripture-declaration. I find the worthy author of a well-known catechism, commonly used in the instruction of Children, joins together scripture and experience, in the answer to that question, "How do you know, that you are born in a state of sin and misery?" Ans. "God's word tells me so. Besides, I find my heart naturally backward to that which is good, and prone to that which is evil." After this example, and considering, that by the law is the knowledge of sin, we shall not separate them; the rather, that God is able to make his own word, even in the bare repetition of it, quick and *powerful*, Heb. iv. 12. In the further illustration of this head, therefore, I shall, first briefly lay before you some of the scripture-declarations on this subject; and, secondly, confirm them from experience, the visible state of the world, and the testimony of our own hearts.

First, Allow me to lay before you some of the scripture-declarations on this subject. And that I may avoid handling the subject systematically, and tediously, I join together original and actual sin. Every one who is able to understand what I say, is concerned in both: and indeed they are inseparable the one from the other. The deplorable wickedness in which the world in general is overwhelmed, hath flowed in a continued stream from the first sin of Adam; and the sinfulness of every person's practice has the corruption of his nature as its fruitful source. See the account given of the world, Gen. vi. 5. "And God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This you may compare with Gen. viii. 21. "And the Lord said, 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."

See also the confession of David, Psa. li. 5. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." In this the Psalmist plainly and clearly teaches the original and universal corruption of our nature. What he asserts concerning himself, must be equally true of all the human race; otherwise, instead of making a proper part of his confession, it would be an excuse or extenuation of his sin. Nothing can more plainly show the force of this text, than the awkward endeavors used by some to evade or misinterpret it. For example, how mean a subterfuge is it, to pretend, that David declared, he was shapen in iniquity, and conceived by his mother in sin; because he was the issue of some criminal commerce between his father and a maid-servant, or between the wife of Jesse and another man? This is plainly a profane invention, offered without any manner of proof, or the least insinuation in the history of that great prince. Besides, it is evidently beside his purpose in the psalm referred to, where he is confessing his own sinful nature, and not the sinful deeds of his parents. If there be meaning in words, his intention is, to humble himself before God, not only for his adultery and murder in the matter of Uriah, but as a *transgressor from the womb*.

To this you may add the testimony of a greater than David, *viz.* our blessed Lord and Saviour himself, John iii. 6. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and "that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." For understanding the proof drawn from his text, you may observe, that though the word *flesh* has various significations in scripture; sometimes, for example, signifying the weakness of our mortal nature, unable to support itself, and liable to a variety of changes, which must at last end in dissolution; yet here it evidently signifies our nature as corrupted by sin. This appears from the opposition of the two clauses: for it is certain, that those who are regenerated, are still liable to all the weakness of mortality. It must therefore bear the same meaning in this place as in Rom. viii. 8. "So then they that are in the flesh, cannot "please God." It is with a view to this great truth that Job, who pleads with so much warmth his general integrity, yet says, Job xiv. 3, 4. "And dost thou open thine "eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment, "with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.

With this agree many other scripture-declarations, some of which I shall mention. Psal. xiv. 2, 3. "The Lord "looked down from heaven upon the children of men; to "see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: "there is none that doth good, no, not one." Pf. lviii. 3. "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray "as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Isaiah xlvi. 8. "Yea, thou heardest not, yea, thou knewest not, yea, from "that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that "thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a "transgressor from the womb." Rom. iii. 9, 10, 11, 12. "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: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all "gone out of the way, they are together become unpro-

“fitable, there is none that doth good, no not one.” To these, I only add that clear and strong passage, Eph. ii. 1, 2, 3. “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. 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.”

In this summary view of the declarations of scripture upon this subject, I have confined myself to such passages as have an aspect upon the state of our nature in general. And indeed, as conclusive a proof of its being the doctrine of scripture, may be drawn consequentially as directly. With this view, not to mention many other arguments, I beg your attention to the two following; 1. The tenor of the gospel-message, particularly the extent of the commission, and the language used through the whole: Mark xvi. 15. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” John iii. 16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Examine the import of this truth. Whom did the Father love? or to whom did he send the Saviour? To the world, and to every creature. For what end did he love them, and for what purpose did the Redeemer come? To save them from perishing. But why were they in danger of perishing? Doubtless, because they were in sin. In vain, then, do men exercise their ingenuity in explaining away particular passages. This truth does not rest upon an expression or two, the meaning of which must be ascertained by critical skill, but upon the whole of the gospel. If we do not throw aside the Bible altogether, Christ Jesus came into the world to obtain forgiveness for the guilty, to save the miserable, and to redeem the slave.

2. Another argument is drawn from the seals of the covenant of peace; and particularly the initiating seal, both

under the Old Testament and the New, of which infants were admitted to be partakers. If they received these seals before the commission of actual guilt, it cannot be but the nature itself must be defiled; especially as baptism is expressly called *the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins*, Mark i. 4.

Thus I have laid before you what the scripture teaches us on the sinfulness of our nature, including all the posterity of Adam, without exception. I beseech you, therefore, my beloved hearers, to consider the concern you have in it, as a part of the whole. If you have any belief of the truth of the scriptures as the word of God, attempt not to warp or pervert them when speaking contrary to your fond prejudices. Desire not that ministers should speak unto you smooth things, and prophesy deceit; but receive with humility and fear the divine will, however heavy a sentence of condemnation it may carry against yourselves, viz. that you are sinners by nature; that your hearts are estranged and alienated from the love of God; and that, if you die in that condition, you shall not see his face in mercy.

I now proceed to the *second* branch of this head; which was, to confirm the account given in scripture from experience, that is to say, from the visible state of the world, and the testimony of our own hearts.

Let us then see what evidence is afforded us from the visible state of the world, *that all have sinned*, &c. And here, my brethren, what an instructive lesson, but at the same time what a humbling and melancholy prospect, opens to our view! There are many remarks which might be profitably made on the state of the world in every age, to shew how much sin hath reigned in the hearts of men, and what desolation it hath wrought in the place of their abode. The great difficulty is, to range them in proper order, and propose them in a simple and perspicuous manner, that ordinary hearers may understand and profit by them. For this purpose, let us first take a view of mankind in a public or national, and then in a private or personal, capacity.

I. Let us consider mankind in a public or national capacity. In this view, what is the history of past ages but

the history of human guilt? If, instead of taking up with the idle and visionary hypotheses of philosophers, we only attend to what men have been in fact, we shall be obliged to say, with the Spirit of God, that "the imagination of the heart of man is only evil from his youth." It is not proper here to omit, or rather it is highly necessary to mention, the impiety and idolatry of the several nations of the world. Excepting the small number of Abraham's family, who were *the election of God*, and, by a peculiar disposition of Providence, the depositaries of his truths, every other nation upon the face of the globe, not only deserted the worship of the true God, but fell headlong into the most stupid and sottish idolatry. This was not peculiar to those nations who continued in ignorance, and whom the more improved and polished thought proper to distinguish by the name of *barbarians*, but was at least equally true of those who were most highly civilized. Of the wisest nations, as well as the wisest men, the apostle very justly says in this epistle, ch. i. 22, 23. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; 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."

I must make even a farther observation, and intreat your attention to it, That the wisest in profession seem to have become the greatest fools. It seems to have been designed in Providence, as a standing and indelible mark of the vanity of human wisdom, that those very nations who were most early in their application to, and most successful in their cultivation of the liberal arts, were the most extravagant and senseless in their theological opinions, and religious rites. I mean, particularly, the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans; worshipping bulls and calves, serpents and insects, the most stupid of four-footed beasts, and creeping things of the most shocking form. This every one may satisfy himself of, who will look into the histories of these celebrated nations, as they have been transmitted to us by themselves.

Consider, my brethren, the unnatural cruelties of the religious rites of many nations. It was frequent and ge-

neral with them, to offer up human sacrifices, and make their children pass through the fire; the very reflection on which is sufficient to fill a considerate person with horror. Consider also the scandalous impurity of some of their ceremonies, and the obscene history of the objects of their worship. Strange to think of indeed! yet so it is, that most of the eminent writers of antiquity are employed in describing the drinking and merriment, the scolding and quarrels, the tricks and robberies, and the amorous intrigues of their gods and goddesses.

If we think in a serious manner on these undoubted facts, can we help saying, Oh! the ingratitude of those wretches among us who call themselves freethinkers, who have been taught by revelation only to form rational and consistent notions of the first cause and Creator of all things, and yet reject revelation entirely, and pretend to found them upon human reason! I am sensible there are some who do not think that the idolatry of the heathen world ought to be reckoned among their crimes; but if you will consult the Old Testament, you will find it considered there as the first and most atrocious crime which solicited the vengeance of an offended God. If you consult this epistle to the Romans, you will find it leads the way in the account given of human apostasy. The first of all the ten commands, which were given as a sum of the moral law, is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And indeed, if the first duty of natural religion be a confession and acknowledgment of God our creator, the first of all sins must be, a contempt of his name, or a profanation of his worship.

But idolatry was not alone. From this, as a fruitful source, flowed every other human vice. What a terrible detail is given us by the historians of every age! On what is it that all the great transactions of the world have still turned? Has it not been on the ambition, cruelty, injustice, oppression, and raging lust and impurity, of men. Whatever number of virtuous persons was among them, they seem to have either lain concealed, or fallen a sacrifice to the envy and malice of others. Since the first murder, of Abel, by his brother Cain, what terrible havoc has been

made of man by man ! We are so habituated to this, that it makes little impression. We can even peruse, with attention and delight, the narratives of stratagems of war, ferocity in combat, devastation and bloodshed. Who are the persons who have acquired the greatest renown in the present or preceding ages ? Who are the persons who have been the greatest objects of human admiration ? Have they not been the most active, and the most successful, destroyers of their fellow-creatures ? This circumstance indeed communicates the guilt of individuals to the whole ; shows that it belongs to mankind in general ; and that the description given by the apostle is not more shocking than true, ch. i. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32. “ And even as
 “ they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God
 “ gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things
 “ which are not convenient : being filled with all un-
 “ righteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, ma-
 “ liciousness ; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malign-
 “ nity ; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful,
 “ proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to
 “ parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, with-
 “ out natural affection, implacable, unmerciful : who
 “ knowing the judgment of God (that they which commit
 “ such things are worthy of death), not only do the same,
 “ but have pleasure in them that do them.”

There are to be found upon record instances of such dreadful and aggravated guilt, as it were to be wished they had been, or could have been buried in oblivion. For this reason, I shall neither mention their names, nor cite the examples ; but observe, that the extent and prevalence of wickedness should be considered as a strong proof of the corruption of the whole race ; and the particular signal instances of astonishing or monstrous crimes, as a proof of the excessive depravation of our nature, and what man in his present state is capable of. I know it is pleasing and gratifying to human pride, to talk of the dignity of human nature, and the beauty of moral virtue ; and if it be done in such a manner as to make us esteem the only mean of recovering our lost integrity and original glory, I have no objection to it. But if it be spoken of man as he now is

without regenerating grace, I am certain it is more agreeable to reason and experience to say, that from the lengths to which some have proceeded, when placed in circumstances of temptation, it is owing to the power of restraining providence, that others have been comparatively somewhat better.

I have seen it observed, with great apparent justice, that probably one end which God had in view when he shortened the period of human life after the deluge, was, to set bounds to the progress of human guilt. As it is the nature of vice, to strengthen by habit, and increase by time; a race of wicked men living many hundreds of years, would degenerate and harden to a degree not easily conceived. And indeed, if we examine into the true causes of any little degree of order and peace which we now enjoy, we shall see abundant reason to adore the wisdom of divine Providence, but very little to ascribe much goodness to the human heart.

The most truly excellent characters which are to be found in history, and the most illustrious deeds which those heroes have performed, have for their very foundation the corruption of the human race.

In this remark I have in view the sages and legislators of antiquity, who acquired so much renown by establishing systems of policy and government for different states. What was this else, and indeed what was it called, but taming the savage, and restraining the profligate part of their fellow-creatures? It seems plainly to be the point in view in every human law, to bridle the fury of human inclination, and hinder one man from making a prey of another. This is well described by the apostle Paul, 1 Tim. i. 9. 10. "Knowing this, that the law is not
"made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and
"profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man-slayers, for whoremongers, for them that
"defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for
"liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other
"thing that is contrary to sound doctrine." We have indeed the testimony of men against themselves in this

case. It has been found to hold, without any exception, that the longer men live, they have the greater familiarity of those with whom they live; the greater experience they have of the world, they have the harder thoughts of men in general. In particular, those who have been most conversant in public life, and have obtained most of what is called a knowledge of the world, have always the worst opinion of human nature.

2. Let us now from a general, come to a particular and personal view of our present state. You may be apt to suppose, that though the sinfulness of human nature is too general, yet it is not universal; that though vice and wickedness has appeared conspicuously, and though perhaps wicked men may have obtained the ascendancy in every nation, this will not serve to found a sentence against every man. We might upon this part of the subject observe, that the truth illustrated above will receive confirmation from our most intimate knowledge of one another. Human nature will gain nothing by a close inspection. Take it either in general or particular, its best appearance is when viewed at a distance. The greatest and best characters, when closely examined, have always such blemishes and imperfections attending them, as greatly diminish their lustre. This indeed has grown into a proverb, That much familiarity breeds contempt. On this account, we may safely say, that if such is the state of our nature, that no man is able to justify himself, or obtain the entire approbation of his fellow-sinners, much more must "every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God," Rom. iii. 19.

But the chief illustration of this part of the subject must be from the testimony which conscience constrains every man to bear against himself. Examine, therefore, my brethren, what reason you have to be satisfied, that you yourselves, unless your natures have been renewed by the Holy Ghost, are under the dominion of sin; nay, that even such as have been "brought again from the dead" do still feel "a law in their members warring against the law of God in their minds." Remember then that you have to do with him "who seeth in secret," and "who

“ searcheth Jerusalem as with candles.” It was necessary formerly to take notice of the enormous effects of sin in this life ; we must now search a little deeper, and consider the beginning and source of these in the disposition of the heart. It is true, there are probably many here who are justly chargeable with the grossest crimes ; such as, impiety, lying, injustice, or uncleanness : and oh ! that it may please God, that their sins may find them out, and his word may be quick and powerful to their conviction. But what I have now in view is, to maintain the universal conclusion in the text, not only that many men have been profligates, but that every man is a sinner.

For this purpose, it is of the utmost moment to put you in mind what sin properly is. There are two ways of defence, you know, upon any trial : the one is, to deny the fact ; the other to maintain it is no crime. It is of necessity, therefore, in the first place, to ascertain the charge, by an account of the nature of sin. Of this, I do not think there can be produced a juster account than we have in our shorter catechism : “ Sin is any want of conformity unto our transgression of the law of God : ” Which is nothing else but a brief illustration of the words of scripture, *Sin is the transgression of the law*. Let the conscience, then, of every hearer answer to the charge. Have you kept or have you broken the law of God ? Have you been obedient subjects to the King of kings ? Have you done your own will, or the will of him that made you ? However unwilling you may be to put this question home at present, no person shall be able to decline the tribunal, or evade the answer in the day of judgment.

We have one great difficulty to struggle with in the attempt of bringing the guilty to confession, that sin hath blinded the understanding, and perverted the judgment ; so that after we have said, that sin is the transgression of the law, there will remain another question, What is the law, and how far doth it extend ? Upon this we must have recourse to the remaining traces that are left upon the conscience ; and I see nothing more proper, than to press home that summary which God hath given of his own right

and our duty, in the first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;" Matth. xxii. 37. Are you your own? Have you no lord over you? Can you plead any exception to this command? Is not your Maker infinitely perfect, and infinitely amiable? Is he not worthy of your supreme love? If he is not, who is it, or what is it, that you have reason to prefer, or that can produce a better title? Can there be any thing more just than the sentiment expressed by the pious Psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Is there excellence or sweetness in the creature, and is there none or less in the Creator, from whom every inferior nature derives its very existence, and on whom it depends every moment for its preservation?

May I not hope to have some hold of sinners here, in pleading the rights of their Maker? Are your hearts then naturally, and have they been habitually and supremely set upon God? Has it been your first and leading care, to know him, and to serve him, to inquire into his will, that you might do what was acceptable to him? Do you believe, that in his favor only is life, and therefore do you seek your happiness and your comfort in him? Many are apt greatly to mistake upon this subject; nay, it seems to be the leading deception of sinners, to think nothing evil or punishable, but such gross crimes as are disorderly in human society, and obnoxious to human laws. It is scarce possible to make them sensible, how much guilt there is in a total forgetfulness of God; and yet this is the very source of human depravity. The chief thing blameable in our attachment to other things, is their filling the room that is due to God, their being employed in a manner that is dishonorable to God, or, in other words, their being instruments of rebellion against the will of God.

Are there any of you, my brethren, who, by the kindness of Providence, have been kept free from gross, visible, and scandalous offences; who, from a natural coolness of temperament, have been chaste or sober; who, from a principle of honor, have been just or generous; who,

from the dictates of prudence, have been regular and decent; but have been unmindful of your duty to God, have been unwilling to think of him, or strangers to delight in him? and are you not sinners in his presence? Have you been preserved by his power, and yet never confessed the obligation? Have you been living daily upon his bounty, and yet seldom or never given him thanks, except in the most indifferent and formal manner, and such worship, as is a much more proper occasion for repentance than ground of confidence? How, then, shall you be able to stand in the judgment? "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

II. I come now to make some practical improvement of what has been said on this subject. And,

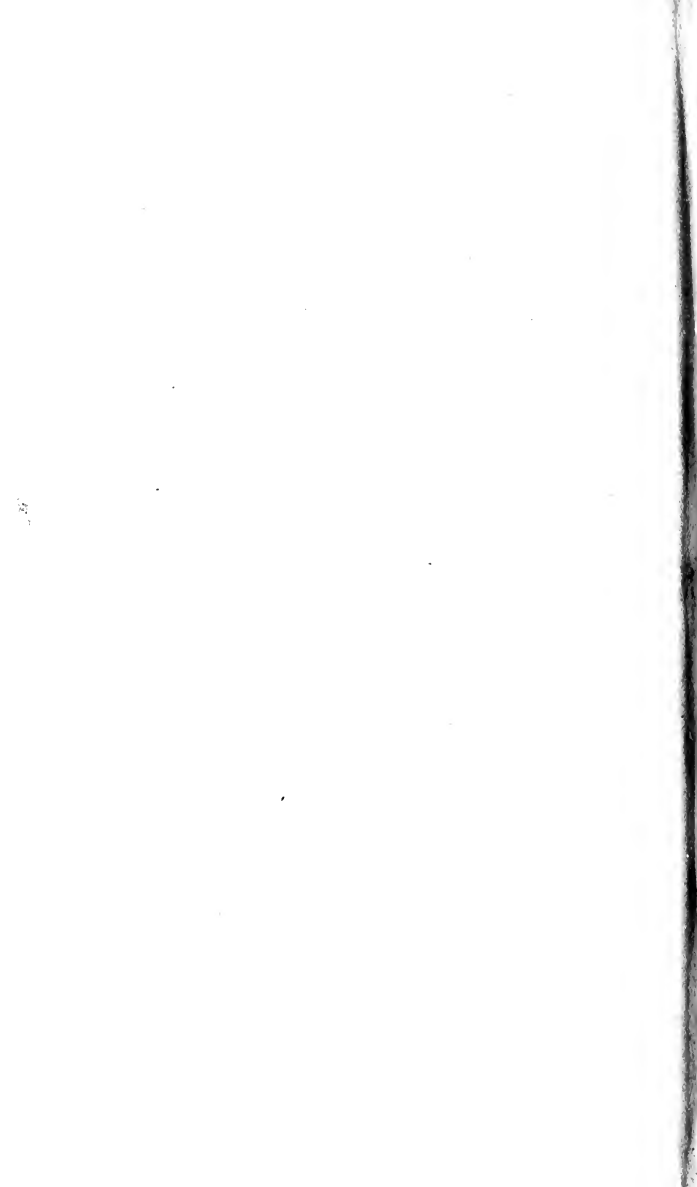
1. From what has been said, you may learn how deeply and surely the foundation of the gospel is laid. It is laid in the actual state of the world, and in that depravity of our nature, which it is impossible to conceal, and which nothing but the greatest obstinacy and perversion of mind can have the courage to deny. I am sensible, that nothing but an inward and personal conviction of guilt and misery wrought by the Spirit of the living God, will bring the sinner to embrace the gospel; yet the necessity of salvation may be evinced in the clearest and most satisfactory manner, by reason and observation. As the visible creation, when attentively viewed, serves to discover the wisdom and omnipotence of God, and is, as it were, an open volume, which men of every tongue may read and admire; so the state of the moral world, as it is called, plainly points out the guilt and apostasy of man, and loudly calls for the interposition of the Saviour. This it is our duty to attend to, not only to stop the mouths of gain-sayers, but to establish the faith of God's children, that it may not be overthrown or unsettled by the cavils and objections of those who lie in wait to deceive-

2. From what has been said, you may see with what sentiments we should look upon the state of the world, or peruse the history of providence, and what profit we may

reap from it. When we see, as at present, in our own age and country, what profanity and neglect of God, what contempt or desertion of his worship, prevails among many of every rank; what pride and luxury, what riot and sensuality, what uncleanness and debauchery, what lying, fraud, and perjury; and when we observe how one race of sinners has succeeded another in every age, and that true religion has been generally, as it is still, in a struggling or persecuted state, we ought to be humbled for the sin of our nature, and the share which each of us has contributed to the general guilt. Instead of finding fault with Providence for the permission of sin, we ought to be filled with a holy indignation against ourselves and others, for the perpetration of it. We ought to admire that wisdom and power by which the King of kings sets restraining bounds to the violence of men. Neither ought we to omit adoring his holiness in the awful visitations with which he sometimes overtakes and overwhelms the wicked in their wickedness. When he sends out his fore judgments of war, famine, and pestilence; or when he looks to the earth, and it trembles, as unable to bear all the guilt that is laid upon it; when thunder, lightning, and tempest, seem to threaten the immediate dissolution of the whole fabric; we ought to consider all these as the just punishment of sin, and look forward with fear to that time, when he shall render to every man according to his works, and deserved vengeance shall not be partial, but universal; when it shall not be occasional and temporary, but final, unchangeable, and eternal.

3. You may learn from what has been said, the state and danger of those who are chargeable with sins of a heinous and aggravated nature. If all without exception are "under sin; if every mouth must be stopped," &c. what shall be the condition of those who have the shameful pre-eminence of being sinners of the first order, who have done more than others to provoke the Lord to anger! If those who have lived to themselves, and not to God, shall not be able to stand in the judgment; what shall become of those who have sold themselves to work iniquity, and whose abominable practices are a reproach to reason, as

well as a scandal to religion? I may even say further, in the words of the apostle Peter, "If the righteous scarcely
"be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner ap-
"pear?" 1 Pet. iv. 18. I do the rather beg your atten-
tion to this, that we always find loose livers the warmest
advocates for libertine principles. It is the drunkard, the
swearer, the impure fornicator, who are so ready to pro-
duce in conversation their pretended arguments against
the corruption of human nature. I speak to all such with-
in hearing. What benefit will you reap by denying ori-
ginal corruption, when you are justly chargeable with so
many actual transgressions? If there are, or ever were,
any persons in the world without sin, surely you cannot
pretend that you are so yourselves. You are ashamed to
reveal your hidden scenes to your fellow-sinners, but how
shall you conceal them, from the Searcher of all hearts?
If you cannot bear to be told your faults by your fellow-
creatures, with what speechless confusion shall you stand
at last before the judgment-seat of Christ? Let me there-
fore address you in the words of your Maker by the Psalm-
ist, Psal. l. 21, 22. "These things thou hast done, and I
"kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such
"a 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." May it please God effectually to convince
you of your sin and danger, and to lead you to his mercy,
as revealed in the gospel, for your forgiveness. I con-
clude with the advice of the Psalmist, Psal. ii. 12. "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."



The SINNER without EXCUSE before GOD.

A

S E R M O N.



PSALM cxxx. 3.

If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

JUSTICE and mercy are the perfections of the divine nature, in which we as sinners have a peculiar concern. Our world is the great theatre, and the human race the great, or, so far as we know, the only objects of their united exercise. Clear and just apprehensions, therefore, of those attributes, must lie at the foundation of all religion. It is easy to see, that a discovery, both of justice and mercy, is necessary to bring the sinner to repentance. He must see the guilt and misery in which he is involved, and the way by which he may certainly, and by which he can only obtain a recovery. The same views are equally necessary to every Christian, during his continuance in this imperfect state. They are necessary to that self-denial which ought to be his habitual character, and to that humiliation and penitence which ought to be his frequent employment.

I must, however, observe, that though there are few of the attributes of God more frequently spoken of, perhaps there are few less distinctly understood. Men have either an imperfect knowledge, or weak persuasion of the justice of God, and thence despise his mercy. On the other hand, they are apt to take presumptuous views of his ge-

neral mercy, and thence despise his justice and severity. This is not peculiar to those, who, upon the whole, are under the dominion of sin. Even the children of God themselves are ready, either to loose their views of the majesty and holiness of God, which should incline them to serve him with reverence and godly fear; or, on the other hand, by neglecting his mercy, to fall into that state of slavish bondage and illiberal fear, which is equally injurious to the honor of God, and hurtful to their own peace.

On these accounts I have chosen to insist a little on this passage of the Psalmist David, in which we have an united view of divine justice and mercy; "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee; that thou mayst be feared." It is thought by some, that this Psalm was composed in that memorable period of his life, when he was plunged in the deepest guilt, by his adultery and murder in the matter of Uriah; but more commonly, that it was in the time of his persecution, when the imminent dangers to which he was so often exposed, brought his sins strongly to remembrance. Reserving what is here said of the mercy of God to another opportunity, let us now consider the view given us of his justice, in this passage, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" For this purpose I shall,

1. Endeavor to ascertain and explain the meaning of the Psalmist's assertion.
2. Support and confirm it from scripture and experience.
3. In the last place, I shall make a practical improvement of what may be said upon it.

I. Let us then, first, endeavor to ascertain and explain the meaning of the Psalmist's expression, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" These words evidently carry in them the deepest sense of sin, a strong and inward conviction of the impossibility of justifying himself before a pure and holy God, if he should deal with him as in justice he might: "If thou, Lord

“shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” God is an omniscient being, every where present, to whom all our thoughts and ways, and consequently all our sins, are and must be perfectly known. The expression, then, cannot mean, that there are any sins unregarded, or not observed of God; because this is impossible. The marking of iniquities here, seems to be an allusion to what passes in human courts, where the judges set down, or put upon record all that is brought against the criminal, in order to found a sentence of condemnation. In this view, the meaning must be, if God should so mark iniquities, as to proceed to punish us for all of which we were really guilty, there could be no possibility of standing such an impartial trial.

I need not tell you, that the putting the words in the form of a question, “O Lord, who shall stand?” does not imply, that there is any uncertainty in the matter, or that any can be found pure enough to endure such a scrutiny, but rather serves to deny it in the strongest manner. Again, we are not to suppose, that the Psalmist, by putting the question thus in general, “Who shall stand?” designed to turn the accusation from himself, or to extenuate his own sins, by bringing in others equally guilty. This is indeed the practice of many in the world, who seem to think the numbers of those who are chargeable with any sin, an excuse or palliation of the guilt of particular offenders. But the true spirit of repentance leads to very different sentiments: it makes the sinner fix upon his own faults, and point at the sins and plagues of his own heart, without thinking upon the sins of others, unless as they may be an occasion of discovering to him more of the depravation and wickedness of his own nature. So that the genuine import of the Psalmist’s expression seems to be, If thou, Lord, shouldst execute the decrees of justice, and punish every thing that is done amiss, the holiest man on earth would not be able to abide the trial; how much less would such a sinner as I be able to stand?

II. I proceed now to support and confirm this truth from scripture and experience. And you will be pleased

to observe, that it is the constant doctrine of the Holy Scriptures; it is the uniform language of humility and penitence there. Thus the Psalmist, Ps. cxliii. 2. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." To the same purpose, see the language of Job, ch. ix. 2. 3. 4. "I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath profpered?" A clear discovery of the infinite majesty of God, the unspotted holiness of his nature, the extent, the purity, and spirituality of his law, will immediately carry home a conviction of this truth, and make us sensible what impure and wretched creatures we are: it will make every one of us cry out with Job, after a discovery of the divine glory and perfection, ch. xl. 4. 5. "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further."—And again, ch. xlii. 5, 6. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Every true penitent will say, with the Psalmist, Psal. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." Nay, he will consider his daily preservation as an evidence of the divine patience, in the suspension of his sentence, as in Lam. iii. 22, 23. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

These, my brethren, are examples of the sentiments and language of the scripture-saints; and if we look a little into their characters, as set before us in the inspired writings, we shall see, that self-abasement is one of the most certain proofs of true religion; that the more any person has made real improvement in holiness, he will think and speak in so much the humbler manner; will more clearly see the evil of sin, and more readily confess its power and influence over his own heart. I know this

is very contrary to the spirit that prevails in the world; and particularly opposite to the reigning temper of the present age. I know also, that there are many objections raised against this fundamental truth. But instead of wrangling controversy, in which our understandings are often lost, and our passions irritated, rather than subdued; for further enforcing the above truth, I shall only urge every hearer to a serious and impartial reflection upon his own conduct. This, I am persuaded, will, by the blessing of God, be the most effectual mean of silencing the reasonings of the carnal mind, and forcing the conscience to a confession, both of the equity of the law, and the guilt of disobedience.

For attaining this end, I shall just propose three general subjects of examination; and beg that you may shew fidelity to your own souls, in bringing them to the trial. 1. How many duties have you omitted, which you must be sensible you ought to have performed? 2. How often have you been guilty of express transgressions of the law of God? 3. How many blemishes and imperfections cleave to those very duties which you endeavor to perform in obedience to his will?

1. Then, How many duties have you omitted, which you must be sensible you ought to have performed? In charging you with neglect of duty, I must begin with unthankfulness and forgetfulness of God. Let the conscience be ever so much biased by partiality, or perverted by wrong principles, is it possible to deny the obligation of every creature to acknowledge his dependence upon the author of his being, the preserver of his life, and the source of his mercies? But have you, my brethren, been sensible of this? How unmindful have you been of the Rock that begat you, and the God that formed you? This is the first of all sins, and the fruitful parent of every particular transgression. It was a heavy charge brought against a great prince by the prophet Daniel, ch. v. 23. last clause, "And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose
" are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Say ye men of the world, have you indeed acknowledged God, on whom you depend for every breath that you draw, for eve-

ry moment that you continue in existence? I have often thought, that it was one of the greatest evidences of the depravity of human nature, that an abundant and opulent state on earth should so generally lead to neglect of God. What is this, when interpreted, If I may speak so, but that the greater our Maker's goodness is to us, commonly the less is our gratitude to him?

But I would speak to those whose consciences are more enlightened, and who have not wholly forgotten the Lord. Are not you also chargeable with manifold omissions! What sense of gratitude have you retained, and expressed, for innumerable mercies, spiritual and temporal, to yourselves, and to your families? How unequal the payment of gratitude to the debt of obligation! What use have you made of them in God's service? What advantage have you reaped, for your own sanctification, from the bounty of Providence, from the strokes of Providence, from the ordinances of divine institution, from the truths of the everlasting gospel, from seasons of instruction, and opportunities of worship, from edifying examples, from faithful admonitions? What have you done for the good of others? How often have you relieved the necessitous, comforted the distressed, instructed the ignorant, admonished the negligent, punished or restrained the profane? I hope I speak to many who have not been wholly negligent in improving their time and talents; yet surely there is just ground of humiliation to the best, that even under a conviction of duty, they have so imperfectly discharged it; and probably the very persons who have done most, will be most sincerely grieved that they have not done more.

Alas! my brethren, it is a great mistake to think light of sins of omission. How much do I pity the condition of those thoughtless persons, who, forgetting that they were made to serve God, seem to live for no other purpose than to enjoy themselves! And oh the miserable delusion of those sinners who set their minds at ease by the silly excuse, That they do harm to none but themselves! Let them hear and tremble at the tenor of the sentence in the great day, Matth. xxv. 30. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and

“gnawing of teeth.” It is the first duty of natural religion, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name;” and it is the sum of all the duties of the gospel, 1 Cor. vi. 19. 20. “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

2. Consider in how many instances you have been guilty of express transgressions of the law of God, his law written upon your hearts, and repeated in his own word. If you know any thing at all of the law of God in its spirituality and extent, you must be deeply convinced of your innumerable transgressions, in thought, in word, and in deed. (1.) How many are the sins of your thoughts? Sin is seated in the heart: it hath its throne and dominion there. Every enormity in the life takes its rise from the impurity of the heart. None will think light of sins of the heart, who have any acquaintance with the word of God. Let them but reflect upon the account given of the guilt of 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.” Let them reflect upon the saying of the wise man, Prov. iv. 23. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life;” or on the distinguishing character of God, Jer. xvii. 10. “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

How many thoughts are there in your hearts admitted and entertained, dishonorable to God, unthankful for his mercies, impatient under his providence? How many thoughts envious, malicious, spiteful, towards your neighbor? How many wanton, lascivious thoughts, and irregular desires? How many covetous, worldly, vain, ambitious thoughts? Let me beseech you also to consider, that these are not sins that we fall into seldom, or by occasional temptation, but multitudes break in upon us every day, and in a manner every hour. What an infinite number, then, must we be chargeable with in twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years! If so many are the sins of a single

day, what must be the guilt of a whole life? What reason to cry out, with the prophet to Jerusalem, "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within us?"

(2.) Let me beseech you to consider the sins of the tongue. Here I shall not insist much on the grosser sins of the tongue, lying, flandering, backbiting; of these, though few will be sensible they are guilty themselves, all are abundantly ready to complain, as reigning in the world in general. Neither shall I insist on impure conversation, filthy and lascivious expressions, or allusions to obscenity; though I am afraid many here present are far from being innocent of the charge. But besides these, the sins of the tongue are so many, that the most watchful Christian cannot say he is guiltless. Even the meek Moses was provoked to speak "unadvisedly with his lips." The apostle James has given us a very strong description, both of the general prevalence, and mischievous influence, of the sins of the tongue, James iii. 2.—3. "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." And that none may presume, after all, to think these sins of the tongue inconsiderable, let us remember what our Saviour tells us, Matth. xii. 36, 37. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of

“ judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and
“ by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

(3.) Now, to these sins of heart and conversation, let us add the consideration of all the sins of our actions, by which we either offend God, ourselves, or are the means, by a doubtful or suspicious example, of inducing others to offend him: all the acts of infobriety and intemperance with regard to ourselves; of injustice, treachery, or oppression, with regard to others. Let us consider those sins to which we are led by our respective callings and employments, or by our respective ages or tempers, or by our situation, and the society with which we stand connected. The lightness and frothiness of some, the sourness and moroseness of others, the inconsiderateness and folly of youth, the plotting and ambitious projects of riper years, the peevishness and covetousness of old age, and the vanity and selfishness we carry with us through the several stages and periods of life: These things are most, if not all of them, sins in themselves, and do infallibly betray us into a great number of others. If we consider all this with any measure of attention, can we refuse to adopt the language of the holy scripture, that our sins are more in number than the hairs upon our heads, or than the sand that is upon the seashore? In fine, if we consider the sins we are guilty of, according to our conditions and relations in the world, as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, we shall find the account so prodigiously swelled, that we shall have more than reason to cry out with the Psalmist, “ Lord, if thou shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand?”

3. Consider the sins that cleave to your religious duties, and every thing you do in obedience to the will of God. The purest worshipper on earth must ask forgiveness for the sins even of his holy things. I am not here to insist upon the hypocritical performances of many professing Christians, done merely, or chiefly, to be seen of men, or spread, as a covering, over their hidden and shameful deeds; nor am I to mention that religious zeal which arises from strife, contention, and vain-glory, and

which chiefly aims at the support of party names ; because these are directly and eminently sinful : they are an abomination in the sight of God. But, my brethren, even in those performances which you go about with some measure of sincerity, how many defects are to be found ? Oh ! how much negligence, coldness, and formality, in worship ! how many wandering, vain, idle, and worldly thoughts, in your hearts, when your bodies are in the house of God ! Consider only the infinite glory and majesty of God, in whose sight the heavens themselves are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly ; and say whether you have ever prayed at all with becoming reverence of spirit. Consider only the unspeakable condescension of that God to his creatures, and the unfathomable riches of his grace to the sinner ; and say, whether your hearts have ever been suitably affected with his love.

It is our duty, my brethren, to consider, how far we have been from preaching the word of God with proper impressions of the majesty of him in whose name we speak ; how far we have done it with simplicity and dignity, neither fearing the censure, nor courting the applause, of our fellow-sinners ; how far we have done it with that tenderness and affection, with that holy fervor and importunity, which the value of those precious souls to whom we speak manifestly demands. And is it not your business to consider, how seldom you hear with that attention, reverence, humility, and love, with which the sacred and important truths of the everlasting gospel ought to be received ; how many hear much more as judges than as learners, as critics rather than as sinners ; and content themselves with marking the weakness of an indifferent, or praising the abilities of an animated speaker ? And how many run with itching ears from one congregation to another, or even from one party or profession to another, not that they may be edified, but that curiosity and fancy may be gratified ? How many lost ordinances, how many mispent sabbaths, have we to lament before God ?

When we come to the second table of the law, how many sinful motives mix their influence in the duties we

perform to our neighbors? how many acts of justice owe their being, in part at least, to fear of reproach? how many works of charity owe their splendor to a desire of applause, as well as to a better principle? I should never have done, were I to go through all the great duties of the Christian life, and observe the sinful defects that cleave to them. I believe I may say with great truth, that would we but deal faithfully, there would be no more necessary to our humiliation, than a strict examination of our duties themselves. This would oblige us to confess, that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God;" that we must not plead for reward, but forgiveness; that no merit of our own, but infinite mercy alone, must be the foundation of our hope.

III. I come now to make some practical application of the subject, for your instruction and direction. And,

I. How great is the deceitfulness of sin! how astonishing the blindness of sinners! How easy and obvious is the consideration of our sins, in the order which I have endeavored to set them before you! Sins of omission, on the one hand, and of commission, on the other; and duties faulty in both respects, viz. by essential qualities neglected, and sins mixed with the performances: sins in thought, in word, and in deed, against God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Yet, alas! how many are there in a great measure ignorant of the sins they are chargeable with, and therefore sleeping in security! Think, my beloved hearers, on your condition. To know your danger, is the first step to deliverance. Is not the law of obedience clear, written upon all the Creator's works? Is it not engraven upon the conscience? and is it not often repeated and enforced by the dispensations of Providence? Would there be so much of divine judgment, if there was no offence? Every natural evil proclaims the sin of man. An inclement season, an injurious world, and a frail, dying body, conspire in pointing out our sinful state. And yet, after all, how blind is the sinner to the discovery, how deaf to the friendly warning, how regardless of the ap-

proaching trial! Awake, I beseech you, while there may be peace, and look upon your danger, while there is yet given you time and opportunity to fly from it.

2. If the holiest cannot stand before God, if no flesh living can be justified in his sight, how fearful must be the state of those who are lying under the guilt of atrocious, aggravated, and repeated crimes! Though great prodigates often desert the ordinances of God, that they may sin at greater ease, and meet with less resistance; yet, in so numerous an assembly as this, there is reason to suppose there are not a few of the *chief of sinners*; the rather, that while some desert the ordinances, that they may have ease from within, others attend them as a cover, that they may blind their neighbors, and meet with less suspicion or disturbance from without. How, then, can murderers, fornicators, swearers, drunkards, thieves, and retainers of unjust gain, hear what hath been said on this subject without trembling for themselves! Hear for your souls sake; hear for eternity's sake; hear, I beseech you, for Christ's sake. O that the Spirit of God may carry home the truth, and make it "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword," Heb. iv. 12. It is an easy thing for you now to dissemble the sins which men would punish, and even to boast of the sins which men must tolerate; but hear and remember the two following passages: Heb. iv. 13. "All things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do;" and, Heb. x. 31. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

3. In the *last* place, If any christian desires to keep his conscience tender and faithful, to have a deep growing and humbling sense of his own sinfulness; if he would bar the gate against the entrance of pride, or banish it after it has obtained admission; if he desires to walk humbly and watchfully—let him live as in the presence of God, let him often sit himself at his awful tribunal. It is easy to justify ourselves before men, who have so little to require, and from whom so much may be concealed. The truth is, it is not a great matter to be able to set the world at defiance. But to look up to that God who sitteth upon

the throne of his holiness, is of infinitely greater moment, and of infinitely greater difficulty. He trieth the reins and the heart. He abhorreth evil. You see how Job defended himself against the accusations of his friends, held fast his integrity, and would not let it go; but no sooner did God speak to him in the greatness of his power, than he confessed his vileness, and laid his hand upon his mouth. In the same manner, he that would guard against the impositions of a deceitful heart, that would not be abused by flattering friends, or led astray by a mistaken world; that would rather walk in the path of penitence than security; let him live as in the presence of God. And happy, happy they, who take confusion of face to themselves now, and seek for mercy through the blood of the atonement, in comparison of those who justify themselves now, but shall stand at last with unutterable confusion before the supreme judge, ready to pronounce the irreversible sentence.



HOPE of FORGIVENESS with GOD.

A

S E R M O N.

P S A L M cxxx. 4.

But there is forgiveness with thee ; that thou mayest be feared.

AFTER considering our own miserable and guilty state, and how little any plea which we can offer will avail before the holiness and justice of God, it is proper to turn our eyes to his mercy, as the only foundation of our hope and peace. This is of the utmost necessity to every penitent. When a sense of sin hath truly taken hold of the conscience, it is so intolerable, that no man can continue long in that condition. When the waves and billows of divine wrath are going over him, he must either fasten upon some ground of hope, or suffer shipwreck upon the rocks of despair. There are indeed, alas that we should be so liable to delusion ! many ways of weakening the force of conviction, and obtaining a temporary, imperfect, or false peace. But the only safe and stable ground of hope is the divine mercy. And happy the sinner who obtains such discoveries of its extent and efficacy, as to make him cleave to it with undivided affection, and rest upon it as the anchor of his soul, from which he is resolved never to depart.

Believe it, Christians, the more the sinner looks into his own state, the more real and thorough his acquaintance with his own heart is, the more he finds, that not the least ray of hope can arise from that quarter. This is precisely the import of the Psalmist's declaration in this

passage, taking the one branch of it in connection with the other; as if he had said; When I consider how great and multiplied my transgressions have been, I must stand speechless, and without excuse, before thy holy tribunal, and justify thee, although thou shouldst condemn me. But Lord, thou art a God of infinite mercy. This I fix upon as the foundation of my hope. I see nothing in myself to plead. Thy law accuses me. My own conscience passes sentence upon me. I am not able to support the view of thy justice and holiness. Whither can I fly, but to thy mercy? Here I desire to take refuge, and to my unspeakable consolation there is forgiveness with thee; so that thou mayest and oughtest to be feared. In discoursing further on this subject, which I intend to do in a manner entirely practical, I propose, in a dependence on divine grace, to follow this method.

1. I shall give a brief view of the discoveries which God hath made of his mercy, as the foundation of the sinner's hope; or, in other words, shew what reason we have to believe, that there is forgiveness with him.

2. I shall point out the connection between the mercy of God and his fear; or explain the import of this expression, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

3. I shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. First, then, let us attempt to give a brief view of the discoveries which God hath made of his mercy, as the foundation of the sinner's hope; or, in other words, shew what reason we have to believe, that there is forgiveness with him. For this purpose I observe, first of all, that the patience and forbearance of God towards sinners, in the course of his providence, is the effect of his mercy. Even this affords some faint hope, that there may be forgiveness with him. See the reasoning or the expostulation of Jonah on the respite of the destruction of Nineveh, Jonah iv. 2. "And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto

“ Tarshish : for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and
“ merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and
“ repentest thee of the evil.” The sentence being sus-
pended, there is time given to apply for pardon, and
space for the exercise of repentance, with a peradventure,
or who can tell, whether he may not be gracious. We
may add to this, his continual benignity and kindness to
all his creatures, not excepting the evil, the unthankful,
and the unholy. The native tendency of both these is to
lead the guilty to repentance, as we are told, Rom. ii. 4.
“ Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and for-
“ bearing, and long-suffering, not knowing that the
“ goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” But
though this ought to be mentioned, I am very sensible,
how insufficient it is of itself to give consolation to a
wounded spirit. Taking in the whole plan of providence,
there are so many tokens of our Creator’s displeasure, so
much to be seen of the justice and holiness, as well as of
the goodness of God, that it must leave the sinner still
under a dreadful uncertainty in a matter of such infinite
concern. Torn by the suspicion which is inseparable
from guilt, he is full of restless anxiety; and knowing
that he must shortly appear before God in an unembodied
state, he is often putting this question to himself, Where-
with shall I come before the Lord? How shall I be able
to stand in the judgment? And therefore,

2. God hath revealed himself in his word, as merciful
and gracious, long-suffering, and slow to anger. This
was the great truth on which the sinner’s hope depended
ever since the apostasy of our first parents. Never since
that time could any man produce his title to divine favor
in his own obedience: and therefore the mercy of God
early intimated in the first promise, continued to make, if
I may speak so, the leading part of the divine character in
all the discoveries he made of himself. Thus, at the giv-
ing of the law, Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, 7. “ And the Lord de-
“ scended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and
“ proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord pass-
“ ed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The
“ Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and

“abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the childrens children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” To the same purpose the Psalmist David, Psal. ciii. 8. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” Hear also the prophet Micah; Micah vii. 18. “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity; and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”

I do not here stay to consider what hints were given in the ancient dispensation, of the atonement which was afterwards to be made by the incarnation of the Saviour. Doubtless there was some respect to this in the very first promise of the *seed of the woman*, and also in the promise to Abraham, that in his *seed* all nations of the earth should be blessed. The same thing was prefigured by the sacrifices, and shadowed out by many different rites of the Mosaic œconomy. It must, however, be allowed, that the faithful in those ages saw it only obscurely, and of consequence understood it very imperfectly. But it was on the revealed mercy of God, which they were obliged to seek in the way appointed by himself, that they placed their entire dependence.

I cannot help observing to you, how very encouraging the assurances of pardon are through many passages of the Old Testament; how very gracious the invitations to the sinner, as if they had been contrived on purpose to remove the jealousy which the guilty are too apt to entertain; 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.” Is. xliii. 25. “I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” Is. xlv. 22. “I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.” Is. 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.” Is this the word of God ?
Are these passages written for our benefit ? Is there any
thing more plain, than that God is merciful and gracious ;
nay that he delighteth in mercy ? How great encourage-
ment is this to the exercise of repentance ? In this very
view, indeed, it is urged by the prophet in the 6th and
7th verses of the last cited chapter, “ Seek ye the Lord
“ while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is
“ near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the un-
“ righteous 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.”

I shall only add, that as the scripture every where bears
testimony to the readiness of God to pardon returning sin-
ners, so there are also many passages in which he declares
his readiness to pardon the failings which continue to
cleave to his own people, and treat them with the utmost
tenderness and grace : Ps. ciii. 13. “ Like a father pitieth
“ his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”
Is. xl. 11. “ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd : he
“ shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in
“ his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with
“ young.” Mal. iii. 17. “ And they shall be mine, saith
“ Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels,
“ and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son
“ that serveth him.”

3. But that nothing may be wanting for the complete
illustration of this truth, observe, that it appears in the
clearest manner, from the gospel of Christ, that there is
forgiveness with God. In the fulness of time, God sent
his own son in our nature, to be a victim and sacrifice
for our offences, to bear our sins in his own body on the
tree. In this astonishing event, indeed, the love and
mercy of God shines with the brightest lustre : John iii.
16. “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only be-
“ gotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should
“ not perish, but have everlasting life.” In this great

transaction, we have not only an assurance of obtaining, but see the price paid for the purchase of our pardon: 1 Pet. i. 18. "For ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." Instead of finding the justice of God stand in the way of our reconciliation and peace, justice being fully satisfied, seals the pardon, and adds to the comfort of the sinner. In the infinite value of this atonement, we may see the extent of the divine mercy. In the infinite power of this Saviour, we may see the perfect security of those who put their trust in him. Salvation, in all its parts, is offered to the chief of sinners: so that, as the apostle expresses it, Heb. vi. 18. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed; which was, to point out the connection between the mercy of God and his fear, or explain the import of this expression, "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." The import of this expression must be a little different, as we understand the word *fear*, which is sometimes taken in a larger, and sometimes in a more limited sense. Sometimes, as being so eminent a part, it is made use of to signify the whole of religion; sometimes it signifies that awe and veneration of the sacred majesty of God with which every one of his servants ought to be habitually possessed. I shall briefly consider it in both these views, there not being the least opposition between them, and both carrying in them the most important and salutary instruction.

If we take the fear of God in the text to signify the whole of that duty and obedience we owe to him, then the connection between forgiveness with God and his being feared, appears from these two considerations.

I. A discovery of the mercy of God is absolutely necessary to his being loved and served by those who have once been sinners. Despair of mercy drives the sinner from God, presents him only as the object of terror and aversion; and, instead of having the least influence in

bringing us to obedience, confirms the guilty in his rebellious opposition to his Maker. This must be manifest to every hearer. There can be no religion at all, either in inclination or performance, if there be no forgiveness with God. How should any so much as attempt what they believe to be an unprofitable labour?

Though this is a truth which none will deny, I am afraid it is a truth not sufficiently attended to, either in its certainty or influence. It tends greatly to illustrate the whole plan of salvation, by the riches of divine grace, or the free, unmerited, unsolicited, love of God. How much does it add to the beauty and meaning of several passages of scripture! as 1 John iv. 10. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Rom. v. 8. "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And the 10th verse of the same chapter, "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Guilt is of a suspicious nature. It is even observed in offences committed by one man against another, that he who hath done the injury is always hardest to be reconciled. The same thing appears very plainly in the disposition of sinners towards God. A gloomy fear, a despondent terror, greatly hinders their return to him; nor can they ever take one step towards him, till, by the display of his mercy, this insuperable obstruction is removed.

2. As a discovery of the mercy of God is absolutely necessary to our serving him at all, so it is perhaps of all others the most powerful motive to induce us to serve him in sincerity. Nothing whatever more illustrates the divine glory. It presents him as the proper object of worship, of confidence, and of love. When a sinner is once burdened with a sense of guilt, sees the demerit of his transgressions, and feels the justice of his own sentence, what an inconceivable relief must it give him to see the divine mercy! and how infinitely amiable must this God of mercy appear in his eyes! Others may reason at their ease upon the subject, he is transported with unspeakable joy on

the prospect. His heart is immediately taken captive: he feels its constringing power, and yields himself willingly to every demand of duty and gratitude. See, to this purpose, the expressions of the prophet Hosea, ch. xi. 4. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love, and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." The same thing is every where in the New Testament represented as the great commanding principle of obedience, 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." 1 John iv. 16. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." And verse 19. of the same chapter, "We love him, because he first loved us."

But further, even taking fear in a more limited sense, as signifying a holy reverence and dread of the power and majesty of God, there being forgiveness with him, is so far from weakening, that it strengthens this fear; and that on the two following accounts.

1. The infinite obligations we lie under to divine mercy, must serve to improve our sense of the evil of sin, as committed against so good and so gracious a God, and to increase our abhorrence of it. The mercy of God to the guilty, at the same time that it brings unspeakable consolation, as delivering them from the wrath to come, serves to humble them, by a view of their own unworthy and undutiful conduct. When an awakened convinced soul, under the apprehension of eternity approaching, begins to contemplate the mercy of God as the ground of forgiveness, he immediately thinks upon this mercy, as having all along spared him in the midst of his provocations. What a wonder of mercy is it, does he say to himself, that I was not immediately cut off in my wickedness, at such a time, or at such a time, which now return full upon his memory! He cannot easily separate the remembrance of past crimes from the mercy that withheld immediate vengeance. And surely nothing will serve more to make the sinner tremble and stand astonished at his

own guilt, than reflection on that forbearance of a patient God, which did not doom him to instant and deserved destruction, but spared him to hear the glad tidings of peace.

Thus the unspeakable grace of God in the gospel opens the springs of penitential sorrow, and makes them flow more sweetly indeed, but more freely, and more copiously than before. You may observe the strong picture of penitence and love, which is drawn with inimitable beauty by the evangelist Luke, ch. vii. 37, 38. "And behold a woman in the city, which 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." Was it not in grace and mercy that the suffering Saviour looked upon Peter, which immediately confounded him? Luke xxii. 61, 62. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." What is it else that is represented by the prophet as having so strong an effect upon the believer in producing penitential sorrow, but the love of our Redeemer? Zech. xii. 10. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

2. Forgiveness with God tends to increase our fear and reverence of him, from the manner in which, and the condition on which it is bestowed. Every circumstance in this dispensation of divine mercy is calculated to abase the sinner, and leave him nothing whereof to glory before God. Forgiveness is always declared to be an act of sovereign grace, Hk. xliii. 25. "I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." We are many times cautioned

against imputing to ourselves, or our own merit, what is merely the effect of divine mercy. If the scripture is read with care, there will be observed many passages which carry this instruction in them, to beware of taking merit to ourselves from the divine goodness, or any effect or expression of it: Deut. ix. 4, 5. "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Ezek. xxxvi. 21, 22. "But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went."

It is probably also with this view, if we may presume to offer an opinion on so deep a subject, that the objects of special mercy are sometimes chosen from among the most criminal, even the chief of sinners. Does not this forbid, in the strongest terms, every man to harbor the least thought, as if by his own righteousness, or being comparatively less wicked than others, he had been intitled to the divine favor: Rom. ix. 15.—18. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

But the circumstances on which we are called chiefly to

fix our attention, is, that forgiveness is bestowed only through the blood of Christ. It is freely and graciously bestowed upon the sinner, but was dearly and hardly purchased by the surety. This is no new or unusual subject in this congregation. But Oh! my brethren, that we could in some measure apprehend its infinite importance. Think, I beseech you, on the holiness and justice of God, as they shine in the sufferings and cross of Christ: that a righteous God required full satisfaction for sin; that "the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all;" that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief." Are not the majesty and purity of God set forth in this transaction, in the most clear and legible, nay in the most awful and terrible characters? for they are written in blood. Is the Lord to be praised for his mercy? and is he not also to be feared for his justice? May we not, or rather must we not, say, "If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If God saw it necessary to lay such a load of wrath upon the Holy One, when standing in the room of sinners, what shall be the condition of the impenitent transgressors, who shall lie under it forever? We may well adopt the words of Moses to the children of Israel, Deut xxviii. 58, 59. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayst fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance."

Do you not now, my brethren, see much propriety, as well as instruction, in this language, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayst be feared?" The expression indeed is not singular in the holy Scripture, even in the sense now illustrated. It is certainly on the same subject the Psalmist is speaking, when he says, Ps. xl. iii. "And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." As also the prophet Hosea, ch. iii. 5. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek

“ the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear
 “ the Lord, and his goodness in the latter days.”

III. I proceed now to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And,

1. From what hath been said, you may learn, that none can understand, embrace, or esteem the mercy of God, but those who are convinced of their sin and misery. Mercy can be of benefit only to the guilty; mercy can be bestowed only on the guilty; and therefore all that can be said in illustration of the divine mercy, all that can be said in commendation of the divine mercy, will be esteemed as idle tales by those who do not know themselves to be guilty. Hence the negligence and unconcern with which the gospel is received. Very many of those to whom it is addressed are insensible of their danger. The employments of the world ingross their time; the enjoyments of the world possess their affections: an eternal, unchangeable state is supposed at too great a distance to require their attention. I beseech you, my brethren, to consider, that the time of your trial is wasting apace. Let the commencement of another season * put you in mind of its speedy passage, and persuade you to look forward to the day of death or judgment, when all offers of mercy, and exhortations to repentance, shall cease, and when, though there may be forgiveness with God to all the proper objects of it in his extensive dominion, yet there shall be no forgiveness for you.

2. From what hath been said you may observe, that the publication of divine mercy, that the illustration of the riches of divine grace in the gospel, hath not the least tendency to lessen our sense of the evil of sin, or the obligation we lie under to obedience: on the contrary, it serves greatly to improve both the one and the other. When we endeavor to bring consolation to the broken in heart; when we set before them the tender mercies of our God, and the infinite compassion of the Saviour; when we press them to hearken to the invitations of the gospel; when we encourage them to rest their salvation upon it, and to

* Preached at the beginning of the year.

be at peace ; this only serves to excite their indignation against sin, and persuade them to fly from it, to bring them to the obedience of children, and shed abroad the love of God in their hearts.

3. From what hath been said, you may see the difference between a real and scriptural discovery of forgiveness with God, and that careless security which arises from a presumptuous reliance on his general mercy. The one prevents conviction, the other produces it. The general and common plea of God's mercy, keeps the sinner at ease as he is ; but a real and scriptural discovery of forgiveness with God, heals the broken in heart, and at the same time increases their sense of the evil of sin, and their abhorrence of every approach to it.

Presumption, and such views of God's mercy as are taken by the secure, arise entirely from the extenuation of sin. The language of their hearts is, " Surely this is not so great a matter, but God's mercy will forgive it." If you will either seriously examine yourselves, or observe, with some attention, the discourse of careless worldly persons, you will perceive this very clearly. They comfort themselves with the thoughts of their little comparative guilt, rather than of the certainty and greatness of divine mercy. " I may perhaps," says one of them, " have been guilty of such or such sins ; but I am sure I never did soor so," or perhaps as some others who immediately occur to their minds as greater sinners than themselves. I cannot help mentioning to you the saying of a prince of our own country towards the close of life, who had been a remarkable libertine in his younger years : " I cannot think," says he* " that God will be so hard as to damn a man for taking a little pleasure out of the common road."

In opposition to this, the true penitent sees more than ever his inexcusable guilt as a sinner, but hopes for forgiveness from God, as the effect of his own infinite grace, and the accomplishment of his promise in the gospel. He gives the whole glory of it to him ; and never thinks of dimi-

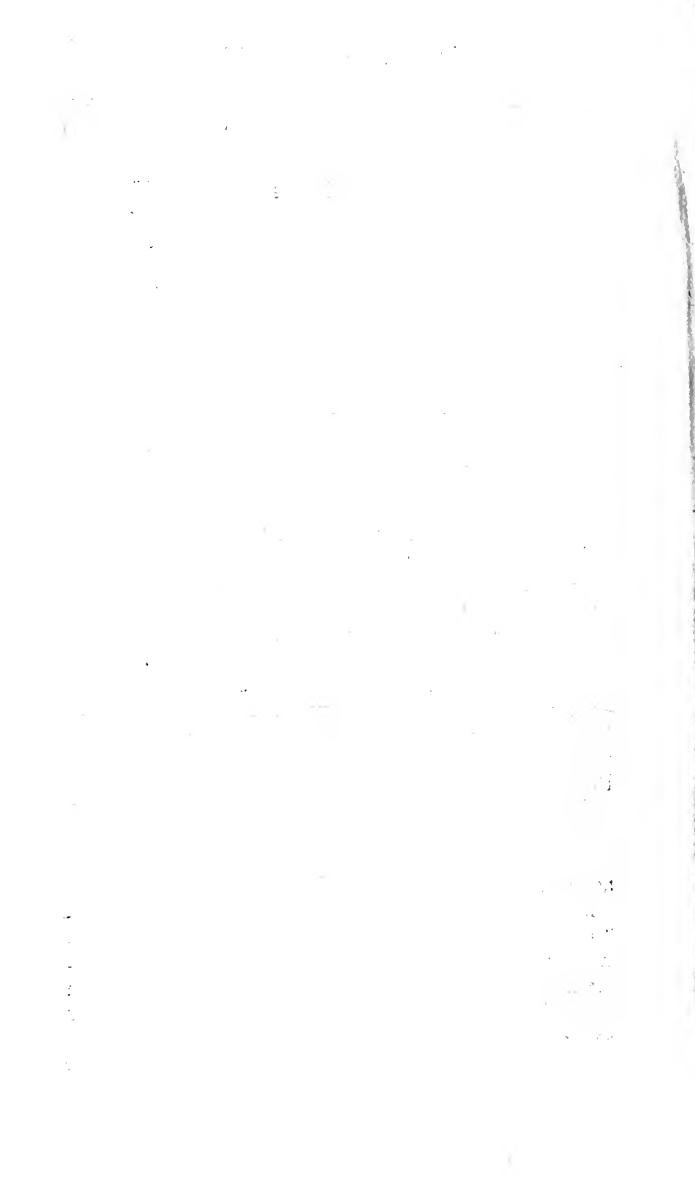
* K. Charles II. to Bishop Burnet.

nishing the lustre of his transcendent mercy, by covering or extenuating the offence. Hence secure persons are easily satisfied, while true penitents make supplication with strong crying and tears. They are often reconsidering the promise, and frequently questioning the ground on which their dependence has been placed. Hence also secure persons seek ease to themselves from the remonstrances of conscience, by stifling conviction, and offering excuses; but true penitents, by giving full force to the accusation, and pleading the benefit of the remission. To say all in a word, the one struggles hard to be found innocent, the other to obtain mercy.

4. From what hath been said, you may see of how much moment it is to the Christian to keep clear views of the mercy of God, as well as of his own interest in it. The moment he loses the comfortable sense of peace with God, his chariot-wheels are troubled, and he drives heavily. It makes his duty burdensome, and his trials insupportable. And no wonder, since he is not so far left of God as to return to the security of sinners; and at the same time the source of his inward consolation is like *a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed*. For what end are the promises of God contained in scripture? why are they put into your hands? why are they repeated in your ears? Why, but for preserving you in that peace which the world cannot give, and which, blessed be God, it cannot take away. Here what your Saviour says John xvi. 33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

5. In the last place, You may see from what hath been said, in what way you may most effectually, and most certainly, preserve your peace with God, *viz.* By the frequent exercise of penitence and confession. This will shew you the necessity of forgiveness from God. This will constrain you daily to seek for forgiveness from God. Beware of seeking or preserving peace by the extenuation of sin, or by stifling conviction. This may well lead you to sloth and security for a season, which lays the foundation of the bitterest repentance of all; but will never give

you the comfort of God's children. He that shutteth his eyes upon his own sins, shall never see the glory of divine mercy. Serious, voluntary, deliberate humiliation, is the true way of promoting both that steadiness in duty, and that peace with God, which ought to be the Christian's supreme desire. Whatever destroys self-sufficiency promotes the growth of true piety. The gospel is particularly directed to those that see their necessity. It brings comfort to the mourner, help to the miserable, and mercy to the guilty. It is a great mistake to think, that the contrition and penitence of the children of God is hurtful to their comfort, for it is the very foundation of it; according to that refreshing promise, with which I shall conclude, *Is. lxi. 1, 2, 3.* "The spirit of the Lord God
" is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to
" preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to
" bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the
" captives, and the opening of the prison to them that
" are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
" and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all
" that mourn: to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion,
" to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for
" mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,
" that they might be called trees of righteousness, the
" the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."



THE NATURE OF FAITH.

A

S E R M O N.

I JOHN iii. 23.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

ACTION SERMON.

WE propose, in a little, to draw near to God in the most solemn act of Christian worship. With what humble solicitude ought we to enquire, whether we are truly intitled to this great privilege, or may hope for acceptance in this important duty. It is the most explicit, and the most public profession we can make of faith in the Redeemer's blood; and therefore none can do it in a proper manner, but those who have indeed believed in the Redeemer's name.

Faith in Christ is the great foundation of our peace with God. It is the great principle of our sanctification. It is the great distinction between the heirs of glory and the heirs of hell: "For he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." And therefore no subject can be of more importance in general, or more suited to our present employment, than what is presented to us in the words of the text: *This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.*

In the context the apostle is speaking of the Christian's confidence or persuasion of his relation to God, ver. 20, 21,

22. "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him; because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Having thus mentioned the commandments, he points out in the words now read, the great commandments of the gospel, in their order, *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.* My purpose at this time is, to confine myself to the first of these; and open, in as comprehensive and practical a manner as I am able, what it is to believe on the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God; and having done so, to make some practical improvement of the subject; particularly, by pressing every hearer, in the most earnest manner, to obey this *commandment* of God.

I. In the *first* place, then, I am to explain what it is to believe on the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Many have been the controversies raised and agitated on this subject, most of them unprofitable, and some of them very hurtful, as tending to disquiet and perplex the minds of serious persons, and sometimes even to furnish an objection to the enemies of the gospel. I shall therefore avoid every thing of this kind, as in general undesirable, and at this time highly unseasonable; and endeavor to lay it down in such a manner as I hope may be understood by the meanest real Christian, and may afford to every exercised soul inward consolation and peace with God.

For this purpose, I hope it will be sufficient to observe, that faith may be considered in two views; its object, and its actings: 1st, *The object of faith*; that is to say, the truths to be believed: 2dly, *The actings of faith*; or what it is to believe these to the saving of the soul. As to the object of faith, it is thus expressed in our text, *This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* Christ Jesus, the Saviour, then, is

the object of faith. This, in its full extent, includes every thing that is revealed in the holy scriptures, with respect to his person, character, and work. It may indeed be said to include the whole revealed will of God; because every part of this will has a more remote or immediate reference to him. Christ Jesus is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending," of the will of God as revealed for our salvation. But as every thing else was only introductory and preparatory to his atonement, or consequent upon it, I shall chiefly direct your attention to him as a Saviour from guilt and pollution. This the name of Jesus immediately imports: Matth. i. 21. "And thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." In this view, I think the object of faith may be summed up in the following particulars.

1. That we are, by nature, in a state of sin, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his law, and liable to his wrath. If this were not the case, a *Saviour* would not be necessary; *salvation* would be a word without force, and even without meaning. It is accordingly found in experience, that till there be a conviction of this truth upon the conscience, the tidings of a Saviour are always treated with neglect or disdain. Nothing can be stronger than the language of scripture on this subject in many passages; particularly, Matth. xviii. 11. "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." Luke v. 31, 32. "And Jesus answering, said unto them, they that are whole, need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." I shall also read to you the account of our natural state, and the end of Christ's coming, given by the apostle Paul, Eph. ii. 1.—5. "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. 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. 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).” I forbear to mention the proof of this from the history of the world, from the marks of God’s displeasure against sin in the course of providence, and from the testimony of conscience, as I have illustrated them at considerable length in other discourses. Let it suffice at present to say, that the first truth which is the object of faith, is the guilt and misery of our nature.

2. The next part of the object of faith is, that there is no way of recovery from this state but by Christ: Acts iv. 12. “ Neither is there salvation in any other ; for there is none other name under heaven given among men where- by we must be saved.” If there were any other, it would not be the command of God that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. After men are in some measure sensible that they are guilty, it is often difficult to convince them that they are helpless. There is something so mortifying in this consideration, and so humbling to our pride, that it is with great unwillingness we yield to it. Nay, after we have seemed to confess it, we are often ready to retract it. The sinner has always a proneness to seek some resource in himself. Hence the disposition to extenuate his guilt ; and if he cannot plead absolute, to place some dependence upon comparative innocence. Hence the disposition to magnify human merit, as if, by the value of some good deeds, we could balance or cancel the guilt of our disobedience. Hence the endless variety of human inventions, of costly sacrifices and voluntary penance. Micah vi. 6, 7. “ Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for my soul ?” The truth is, till the sinner is stript of every plea, and found to be without excuse, he will still refuse to be indebted to the grace of his Redeemer. But hear ye the Spirit of God, Rev. iii. 17, 18. “ 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. 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.”

3. This leads me to the third part of the object of faith, *viz.* That the pardon of sin, and peace with an offended God, is freely offered to the chief of sinners through Christ. The two preceding truths are preparatory to this, and serve to point out its necessity and moment. This is the gracious message which was brought into the world by the gospel ; and from which it derives its name, importing glad tidings. What we are particularly to attend to here is, (1.) that Christ Jesus was substituted in the room of sinners, and suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God ; that the holiness and justice of God required an expiation of sin, which was made by this immaculate victim : *If. liii. 5, 6.* “ But he was wounded
“ for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities :
“ the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with
“ his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone
“ astray ; we have turned every one to his own way, and
“ the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
Rom. iii. 25. “ Whom God hath set forth to be a pro-
“ pitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his
“ righteousness for the remission of sins that are past,
“ through the forbearance of God.” (2.) Another thing
also to be observed, is the constitution of the sufferer’s
person. It was no less than the eternal and only begot-
ten Son of God. This is a circumstance of the utmost
moment, and on which the greatest stress is manifestly
laid in scripture. It is included in the words of the text :
“ This is his commandment, That we should believe on
“ the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” It is also con-
“ stantly found in the early Confessions of Faith ; *John i.*
49. “ Nathaniel answered and said unto him, Rabbi,
“ thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.”

Matth. xvi. 16. "And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art Christ, the son of the living God." Acts viii. 37. "And Philip said, If thou believest with all "thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Unless this is attended to, we shall neither be sufficiently sensible of the evil of sin, which required such an atonement, nor of the love of God which provided it, nor of the power of the Saviour to execute it; nor can we have such encouragement to put our trust in it.

From these two circumstances you may be directed to contemplate the leading and principal object of faith, *viz.* the only begotten Son of God dying in our room, and purchasing our pardon. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, having finished his work, invites weary and heavy-laden sinners to come unto him; and assures them, that the highest demands of the law are answered, that their debt is fully paid, and nothing is now to be laid to their charge: Rom. viii. 33, 34. "Who shall lay any "thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that "died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at "the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession "for us." 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."

4. In the last place, The object of faith is the power of Christ to renew our natures, to deliver us from the bondage of corruption, and bring us into the glorious liberty of God's children. We must never separate the Redeemer's merit and his power. Conviction is imperfect unless we see our slavery, as well as misery, and unfeignedly desire deliverance from both. Neither do we properly apprehend the extent of Christ's undertaking, unless we view him exalted as a prince and a Saviour to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. There are too things equally essential to the gospel upon this particular. (1.) The necessity of being sanctified. Salvation in sin is not promised; salvation or happiness in sin is not possible;

and therefore all who hope for salvation through Christ, must be renewed in the spirit of their minds. Thenceforth they must not serve sin: 2 Cor. v. 17. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." If the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness of men, it must still abide on the children of disobedience.

(2.) The other thing to be observed is, that the sanctification of the believer is the purchase of Christ's blood, and the work of his Spirit. This is plain through the whole of the scriptures both of the Old Testament and the New. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27. "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. A new heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." John xv. 4, 5. "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. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Nothing can be stronger than the language used on this subject: "His grace is sufficient for us; his strength is made perfect in weakness." "By the grace of God," says the Apostle, "I am what I am." And again, "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Nay, he is said "to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." All this shows, that there is no room left for the sinner to glory; but that the whole of his loss by the fall, both his integrity and his happiness, may be recovered, and can only be recovered through Christ. This is the sum of evangelical truth, this is the source of evangelical holiness: Gal. ii. 16.—20. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ; that we might be justifi-

“ fied by the faith of Chrift, and not by the works of the
 “ law ; for by the works of the law fhall no flefh be jufti-
 “ fied. But if while we feek to be juftified by Chrift,
 “ we ourfelves alfo are found finners, is therefore Chrift
 “ the minifter of fin ? God forbid. For if I build again
 “ the things which I deftroyed, I make myfelf a tranfgref-
 “ for. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I
 “ might live unto God. I am crucified with Chrift :
 “ neverthelefs I live ; yet not I, but Chrift liveth in me :
 “ and the life which I now live in the flefh, I live by the
 “ faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave him-
 “ felf for me.”

I proceed now, in the fecond place, to confider the
 aétings of faith, or what is implied in believing thefe
 truths to the faving of the foul. And I cannot help ob-
 ferving to you, that it is but in compliance with common
 cuftom, or at leaft with the prefent ftate of things, that I
 fay much upon this part of the fubject. I am perfuaded
 it is of much more confequence, and much more proper,
 to direct you to the object of faith in God’s revealed will,
 to explain it in all its extent, and to prefs it with all the
 evidence that attends it, than to examine curioufly into,
 and diftinguifh nicely upon the nature of faith, as it is an
 aét of the human mind. I do not find, that the fcripture
 fays much upon the aét of believing ; but it is in a man-
 ner wholly employed in telling us *what* we ought to be-
 lieve, both with regard to our apoftafy and recovery. We
 do indeed read in fcripture of believing with all the heart.
 We read alfo of a temporary faith in the ftoney-ground
 hearers ; and of the ftrengh and weaknefs of faith. But
 all this feems, at leaft chiefly, to relate to the firmnefs or
 uncertainty of our perfuafion of, or affent to the truths
 which are addreffed to us in the name of God. The fim-
 pleft view of faith feems to be receiving “ the record
 “ which God hath given us of his Son.” Agreeably to
 this, the reverfe of faith in fcripture is doubting : Matth.
 xiv. 31. “ O thou of little faith, wherefore didft thou
 “ doubt ?” Matth. xxi. 21. Jefus answered and faid
 “ unto them, Verily I fay unto you, If ye have faith and
 “ doubt not, ye fhall not only do this which is done to

“ the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, “ Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; it shall “ be done.”

But, my brethren, since there have been questions upon this subject, and since it is certain from experience that there is a deceitfulness in the human heart, and a supposed faith, which yet is vain and fruitless, I shall observe, that the actings of faith may be resolved into the three following particulars, or that the faith of God’s elect will discover itself by the three following effects.

1. A firm assent of the understanding to what is revealed of Christ in scripture ; particularly as summed up in the preceding part of this discourse : That you believe the lost and helpless state of man by nature and practice : That Christ is able to save to the uttermost ; and that he hath made effectual provision, both for expiating your guilt and purifying your hearts. Perhaps you will think this is easy, and be ready to say, that you have from your youth given, and that you do at this moment give, entire credit to the whole. But, my brethren, there is more here than you are aware of : there is a great difference between a common and traditionary belief, which was never tried, and that inward and personal conviction which dwells in the heart, and therefore will govern the life. If any man believe, that all the posterity of Adam are in a state of guilt and misery, one would think it unavoidable that he must perceive his own danger as a part of the whole ; and yet I am persuaded, it is usually a personal conviction of guilt and danger by the law upon the conscience that first opens the sinner’s eyes upon the general truth ; and then his own interest makes it bulk in his apprehension, and raises in him an earnest solicitude, both to examine into the cause of the disease, and to ask after the method of cure.

There is another way of considering the assent of the understanding to divine truth. The testimony of faith is opposed to the testimony of sense. Faith tells us, that our only happiness is in the favor of God, and that this can only be obtained through Christ ; that eternity is coming on ; and that there is no time to be lost. Sense, on the other hand, tells us, that the world is good, that its delights

are pleasant and that our comfort is here ; not forgetting to represent the service of God as a burden and drudgery. In the mean time, the corrupt principle within, assents to the delusion, and assists in blinding the mind ; adding, that whatever may be in religion, the danger may be ward-ed off by a late repentance. It is not enough then to give a cold and general assent to the truths of religion when they are not contradicted, but to believe the testimony of faith, in opposition to the suggestions of sense ; or, in other words, *to walk by faith, and not by sight.* That this may be brought to the test, I observe,

2. That faith implies the consent and approbation of the heart to every truth with regard to Christ's person and character, and salvation through his blood. To every believer, the plan of redemption by the Mediator of the new covenant, appears not only true, but wise, reasonable, gracious, and necessary. This, my brethren, particularly distinguishes true faith, not only from unbelief and security, but from an empty and barren profession. The careless despise the truth, the believer adores it ; the half Christian is ashamed of it, the believer glories in it : " God forbid," says the apostle, Gal. vi. 14. " that I should glory save in " the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. ii. 7. " Unto " you therefore which believe, he his precious : but unto " them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders " disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner."

I believe indeed it is usually a deep and heartfelt conviction of danger, which first persuades the sinner of the truth, and makes the trembling penitent a willing believer. But because there may be sometimes a belief of that truth, which we do not esteem, nay, even a jealousy and suspicion of the truth of what we inwardly hate, I have added, that faith implies the consent and approbation of the heart. The whole doctrine of redemption appears to the believer most admirably calculated to promote the glory of God, and secure the salvation of sinners. Even what bears hardest upon man, taking away the foundation of self-righteousness and self-dependence, appears to him perfectly reasonable : he not only submits to it, but embraces and closes with it. He sees the law to be holy ; he con-

feels the threatening to be just; and he is not only content, but thankful, that his present deliverance and future security depend, not on himself, but on the Redeemer. He is willing to be only and eternally indebted to the unmerited mercy and sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Thus you see the doctrine of salvation is represented in scripture under the form of a blessing to be received, as well as a truth to be believed: *Jf. lv. 1, 2, 3.* “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. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” *Matth. xi. 28.* “Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And indeed the inspired writers always speak of it in such terms as shew themselves not only satisfied of the truth, but deeply penetrated with a sense of the greatness of the mercy; *Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19.* “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able, to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

3. In the last place, faith implies such a personal application of the truths of the gospel as produceth repose of conscience, dependence and reliance on the Saviour. This, my brethren, is the point first in view, and the termination of the whole; and I cannot help thinking, that it is so essential to faith, that faith and trust are often put reciprocally for one another in the New Testament; as in *Eph. i. 12, 13.* “That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gos-

“pel of your falvation : in whom alfo after that ye believed, ye were fealed with that holy Spirit of promife.”

I do not mean to fay, that divine faith is a belief that Chrift died for me in particular. I know the ftrong objections which lie againft that form of expreffion. The object of faith is, that Chrift died for loft finners of the race Adam. But as it can hardly be fuppofed, that any give their affent to this truth till they are convinced that they themfelves are finners, fo, if they believe that there is no falvation in any other, and that he is able to fave to the uttermoft, it feems to follow of neceffity, that they will reft and rely “upon him alone for falvation as he is offered in the gofpel.” This is certainly the view given us of the matter in the holy fcripture: Rom. v. 1. “Therefore being juftified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jefus Chrift.” Heb. vi. 18. “That by two immutable things, in which it was impoffible for God to lie, we might have a ftrong confolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope fet before us.” Faith and defpair are inconfiftent. Faith and hope are inseparable. The glory of the Redeemer’s perfon, the perfection of his atonement, and his ability to fave, are all fet before us in the gofpel; and if we cannot rely upon him, if we cannot trust our falvation in his hands, it certainly arifes from fome doubt or difapprobation of thefe interefting truths. If you doubt of the truth, it is no wonder that you diftruft the promife; but if you are truly and inwardly fatisfied of Chrift’s power and mercy, you will clofe with him, as your Saviour, and fay unto him, in the words of Thomas, when his doubts were removed, “My Lord, and my God.”—Thus I have fhortly given you a view of the a&tings of faith: which may all be reduced to what I have endeavored to illuftrate; the affent of the understanding, the approbation of the heart, and thefe jointly producing repofe of confcience and peace with God.

II. I proceed now, in the *laft* place, to make fome practical improvement of what hath been faid on this important fubject. And, in the

First place, Hence learn the absolute necessity of self-denial, and how much it ought to prevail in the temper of a Christian. In explaining to you the object of faith, I have endeavored to lay before you the nature of the gospel-message, and the substance of the truth as it is in Jesus, *viz.* the lost and helpless state of man by nature, forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and sanctification as the work of his Spirit. If this view is just, then religion must be begun, preserved, improved, and perfected, by union with Christ. If this view is just, then all self-righteousness and self-dependence is a denial of Christ. And indeed, such is the life of a believer, if the conduct of the great apostle of the Gentiles may be taken for an example: Phil. iv. 13. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

2. Hence also learn the necessity of a new nature, in order to a new life. If the old nature is indeed in ruins, it will be lost labor to begin to build without a new foundation. And if the foundation is ill laid, however beautiful the superstructure, the fabric cannot be lasting. The not attending to this is visibly the cause of many miscarriages. Men often resolve upon some amendment of life, from prudence, conveniency, or even from imperfect convictions, and some apprehension of eternity itself. But though these resolutions are formed with seeming sincerity, inherent corruption soon becomes too strong for such feeble opposition. Remember therefore our Saviour's caution, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt." If you desire to live a life of holiness or virtue, apply to God through Christ, for the pardon of your sins, and peace with him. Entreat of him also, in the same prevailing name, that by his grace he would implant in you "a new heart, and a new spirit, that you may walk in his ways, and observe his judgments to do them."

3. Learn also how injurious they are to the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, who slander it as unfriendly to holiness of life. So far from being unfavorable to holiness, it makes the most effectual provision for it. Obedience to

the whole law of God, is embraced by every believer as his choice, and promised as his duty; only he expects to derive strength from his Redeemer to enable him to discharge it. I desire to bear witness, and so will every faithful minister of the New Testament, that Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. He hath not only left it in its full force upon the conscience, but he hath added to its obligation. The awful sanction of the law shall take place upon every impenitent sinner. It is well represented by the flying roll, in the prophecies of Zechariah, chap. v. 3, 4. "Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth, shall be cut off as on this side, according to it; and everyone that sweareth, shall be cut off as on that side, according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name; and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof." See also the superadded sanction of the gospel, Heb. x. 28, 29, "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?" Hear it, my brethren, hear it for your souls sake, any known sin allowed in the heart or conversation, is as inconsistent with salvation under the covenant of grace as under the covenant of works; or rather, to speak more properly, as many as continue in the practice of sin are *condemned already*, and remain under the power of that *ministration of death*. To delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man, is the fruit of faith, the character of the new nature, and necessary to fit you for the divine presence.

4. Suffer me to say a few words, for the reproof and conviction of those who are living in contempt of the gospel. Alas! how many are there who turn a deaf ear to the most earnest and pressing invitations addressed to them

in the word of God, and enforced by his providence ! There are two sorts of despisers of the gospel. (1.) Those who are open and avowed enemies to the doctrine of the gospel, who desert it, despise it, or slander it. Too many there are of this character in the present age, to whom the cross of Christ is foolishness. O ! how deplorable is their folly ! and how aggravated their guilt ! If this is the divine commandment, That we should believe in the name of the Son of God ; and if there is truth in the divine word, “ That there is no salvation in any other ;” miserable indeed must be the state of those who are found thus fighting against God. Will it be a light thing to be found despisers of all that grace and love manifested in the gospel ? How heavy is the threatening, in our Saviour’s own words, against those who despise the *precious corner stone*, and *tried foundation*, which is laid in Zion, Matth. xxi. 44. “ And whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. (2.) They are despisers of the gospel who, professing belief in the doctrine of Christ, continue to live in unrighteousness. He came to turn you from all your transgressions, as well as to deliver you from condemnation. His power is particularly illustrated in bringing sinners “ from darkness to light, and from the power of “ Satan unto God.” The end of his coming is lost as to all those who continue in sin. If they are called by his name, they are a scandal to it ; if they form any hopes from his sufferings, they will be disappointed ; if they advance any claim to his mercy, it will be rejected ; if they plead relation to him, he will openly renounce them : Matth. vii. 21, 22, 23. “ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, “ Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he “ that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. “ 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.”

5. In the *last* place, Suffer me, in the most earnest manner, to beseech every sinner in this assembly, to believe in the name of the Son of God. I say, every sinner,

because those only who are sensible that they are sinners, will be obedient to the call.

Are you not therefore sensible of your guilt and danger? Are your understandings so blinded? Is natural conscience itself so feared, that you do not see how much you stand in need of a Saviour? Remember, that if there be any truth in the whole compass of natural and revealed religion that cannot be spoken against, it is this, That God "is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity;" and that, for this reason, "he will render to every man according to his works. It is a truth engraven upon the conscience, and ratified by the course of providence; the Heathens discovered it through the thickest darkness; and the guilty confess it by their daily fears. What a harvest of converts would I bring in even in this assembly, if I could but lead to the Saviour every one that believes, in some measure, in a judgment to come! What an astonishing disorder is brought into our nature by sin? What a marvellous delusion is upon the mind, and what inconsistency is there in the conduct of sinners! It is hard to say, which of the two is most amazing; their backwardness to receive the truth, or their unwillingness to obey it; their inattention to evidence on the one hand, or their forgetfulness of what they do believe, upon the other. Is there any person within these walls, who doubts that he is to die; or who does not believe, that he must be judged after death? Are you then ready for the trial? Have you served your Maker? Have you loved him above all? Have you lived to his glory? Have you fought and placed your happiness in his favor? Or are you sensible that iniquities have prevailed against you? Have they now taken hold upon you, so that you cannot lift your eyes? Behold, I preach peace to you by Jesus Christ. Believe in his name and merits for your pardon; rely on his grace and Spirit for your reformation; and return to God, through him, as your unchangeable portion. This is the tenor of the gospel: Luke xxiv, 46, 47. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

CHRIST'S DEATH A PROPER ATONEMENT
FOR SIN.

A
S E R M O N.

I JOHN ii. 2.

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

TO as many as have any belief of eternity, it must be a matter of unspeakable moment to know, how they may have confidence towards God. This enquiry becomes, if possible, still more serious, when we consider man as in a lapsed and corrupt state by nature, as guilty, and obnoxious to his Maker's righteous judgment. Then it becomes necessary, not only to preserve the favor, not only to avoid the displeasure, but to seek for some shelter or covering from the wrath of God.

This is the account given us of our condition in scripture; which, as it is a truth of the utmost importance, lying at the foundation of all religion, I have often endeavored both to explain and enforce. And happy, happy they who have heard with application; happy they whose eyes have been opened on their danger as sinners; who have seen and felt the evil of sin, as a departure from, and rebellion against a most holy, righteous and gracious God.

Happy they, who, rejecting the vain reasonings of the carnal mind, and the cob-web-defences of the short-sighted creature, have been laid prostrate as guilty and helpless, before the sovereign and almighty Creator. All mankind, in the several ages of the world, have in general discovered such a jealousy of their condition, and have so far felt the reproof and condemnation of natural conscience, that their attempts and inventions have been innumerable to appease the offended Deity.

But blessed be the name of God, we are not left to any uncertainty as to this important question. We may cheerfully apply our minds to it, and receive unspeakable consolation "through the tender mercy of our God; whereby "the day-spring from on high hath visited us." The way to life and peace is fully explained in the glorious gospel of the Son of God. We are indeed, by nature, guilty sinners, enemies to God in our minds, and by wicked works; but there is a gracious provision made for our recovery in the mediation of Christ. This is the strong hold and refuge of the sinner; it is the foundation stone and confidence of the believer. In the 8th and 9th verses of the preceding chapter, the apostle John says, "If we say that we "have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not "in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to "forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And in the verse preceding the text, "My "little children, these things write I unto you, that ye "sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate "with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He then teaches the Christian to live by faith in the Saviour's blood: *And he is the propitiation for our sins.* And that he might further illustrate the extent and efficacy of the great atonement, he adds, *and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* In further discoursing on this subject, I propose, through the assistance of divine grace,

1. To consider Christ as the propitiation for sin, or what is implied in his being so called.
2. To consider the extent of this propitiation, or its being for the sins of the whole world. And,
3. To make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. First, then, *Let us consider Christ as the propitiation for sin, or what is implied in his being so called.* We find our Saviour designed as a propitiation in several other passages of scripture; as in this epistle, chap. iv. 10. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" and Rom. iii. 25. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." It is the opinion of many learned men, that Christ is called a *propitiation*, or *the propitiation*, in allusion to the mercy-seat above the ark, which was set up at first in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple in the most holy place. To confirm this, it is observed, that the original word here used is the same which the Greek translators of the Old Testament always use to denote the mercy-seat, and which the apostle to the Hebrews uses when speaking of the same subject, Heb. ix. 5. "And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat: of which we cannot now speak particularly." But I apprehend there is some inversion of the order of things in this remark: for Christ is not called a propitiation in allusion to the mercy-seat, which, independent of him, could ill bear that denomination; but the mercy-seat hath this title given to it because it was an eminent type of Christ. It beautifully indeed represented the benefit which we derive from him as our propitiation. For as God, by the Shechinah, or symbol of his presence, dwelt of old upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubims, and was from that place propitious to his people; so now God dwells in Christ, and by him reconciles sinners to himself: 2 Cor. v. 19. "To wit, That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." In that ancient dispensation, every worshipper was to look toward the mercy-seat; and it was from thence that God accepted them, and gave intimations of their acceptance: so it is through Christ, or in his name, that we have now access to God; and it is in him that he sheweth us favor, and maketh us accepted; Eph. i. 6. "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accept-

“ed in the beloved.” It was from the mercy-seat that God spake to his people by the intervention of the high-priest, and by Urim and Thummim; so it is by his Son that God now speaks to us, and shews us the way of salvation: Matth. xvii. 5. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

But the true and proper meaning of Christ's being a propitiation, is to be taken from the sacrifices in general, and particularly points at his undertaking the office of mediator or peace-maker between God and man, and in that capacity suffering the wrath of God in the room of sinners. By this he appeaseth him, rendereth him propitious or gracious to us, and purchaseth our pardon: Rom. iii. 25. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood.” Remember how intimately it is connected with *redemption*, another expression which runs through the whole of the New Testament, and is considered as equivalent to the forgiveness of sins: Eph. i. 7. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Now, redemption certainly signifies purchasing or buying with a price.

The sacrifices under the Mosaic economy did all of them imply a substitution in room of something that had been forfeited, or was due. It is observed by one eminent for his knowledge of Jewish antiquities, that besides what was done when any particular person presented a sin-offering, at the continual burnt-offering there were certain men appointed to represent the whole congregation of Israel. Their office was, to lay their hands upon the head of the lamb, and thus as it were transfer the guilt from the people to the victim. On this account they were called *stationary men*, because they attended continually for this end. And as the very purpose of the sacrifices under the law was, to typify the sacrifice of Christ, they are a standing evidence of the early and original reference to him, as the ground of divine mercy.

Nothing is more undeniably true, than that the offering of sacrifices was both early and universal in every nation under heaven; and it is no less certain, that those

who used them did consider them as expiatory, or propitiatory, to render the offended Deity placable, and obtain his mercy. This was at once a confession of guilt, and a declaration, that they apprehended the necessity and propriety of an atonement. Neither is it possible to account for the universal prevalence of sacrifices in any tolerable manner, but by supposing, that they were the remains of what had been taught in the ages immediately after the fall, by divine appointment.

I apprehend it is also undeniably evident, that this is the light in which the sacrifice of Christ is represented in the holy scriptures. How many passages might be adduced to this purpose? In ancient prophecy, this part of his work is set forth in the following manner, *Is.* liiii. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried
" our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten
" of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our
" transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the
" chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his
" stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone
" astray: we have turned every one to his own way, and
" the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He
" was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not
" his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
" and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he open-
" eth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and
" from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?
" for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the
" transgression of my people was he stricken." *Dan.* ix.
24. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people,
" and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and
" to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for
" iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and
" to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the
" most Holy."

In the New Testament, he tells us, he was to lay down his life for his people: *John* x. *II.* "I am the
" good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for
" the sheep." The same thing he plainly says in the in-

stitution of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, Matth. xxvi. 26, 27, 28. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." That his body broken and blood shed for his people, was to be understood of his being made a sin-offering, is plainly testified in the apostolic writings, 2 Cor. v. 21. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Gal. iii. 13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Heb. ix. 26, 27, 28. "But now once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." See also the assertion of the apostle Peter, 1 Pet. iii. 18. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, (that he might bring us to God) being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." It is evidently also on this account, that he is called the Lamb of God, and we are called to attend to him in that capacity, John i. 29. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

It is lamentable to think, that there should be any who call themselves Christians, and yet refuse to acknowledge this truth, which is woven, if I may so speak, through the whole contexture, both of the law and gospel. It brings to my mind the story of an ancient artist; who, being employed to build a magnificent and elegant temple, had the ingenuity to inscribe upon it his own name, and so to incorporate it both with the ornaments and body of the structure, that it was impossible afterwards to efface the name, without at the same time destroying the fabrick.

In the same manner, Christ dying for sin is engraven in such characters through the whole revealed will of God, that it is impossible to take it away without overturning the whole system. For this end Christ came into the world; for this end he bore the name of *Jesus*, or the *Saviour*; and for this end he became the high priest of our profession, that he might, *by one offering, for ever perfect them that are sanctified.*

This then is the scripture-view of Christ as our propitiation, that our guilt is taken away, and we are reconciled to God through the sacrifice which he hath offered without spot or blemish. And notwithstanding all that has been thrown out against it by the pride of self-righteousness, there is nothing that can be justly opposed to it on the part of unprejudiced reason. God is merciful, but he is also just. And as there is nothing more inseparable from the idea of sin, and an accusing conscience, than merited punishment; so there is nothing more essential to the idea of justice in God, than a disposition to inflict it. This the scripture every where declares; and the conscience of the guilty, who dreads his Maker's presence, ratifies the truth.

Now, if God shews mercy to the sinner, is it so abhorrent from reason, that this should be by a Mediator, if one can be found fit to step in between the parties, and "lay his hand upon them both?" Is not this necessary to manifest the righteousness and severity of the law, as well as the tenderness and compassion of the judge? Is not this precisely the reason assigned for it in scripture? Rom. iii. 25. "To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." It is trifling to say, that there is nothing of the passion of anger in God, that should need to be appeased. Such expressions are only figurative, but they convey their meaning very clearly. It is not anger or revenge, as they appear in our disordered frame, that accepts of an atonement. These furious passions fly directly at the offending person, and reject all intercession. But justice, in calm and regular government, requires satisfaction, that the malignity and demerit of the offence may be preserved, while mercy is

extended to the criminal. We ought to consider, that one great and general end of the dispensations of Providence is, to illustrate the glory of the true God in all his real perfections. This is best done by a purchased pardon, by a wise and awful mixture of impartial justice with unmerited mercy. How can you hear the word *mercy* so often without perceiving this? It is not mercy at all, unless it is bestowed on those who have deserved to suffer; and therefore why may not a voluntary surety be admitted to suffer in their place? The truth is, such are the impressions that are usually made on the awakened conscience, of the infinite holiness and purity, and the tremendous majesty of God, that nothing less will satisfy it than a sufficient atonement, or a clear view how he may be "just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus."

But, my brethren, it is one thing, to know, to profess, or even to support the truth; and another, but of unspeakably more moment, to feel, and to apply it. It is one thing, to have a rational conviction, from critical inquiry, that this is taught in the holy scriptures; and another, to cleave to it with esteem and affection, as *the gospel of our salvation*, as the great foundation of our hope and peace. Therefore, in what remains of this branch of the subject, I would consider myself as speaking, not to the wrangling disputer, but to the convinced sinner; not to the self-righteous boaster, but to the broken in spirit. The chief circumstances in the propitiation which Christ hath made, to be taken notice of in this view, are these two: 1. Its absolute necessity. 2. Its perfect sufficiency.

1. Consider the *absolute necessity* of this atonement. There is no other way by which the sinner can be restored to the favor of God. Nothing can be clearer from the holy scriptures. It is indeed the tacit inference that may be drawn from the whole. Why is this love and mercy of God celebrated in such exalted strains by the inspired writers, and felt with so much gratitude by the redeemed, but that they were under condemnation, and must have perished, but for the help of this Saviour? Rom. "viii. 1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the

“flesh, but after the Spirit.” And the same chapter, ver. 33. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.” 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.” As “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” so we have the same infallible testimony, Heb. x. 4. that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” Nay, that the thing might be put beyond all possibility of doubt, see the declaration of Peter and John, 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.” And what other sense can be put upon these words of our Saviour himself? John xiv. 6. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” In vain then do we found our hopes upon any thing else: The holiness of the divine nature, the purity of the divine law, and the greatness of divine power, conspire in blasting every hope of the sinner but what is centred in Christ.

2. Consider the *perfect sufficiency* of this atonement. It is sufficient to answer all the demands of law and justice. It is sufficient to vindicate the honor of the divine government, and to illustrate the holiness and justice of God in the forgiveness of sin. It is sufficient to purchase a full and complete remission to the greatest sinner. Whoever reflects upon the infinite wisdom of God, must be sensible that it is not without reason that so much is said on this subject in scripture; that so much pains is taken to set forth the glory and greatness of the Saviour of sinners. The greatness of his person, and dignity of his character, are set before us in the most striking light. He is “the eternal and only begotten Son of God; the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” And Phil. ii. 6. “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” If. 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.”

It is not easy indeed to enumerate the magnificent titles with which he is adorned in scripture: *The Alpha and Omega,—The first and the last,—The Prince of the kings of the earth,—The King of kings, and Lord of lords,—The King of glory,—and The King of saints.* What mighty works are subscribed to him in creation and providence! We are told, “He shall reign till all enemies are brought under his feet.” The propriety of his sacrifice as the Son of man, and the purity of his sacrifice as the Holy one of God, are taken notice of in scripture; Heb. ii. 17. “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” Heb. ix. 13, 14. “For if the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” To this you may add the continued fulness that dwells in him; John i. 16. “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Col. i. 19. “For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell.” What is this, my brethren, but to encourage and embolden sinners to put their trust in him, and to carry home with power this truth, which I shall give you in the words of the Holy Ghost? 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.”

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was, to consider the extent of this propitiation, founded on the last clause of the text: “And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” In general, when we remember that this epistle was written chiefly to the converts of the circumcision, it may convince us, that in all probability this expression was intended against the

great and national prejudice of the Jews, of which we see very frequent notice taken in the New Testament. As they had the oracles of God committed to them, as for the wise purposes of his providence he had separated them from other nations, and the Messiah was to descend from them according to the flesh, they apprehended that all the blessings of his reign were to be confined to themselves: therefore they are often given to understand, that the purpose of mercy was far more extensive, and that Christ came with a view to fulfil that promise made to the father of the faithful, Gen. xxii. 18. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." The expression in the text then undoubtedly implies, that redemption through the blood of Christ was to be preached to sinners of the Gentiles; that as he had been the Saviour of all ages by the efficacy of that sacrifice which he was to offer in the fulness of time, so that the virtue of it was not to be confined to the house of Israel, but to belong to sinners of every nation under heaven.

I am sensible, my brethren, that very great controversies have been raised in another view, as to the extent of Christ's death, and the import of this and other such general expressions in the holy scriptures. In this, as in most other debates, matters have been carried a far greater length than the interest of truth and piety requires; and, as is also usual, they have arisen from an improper and unskilful mixture of what belongs to the secret counsels of the Most High with his revealed will, which is the invariable rule of our duty. Without entering, therefore, into these debates, which are unsuitable to our present employment, or rather giving my judgment, that they are for the most part unnecessary, unprofitable, or hurtful, I shall lay down three propositions on this subject, which I think can hardly be called in question, and which are a sufficient foundation for our faith and practice.

I. The obedience and death of Christ is of value sufficient to expiate the guilt of all the sins of every individual that ever lived or ever shall live on earth. This cannot be denied, since the subjects to be redeemed are finite, the

price paid for their redemption is infinite. He suffered in the human nature, but that nature intimately and personally united to the divine; so that Christ the Mediator, the gift of God for the redemption of sinners, is often called his own and his eternal Son: Rom. viii. 32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Such was the union of the divine and human nature in Christ, that the blood which was the purchase of our redemption is expressly called the blood of God, Acts xx. 28. "To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." This is the great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, in which all our thoughts are lost and swallowed up.

2. Notwithstanding this, every individual of the human race is not in fact partaker of the blessings of his purchase; but many die in their sins, and perish for ever. This will as little admit of any doubt. Multitudes have died, who never heard of the name of Christ, or salvation through him; many have lived and died blaspheming his person, and despising his undertaking; many have died in unbelief and impenitence, serving divers lusts and passions; and if the scripture is true, he will at last render unto them according to their works. So that if we admit, that the works of God are known to him from the beginning of the world, it can never be true, that, in his eternal counsels, Christ died to save those, who after all that he hath done, shall be miserable for ever. "He is a rock, his work is perfect." His design never could be frustrated; but, as the apostle Paul expresses it, Rom. xi. 7. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." But,

3. There is in the death of Christ a sufficient foundation laid for preaching the gospel indefinitely to all without exception. It is the command of God, that this should be done: Mark xvi. 15. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The effect of this is, that the misery of the unbelieving and impenitent shall lie entirely at their own door; and they shall not only die in their sins, but shall

suffer to eternity for this most heinous of all sins, despising the remedy, and refusing to hear the Son of God; Heb. x. 26, 27. "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 judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Let us neither refuse our assent to any part of the revealed will of God, nor foolishly imagine an opposition between one part of it and another. All the obscurity arises from, and may be resolved into the weakness of our understandings; but let God be true, and every man a liar. That there is a sense in which Christ died for all men, and even for those who perish, is plain from the very words of scripture; 1 Tim. iv. 10. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe." 1 Cor. viii. 11. "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" Thus it appears that both in a national and personal view, Christ is "the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

III. I proceed now in the *last* place, to make some practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction. And,

I. From what hath been said, let us be induced to give praise to God for his mercy to lost sinners revealed in the gospel. Let us particularly give him praise for Christ Jesus, his unspeakable gift: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for us."

While we remember, with abasement of soul, the holiness and justice of God, which required satisfaction for sin, let us also remember his infinite compassion, who was pleased himself to provide "a lamb for the burnt-offering." Let us at the same time give praise to the tender-hearted Saviour, who gave his life as an offering "of a sweet-smelling favor" to God. Redeeming grace shall be the theme of eternal gratitude and praise in heaven. After

all our trials and dangers are over, we shall then, with unspeakable delight, ascribe the honor of our victory to him, saying, Rev. v. 12. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Why should we not also attempt to give him praise in his church on earth? for he, having finished his own work, and entered into his glory, hath given us an assured prospect, that we also shall overcome in his strength; that he will come again, and "receive us to himself; that where he is, there we may be also."

2. You may see from what hath been said, that such as are yet unrelated to this Saviour are in a state of sin, and liable to divine wrath. Hear and receive this truth, however unwelcome to the secure, however distasteful to the carnal mind. If it were not so, this propitiation which God hath set forth would have been altogether unnecessary. Let us beg of him who hath ascended up on high, to send down, according to his promise, his Spirit to convince the world of sin. How many affecting and striking proofs have we of this, both in our character and state! and yet how difficult to make us sensible of it! What is to be seen in the world at present, or what do we read in the history of past ages, but one melancholy scene of disorder, misery, and bloodshed, succeeding another? Is not this the effect of human guilt? And do we not, by mutual injuries, at once demonstrate our own corruption, and execute the just judgment of God upon one another? May not every person discover the latent source of these flagrant crimes, in the pollution of his own heart, his aversion to what is good, and his proneness and inclination to what is evil? And yet, alas! how difficult a matter is it to make the heart humble itself, and plead guilty before God; to make us sensible, that we are transgressors from the womb, and inexcusable in this transgression; that the threatening of the law is most just, "Curst is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;" and that it is of the infinite mercy of God, that the execution is suspended, or any hope given us of being able to avert it?

Yet this, my brethren, I will repeat it, and I beseech you to attend to it, is certainly the case by nature, with every person in this assembly. Every one who now hears me is in a state of condemnation, and liable to everlasting misery, excepting that happy number who have "fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them." All insensible persons, living in a careless secure forgetfulness of God; all who indulge themselves habitually in the lusts of the flesh; drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, liars, unjust persons, lovers of the present world, are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. Oh that it were possible for me to awaken you to a sense of your danger, while there is yet a possibility of escaping! Oh the importance to you of the unknown time from this day of your merciful visitation to the day of your death! What would those who are now reserved in chains to the judgment of the great day, give for the precious opportunity you are now despising! In a little time I know that you yourselves will repent; oh that it may not be when it is too late to reform! But all words must sink under such a subject. No picture that I could draw of the despairing horror of a sinner on his death-bed, or the blaspheming rage of those who are tormented in hell-fire, could possibly give any of you a just apprehension of what it is to fall into the hands of the living God, unless it please himself to wound the conscience with the arrows of conviction, that he may afterwards pour in the healing balm of peace and consolation. And oh that it might stand with the will of God that none here present should escape!

3. Learn from what has been said, that there is no sacrifice for sin, but the one offering of our Redeemer on the cross; no hope of mercy for any child of Adam, but through his blood. The typical sacrifices under the Old Testament were but shadows, the substance is Christ. In vain will any go about to establish their own righteousness, and refuse to submit to the righteousness of God. Think not, my brethren, by attempts of reformation, by faulty defective duties, to be able to cancel any part of that guilt to which you are adding every day. How great is the fol-

ly and presumption of self-righteousness! What a profane contempt of the riches of divine grace! Hath God seen it necessary to set forth Christ as a propitiation through faith in his blood? and will you say, that it is unnecessary, and spurn the offered mercy? How much ignorance is in self-righteousness! What imperfect views must they have of the law of God, and how little knowledge of themselves, and their own hearts, who admire or trust in human virtue! Above all, what is the foundation and corner-stone of self-righteousness? It is pride, that sin of all others most odious and abominable in the sight of God. Is it not a matter of daily experience, that those persons who are evidently most loose and careless in their own practice, and who, one would think, should have least of that kind to rely upon, are most prone to a self-righteous plan, and most ready to despise the doctrine of justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ. Are you sometimes surprised at this, Christians? The thing is easily explained. They know little either of the law of God or their own hearts. They seldom study the one, or reflect upon the other. If they did, they would soon be ashamed of such a pretence. Those who apply themselves with the greatest diligence to the study of holiness in heart and life, do always most sensibly feel, and most willingly confess, that all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God.

4. In Christ Jesus, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, there is abundant provision made for the pardon of all our sins, and peace with an offended God. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Behold the Lamb which God himself hath ordained, and set apart for this important work, and which he will certainly accept! "Deliver them," saith he, "from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." Behold the immaculate and spotless victim in the purity of his human, and the glory of his divine nature! There is no sin so atrocious but his blood is sufficient to wash away the guilt. Is there any sinner in this assembly burdened with a sense of guilt, arrested by an accusing conscience, terrified by the thunders of the law, ready to cry out, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God! My flesh

“ trembleth because of thee : I am afraid of thy judgments.” Let such an one know, that help is laid on him that is “ mighty to save.” Let your guilt be what it will, who can so far derogate from the Redeemer’s glory as to suspect that his blood cannot purge it away ? Give no heed to unbelieving thoughts, or discouraging suggestions ; but be “ strong in faith, giving glory to God ;” and attend to the Saviour’s own words : “ Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

5. In the *last* place, Let all the children of God, whose hope hath still been in the divine mercy through a crucified Saviour, embrace the opportunity now given them of professing, exercising, and strengthening their faith in the great atonement. Plead your relation to God through Christ, and encourage yourselves in his all-sufficiency and merit. Look upon his sufferings for humbling you under a sense of the evil of sin, which made such an expiation necessary. Nothing serves more to abate and level human pride, than to see our nature on the cross though personally united to the divine. Look upon him in his agony, for mortifying and crucifying sin in you. There is a purifying virtue, and sanctifying efficacy, in the blood of Christ. It not only speaks peace to the wounded conscience, but purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. I am not against the introduction of every argument from scripture or reason against sin, or in support of duty ; but let them never supplant the great, the leading, the constraining argument, which is drawn from the cross of Christ. Believe it, my brethren, nothing so much reconciles the heart to duty, nothing so kindles a holy indignation against sin, as a believing view of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This gives the Spirit of adoption a child like fear, and a child-like love. This fills the Christian with comfort, this inspires the Christian with zeal. To seek our comfort in a separate way, or in the first instance from our duties, is to make that comfort feeble and variable as the duties are defective ; but to enliven our duties by the comforts of the gospel is to follow the order of the covenant of grace, by which we at once promote the glory of God, and most ef-

fectually secure our own comfort and peace. This is the Spirit breathed by the apostle Paul, with whose words, Gal. ii. 19, 20. I shall conclude; "For I through the law
" am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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."

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN REDEMPTION.

A

S E R M O N.

REV. i. 5.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

ACTION SERMON.

THE bare repetition of these words is sufficient to convince every hearer how well they are suited to the design of our present meeting. Redeeming love is certainly the most delightful of all themes to every real Christian. It is the immediate and direct object of our contemplation in the Lord's supper. This ordinance was instituted to keep up the remembrance of the sufferings and death of Christ, which was the great and finishing proof of his love. How then can you attend on it in a more becoming and dutiful, a more pleasant and desirable, or a more happy and useful frame of spirit, than when your hearts are filled with a sense of the love of Christ, and you find yourselves disposed to join, with a mixture of joy and wonder, in the doxology of the apostle John, in the text, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood?*

The author of this book is sometimes styled *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. Since, therefore, it pleased his master to distinguish him by the tenderness of particular friendship, it is no wonder that we find so much of the

delightful affection of love in his writings. In the beginning of this chapter, he gives an account of the general subject and design of the book of Revelation, the manner in which the discoveries contained in it were made to him, and his fidelity in testifying them to others. Then follows the apostolic salutation to the seven churches in Asia, which is a solemn benediction, in name of all the persons of the adorable Trinity: "Grace be to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come;" (that is, from God the Father, the ancient of days, immutable and eternal); "and from the seven spirits which are before his throne;" (not to detain you with a critical account of this phrase, it means the Holy Ghost, single in his person, but multiplied in his gifts; the variety, fullness, and perfection of which, are denoted by this form of expression); "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." To him you see he gives three illustrious characters.

1. *The faithful witness*, who came from above, and revealed the whole will of God for our salvation; who being the eternal truth, might be absolutely depended on in the account he was by the apostle to communicate, of the great events of Providence towards his church and people.

2. *The first begotten from the dead*, declared to be the Son of God with power, by his glorious resurrection and triumph over the king of terrors. And, 3. *The Prince of the kings of the earth*; that is, the Lord of nature, to whom every prince and potentate must be subject, and to the ends of whose Providence, and the increase of whose kingdom, all their schemes of policy and conquest shall at last be subservient. He then, with great propriety, having mentioned the name, and given a short view of the character of his blessed Lord, lays hold of the opportunity to express his own and every other sinner's obligation to him in this sublime ascription, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*

To enter upon the consideration of the love of Christ in its full extent, in its source, its expressions, and its effects, even those that are suggested in the text, would

far exceed the bounds of a single discourse. What I propose, therefore, at this time, in order to prepare your minds, and my own, for the solemn action before us, is only to collect into one view some of the great and general characters of the love of Christ, which are most proper to excite our gratitude and praise; and then to make some practical improvement of it, for your instruction and direction.

I. First; then, let us endeavor to point out some of the great and general characters of the love of Christ. In this I shall take care to confine myself to such views as are given of it in the holy scriptures. And every character given of it there, we are both entitled and obliged to attend to, and improve.

1. First of all, then, you may observe, that it is an *everlasting* love. It took its rise in the eternal counsels of Heaven. This is a character given of the love of God to his people, Jer. xxxi. 3. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." This expression is often used with a double view, to shew, on the one hand, its early, its original source, and on the other, its perpetual stability, and endless duration. Ps. ciii. 17. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him; and his righteousness unto childrens children." Is. liv. 7, 8. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." Having cited these passages of the Old Testament, I must justify the application of them, by observing, that all the covenant-mercies of God to man, in our present fallen state, are to be referred to the love of Christ, as their price, their source, and their sum. This is plain from innumerable passages of scripture: Eph. i. 4, 5, "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto"

“ the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Eph. iii. 11.
 “ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” For this reason it is, amongst others, that Christ is called, Rev. xiii. 8, “ the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

I confess, my brethren, we are but ill able to understand, or at least to measure, the import of this truth, That the love of Christ to sinners, or of God in him, was from eternity. All our conceptions are soon lost, and swallowed up, in what is infinite and boundless. But surely it affords matter for the deepest and humblest adoration, as well as for the highest gratitude and joy. Does it not afford matter for adoring wonder, that the plan for redeeming lost sinners, and restoring them to the obedience and enjoyment of God, was the object of the divine purpose from eternity? It appears to be a very conspicuous part, or rather perhaps we are warranted to say, from the scripture revelation, that it is the chief part of our Creator's will, to which every other part of his providence is subordinate and subservient. Accordingly, in the very passage where my text lies, the Redeemer says, ver. 8. “ I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” Does not this lead us to contemplate the glory of an infinite God, as it shines in this everlasting love? Does it not also afford matter of gratitude to the believing soul, while he considers every vessel of mercy as concerned in this eternal purpose?

I am sensible, my brethren, there may be an abuse and perversion of the doctrine of election, if we think of it as independent of its fruits, and apply it so as to produce either security or despair. But I despise the wisdom of those persons who would conceal this truth as dangerous, which it hath pleased God distinctly to reveal. It is the root which produceth the plant; but it is the plant which discovers the root. It is the fountain which produceth the streams; but the streams lead us to the fountain. Must not the sinner who by faith has laid hold on a crucified Saviour, and given credit to the word of God in a preach-

ed gospel, consider, with admiration, his name written in *the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world?* What delight will it give him! What honor does it reflect upon him, at the same time that it destroys the very foundation of arrogance and pride? This is the first, and yet it is but one of many parts of the doctrine of salvation, which at once exalts and abases us; raises our hopes, and forbids us to glory; clothes us with infinite honor, and yet discovers us to be less than nothing: so that we may say with the apostle Paul, after a view of the same subject, Rom. xi. 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" This leads me to observe,

2. That the love of Christ is *free* and *unmerited* love. This is a circumstance that is scarcely ever separated from the account given of the love of Christ in scripture. It may be founded even on the infinite disproportion between uncreated excellence and created weakness: Ps. viii. 4. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Ps. cxliv. 3. "Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him? or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?" Nay, as if this were a truth of the utmost moment, we have it repeated a third time in almost the same words; Job vii. 17. "What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him?" But this is not all, nor indeed the main thing to be attended to; for the love of Christ hath for its object those who were in actual rebellion against God, transgressors of his holy law, and liable to the stroke of his justice. It was not only to exalt those who were low, or to supply those who were needy, that Christ came, but to deliver those who were appointed to death: John iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Rom. v. 8. "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Eph. ii. 4, 5. "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.)” The same thing indeed is clearly intimated in the words of our text, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* It is on this account in particular that salvation, according to the gospel, is said to be free, and of grace, that is to say, an act of unmerited and voluntary kindness, which the sinner had no title to demand : Rom. iii. 23, 24, 25. “ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ; 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.”

Believe it, Christians, this is the proper exercise of mercy ; and here the divine mercy shines and reigns. Without this, it is not obscured only, but annihilated or destroyed. But, oh ! what a view does this give us of the love of Christ ! What an impression will his love make on all those who are truly convinced of their guilt and wretchedness ! This is the very hinge upon which the whole doctrine of salvation turns. I hope you are not disposed to make any opposition to it. But, alas ! it is not sufficient to have learned it as a science, to have been taught it as making a part of the Christian faith ; it is another matter to have a real and personal conviction of it upon the heart. Why is the love of Christ so cold a subject to the generality of the world, but because they have no sense of their guilt and misery ? I am even afraid, that many of the zealous advocates for this truth have but little experience of its power, and live but little under the influence of it in their practice. Where indeed is the person to be found, who does full justice to the Saviour, and considers his love as wholly unmerited and free ? The most evangelical expressions do often consist with the most legal and self-righteous affections. Let me try, however, before I leave this particular, if I can make you understand it, even though you should not feel it. Suppose any of you

were upon the most deliberate and composed reflection, upon the most particular and close examination, sensible that you justly deserved to be banished from the divine presence, and cast into everlasting fire; and that your blessed Saviour, when there was no other way to prevent it, did save you by the sacrifice of himself; tell me, what would you not owe to him? what words would you find to express your love to him, or your sense of his love to you? There have been some convinced sinners so rivetted, if I may speak so, to this circumstance, that they could find little other way of measuring the love of Christ, but by looking into themselves; and to whom indeed it has been enough to illustrate the greatness of his mercy that they were not consumed. To this add,

3. The love of Christ is *unsolicited* love. It took its rise, not from those who stood in need of it, but from him who bestowed it. It was not the effect of our earnest importunity, but of his own infinite mercy. This is a circumstance which we ought by no means to omit, as we find it particularly taken notice of in Scripture: 1 John iv. 10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" and in the same chapter, verse 19. "We love him because he first loved us." It is natural to expect, that those who are in misery should implore the assistance of those who are able to relieve them, or that those who have been in the offence should humble themselves before those who have it in their power to punish, or to forgive them. But it was quite otherwise here. The love of Christ discovered itself, when we were in open rebellion against him; or, in the words of the apostle Paul, Rom. v. 10. "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

This affords us at once an illustration of the love of Christ, and a moving picture of our own deplorable and guilty state. There is something infinitely more noble and generous in extending mercy to the miserable, without waiting for their request, than when it is hardly procured, or as it were extorted, by importunity and solicitation. And does it not present us with a melancholy

prospect of our natural state, that we are not only unworthy to receive, but unwilling to ask for mercy? I desire, my brethren, that you may not consider this as only relating to mankind in general, and the voluntary purpose of grace and mercy from above in their favor, but as what makes a part of the experience of every particular convert. As the offer of mercy is made to him freely, so he will and must be sensible how cold and unthankful a reception he hath often given to the proposal. He will be sensible what resistance he hath often made to the design of the gospel; what exception he hath taken at the terms of it; and with how much difficulty he was at last induced to comply with it. I am persuaded there are few circumstances in the love of Christ that are more affecting to a believer, than to remember his own obstinacy, when a sinner, and his backwardness to accept of the invitations of the Saviour. After he hath rested his hope on the divine mercy, after he hath been made willing in a day of divine power, and hath obtained some comfortable evidence of the divine favor, how does he tremble at the thoughts of his former resistance! how does he wonder at the patience of God, and adore that victorious love, which stormed his heart, as well as paid the price of his redemption!

We find this particularly the case with those who having been for a season remarkably profligate, are saved as brands from the burning. They cannot help recollecting their former condition, their profane madness; and wondering, with a mixture of gratitude and fear, that they were not cut off in their wickedness, and made monuments of divine vengeance. Far from desiring a share in the love of Christ, they were perhaps doing their utmost in contempt of his name, and in opposition to his interest. Yet, Rom. x. 20. "was he found of them that sought him not, and made manifest to them that asked not after him:" they were powerfully though sweetly constrained to return to God through him.

4. The love of Christ is a *distinguishing* love, which must necessarily and greatly enhance the obligation of those who are the objects of it. When one person is passed by, and another is chosen, either to be delivered from

impending danger, or to be made partaker of extraordinary blessings, the loss or suffering of the one, seems to set off the superior happiness of, or the favor bestowed upon the other. To apply this to the subject we are now upon, there is a double distinction pointed out in scripture; one of our nature, in opposition to the fallen angels; and the other, of particular persons, as the vessels of mercy.

(1.) There is an evident distinction between our nature and that of the fallen angels: Heb. ii. 16. "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; he took on him the seed of Abraham." 2 Pet. ii. 4. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." I am sensible, that upon this subject we may be sometimes in danger of speaking with impropriety, especially if we pretend to assign the reasons of God's procedure any further than he hath been pleased himself explicitly to reveal them. There can be no doubt that the Lord of all, God infinitely wise, had the best reasons for his conduct, the most noble and excellent purposes in view in every thing that he ordained; but they are not discovered to us, and perhaps they are above our comprehension. The single point we are called to attend to, is the distinction infinitely gracious which is made in our favor. A Saviour is provided for us, a mercy infinite in itself, and the more highly to be prized, that (Jude, verse 6) the angels, our fellow-creatures, "who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." If we should attempt a comparison between ourselves and these spirits of higher order, we could find no ground of preference in our own favor; perhaps we should find many things that might seem to operate a contrary way; but it is safest, in humility and gratitude to say with the Psalmist, Psal. cxv. 3, "Our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he pleased."

(2.) But this is not all; there is also a distinction of particular persons as the vessels of mercy. Since I am introducing this subject, to prevent mistakes, I must observe,

that every sinner of the race of Adam who shall perish eternally, shall also perish most justly; his blood shall lie at his own door, and he shall be found guilty of rejecting the counsel of God against himself. At the same time, all who are effectually brought to the saving knowledge of God through Christ, shall be obliged to confess, that they were brought in by almighty power, or, in the language of the Holy Ghost, 1 Pet. i. 2. that they are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

On this, as on the former branch of this head, it may be observed, that we must not presume to penetrate into the unsearchable depth of the divine counsels; but at the same time it must be remembered, that we are not permitted, and cannot pretend, to find the reasons of preference in ourselves; for no flesh may glory in his presence. God in many passages asserts his own sovereignty and perfect liberty in the distribution of his grace: Rom. ix. 15, 16. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." And again, in the 18th verse, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Nothing can be harder, indeed, than for the proud and carnal mind to bow before the sovereignty of God; yet nothing is more evident, than that the destination of the vessels of mercy doth not proceed upon the ordinary grounds of human estimation. Nay, there seems to be an express design to stain the pride of all human glory: 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. "For you 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." Experience daily illustrates this; for while we see some brought to an entire submission to the gospel, and an obedient conformity to the will of God, we see many of equal,

or of greater rank, of equal or of greater ability and endowments of mind, and favored with equal or superior advantages and opportunities of instruction, who yet continue to bear the marks of reprobation. The same mercies dispose one to thankfulness, and inspire another with pride. The same trials will soften one heart, and harden another. All this our Redeemer makes the subject of a solemn thanksgiving to God, 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." Who that believes, in this assembly, will presume to take the least part of the honor of it to himself, or will refuse to adore the distinguishing love of God? And how often must those who bare the message of peace be obliged to seek the cause of an unsuccessful gospel in the counsels of the Most High? 2 Cor. iv. 3. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

5. The love of Christ was an *expensive* love. So great a deliverance would have called for the most humble and thankful acknowledgment, though it had been as much *without price* to the Saviour as to the sinner. But oh! my brethren, how far was it otherwise! and what shall we think or say of the love of Christ, when we consider how much it cost him to procure salvation for us! when we consider the depth of his humiliation, the variety, the continuance, and the greatness of his sufferings! You cannot but be sensible how frequent mention is made of this in scripture, or rather how seldom it is omitted when the love of Christ is introduced at all. It is the circumstance particularly pointed at in the text, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* The same thing appears from the other doxologies, or acts of worship to the Saviour, which are contained in this book, as Rev. v. 9. "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals there-

“ of; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God
 “ by thy blood.” It appears also, from the frequent men-
 tion of the cross of Christ, on which his sufferings were
 completed. Nay, of so much moment was this, that it
 seems to have made the sum of the gospel, as preached
 by the apostles; 1 Cor. ii. 2. “ For I determined not to
 “ know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him
 “ crucified.”

The sufferings of Christ, then, ought to be ever present
 to the mind of the believer. The necessity and impor-
 tance of this is plain from both the seals of the covenant
 of grace. The water in baptism represents the blood of
 Christ; and we are told, Rom. vi. 3. “ Know ye not,
 “ that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ,
 “ were baptized into his death.” The institution of the
 Lord’s supper also had the remembrance of Christ’s suf-
 ferings as its direct and immediate intention; 1 Cor. xi.
 24, 25, 26. “ And when he had given thanks, he brake
 “ it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is bro-
 “ ken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the
 “ same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped,
 “ saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood:
 “ this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.
 “ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup,
 “ ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” Remember,
 then, Christians, how he left the throne of his glory, and
 took upon him the form of a servant. Remember him
 despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and ac-
 quainted with grief. His life indeed was one continued
 scene of sorrow, from the cradle to the grave.

I hope the particulars of his sufferings are not strangers
 to your meditations: may the Lord enable you to con-
 template them with faith and love. Remember his agony
 in the garden, when he suffered from his Father’s hand:
 For “ it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to
 “ grief.” Think, O Christian, what it was to redeem a
 lost world, when you hear him saying, as in John xii. 27.
 “ Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Fa-
 “ ther, save me from this hour; but for this cause came
 “ I unto this hour.” Remember him seized by the treach-

ery of one of his own disciples; accused and arraigned as a felon; dragged to the tribunal of an unrighteous judge; clothed with a purple robe, and crowned with thorns in derision of his kingly office; severely scourged; blindfolded, buffeted, and spit upon; and the whole indeed so conducted by the righteous permission and unseen direction of divine providence, that hardly any expression, either of cruelty or contumely, was omitted. Cease to wonder, my dear friends, that profane wretches deride the signs of his sufferings, when you remember, that the blinded ramble attending the important trial were permitted to insult him, saying, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee."

Remember him going forth without the camp, bearing his reproach. Remember that spotless victim, the Lamb of God, stretched upon a cross, and nailed to the accursed tree, while he suffered all that the extremity of bodily pain, and the most unutterable anguish of spirit, could possibly inflict upon an innocent creature. No wonder that the earth did shake, that the rocks were rent, and the natural sun refused to give his light, when the Sun of Righteousness was under so great an eclipse. Did the Saviour then willingly submit to all this pain and ignominy for our sakes? Was not this the most expensive love; and can we refuse to say with the multitude of the heavenly host, Rev. v. 12. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing?"

6. The love of Christ was the most generous and *disinterested* love. The supposition or suspicion of any interested views in what one person does for another, nay, even the possibility of his serving any purpose of his own at the same time, greatly abates the value of any favor, and lessens the sense of obligation. But nothing of this kind can be so much as imagined here. It was giving to those from whom he could receive nothing, and emptying himself of that glory to which the whole creation could not make any addition. The truth is, we ought to consider in the same light every other mercy of God, as well as the love of Christ his Son, which was the source of

them all; Job xxii. 2, 3, 4. "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? Will he reprove thee for fear of thee? will he enter with thee into judgment?" And to the same purpose, Job xxxv. 5, 6, 7, 8. "Look unto the heavens, and see, and behold the clouds, which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." The essential glory and happiness of the Deity, and consequently of the *Eternal Word*, can receive no addition, nor suffer the smallest diminution, from the state of any, or of all his creatures. He was infinitely happy in himself from all eternity, before there was man or angel to serve him, and would have continued so though they had never been. How infinitely then are we indebted to this generous Saviour! with what gratitude ought we to celebrate his pure and disinterested love, who graciously interposed in our behalf, and delivered us from the wrath of God, by bearing it in our room!

7. In the last place, the love of Christ was a most *fruitful, active, and beneficent* love. The effects of it are unspeakably great; the blessings which we reap from it are not only infinite in number, but inestimable in value. They are indeed almost as valuable as their price was costly. It was not to be supposed, that so great a person would be employed upon a trivial work, or an infinite price paid for an inconsiderable purchase. But how, my brethren, shall we form any adequate conception of the benefits that flow from our Redeemer's death? All that is necessary for us, all that is desirable to us, all that is truly precious in itself, is effectually made ours: Rom. viii. 32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" 1. Cor. i. 30. "But of him are ye in

“Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and
“righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

(1.) We are through Christ delivered from condemnation: Rom. viii. 1. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk
“not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Do you know any thing of a sense of guilt? Does your Creator’s power and greatness ever make you afraid? Have you trembled at the approach of the king of terrors? or of that day of righteous judgment, when God shall render to every man according to his works? Christ our Saviour hath delivered us “from the wrath to come.” This is the first ground of the apostle’s ascription in the text: *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* Hear also the apostle’s triumphant assurance, Rom. viii. 33, 34. “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of
“God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that
“condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is
“risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who
“also maketh intercession for us.”

(2.) Through Christ the believer is assured, that he shall receive every thing that is necessary for him in his passage through the world. The Spirit is purchased and bestowed to lead him into all truth, and to sanctify him wholly. Christ did not satisfy himself with cancelling our guilt, but made effectual provision for the renovation of our nature. The Spirit is also given as a spirit of consolation. He is styled *the Comforter*, who shall *abide with us forever*. Without enlarging at this time on the comforts of the gospel, they are sufficiently commended in the following words of the apostle, Phil. iv. 7. “And the peace of
“God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your
“hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” To these add a sanctified providence. As many as are reconciled to God through Christ, may rest satisfied that all things shall work together for their good. The most opposite events, prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, honor and reproach, nay, every thing without exception, shall be subservient to their interest: 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23. “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, all are yours ; and ye are Christ’s ; and Christ
 “ is God’s.”

(3.) Through Christ the believer is entitled to everlasting glory and happiness in the enjoyment of God to all eternity. This was among the last things he told his disciples before he left the world : John xiv. 2, 3. “ In my
 “ Father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so, I
 “ would have told you : I go to prepare a place for you.
 “ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come
 “ again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am,
 “ there ye may be also.” You are this day to commemorate your Redeemer, who died once upon a cross, but who has now been many ages upon a throne : Rev. i. 18. “ I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and behold, I am
 “ alive for ever more, Amen ; and have the keys of hell
 “ and death.” He is able to make his faithful disciples more than conquerors over all their spiritual enemies ; or, as it is expressed in the passage where the text lies, he will make them *kings and priests to God and his Father*. In the passage immediately preceding the text, he is called the first begotten from the dead ; and elsewhere we are told, that the order of the resurrection is, “ Christ the first
 “ fruits, and afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming.” It shall both finish and illustrate his love when he shall raise them that sleep in the dust ; when he “ shall
 “ change their vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like
 “ unto his own glorious body, according to the working
 “ whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.” At present, how imperfect are our discoveries ? how weak and feeble our conceptions ? how cold and languid our affections ! Now we “ see through a glass darkly, but
 “ then face to face.” O how joyful to every believer the deliverance from a state of suffering, temptation and sin, and the possession of perfect holiness and unchangeable happiness ! And O how great the opposition of the future to the present state ! No more struggling with the evils of life : No more perplexity or anxious care for food and raiment ; no more distress from sickness or pain ; no prisons nor oppressors there ; no liars nor slanderers there ;

no complaints of an evil heart there, but the most perfect security of state, and most unremitting vigor of affection. How shall the ransomed of the Lord then sing their Redeemer's praise! Rev. i. 5, 6. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

II. I proceed now to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And,

I. Let me intreat every person in this house to make the following obvious reflection: If so great are the obligations of believers to the love of Christ, how dreadful must be the condition of those who die in their sins! The one of these explains and illustrates the other. The believer can owe but little, if the deliverance is not great. I have been lately speaking of the happiness of the elect of God, in being freed from the miseries of the present state; but, oh! unhappy they who shall depart from this life unreconciled to God: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not on the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." When the heirs of glory "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father," the unbelieving and impenitent shall be cast into the lake of fire, "where the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." I desire to put you in mind of this, under the impression of this important truth, That nothing but the sovereign grace of God can make the warning effectual; and therefore beseeching him to accompany it with the powerful operation of his Holy Spirit. At the same time, I assure you, that if you reject the counsel of God against yourselves, your blood shall be upon your own heads. Do not pretend to say, "If it depends upon election, and almighty grace is necessary, all our endeavors will be vain." Secret things belong only to God. His purpose is not more unchangeable than his promise is faithful. Nay, though you may not be able to see it, nor I to explain it, they are perfectly consistent the one with the other. He will be *just when he speaketh, and clear*

when he judgeth; and therefore give heed to the exhortation, not in my words, but in the words of the Holy Ghost, Phil. ii. 12, 13. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Know, I beseech you, your own mercy. The necessity is urgent, and the time is uncertain. With what propriety may the words of the apostle be addressed to every person in every situation, and in every age! 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. "We then as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain: for he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Happy they who still hear the joyful sound! Happy the sinner who is not yet gone to his own place! Flee, flee to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope. Consider the aggravated guilt and seven-fold condemnation of the despisers of the gospel. All that you have heard of the love of Christ serves to shew the danger of his enemies. Read the words immediately following the ascription of which the text is a part (ver. 7.): "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Read also this awful description, Rev. vi. 14, 15, 16, 17. "And the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places: and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond-man, and every free-man, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Mark this extraordinary expression, *the wrath of the Lamb*, that meekest and gentlest of all creatures; teaching us, that his former meekness, and patience, and suffering, shall inflame and exasperate his future ven-

geance. Could I conduct you to the gates of the infernal prison, I am persuaded you would hear Judas Iscariot, and all other treacherous disciples, crying out, ‘ O that Christ had never come in the flesh ! The thunders of Sinai would have been less terrible. The frowns of Jesus of Nazareth are insupportable. O the dreadful, painful, and uncommon wrath of a Saviour on the judgment-seat !—The Lord speak consolation to his own people, and pierce the hearts of his enemies, that they may be brought to repentance.

2. You may learn from what has been said, that the great and leading motive to obedience under the gospel is a deep and grateful sense of redeeming love. This runs through the whole writings of the New Testament. It binds the believer to his duty ; it animates him to diligence ; it fills him with comfort : 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. “ 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.” Gal. ii. 19, 20. “ For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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.” That this motive will have the most powerful influence on the believer’s conduct, is evident both from reason and experience. No principle takes a faster hold of the human heart than gratitude for favors received. If the mercies be cordially accepted, and highly esteemed, which is certainly the case here, nothing can withstand its influence. It reconciles the heart to the most difficult duties ; nay, it even disposes the believer to court the opportunity of making some signal sacrifice, in testimony of his attachment. Love sincere and fervent overcomes all difficulties ; or rather indeed it changes their nature, and makes labor and suffering a source of delight and satisfaction. Let but the Saviour’s interest or honor seem to be concerned, and the believer, who feels how much he is indebted to him,

will cheerfully embrace the call, and set no bounds to his compliance. This shows how much beauty and force there is in our Lord's manner of recommending love and compassion to our fellow-creatures, *Matth. xxv. 40.* "And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." But to what purpose do I dwell upon this subject? for a sense of redeeming love is not only the most powerful motive to every other duty, but is itself the possession and exercise of the first duty of the moral law, as well as the sum and substance of evangelical holiness, viz. the love of God. The first sin, by which our nature fell, was a distrust of, and departure from God; and the malignity of every sin we continue to commit, consists in giving that room in the heart to something else, which is due only to God. A sense of redeeming love, therefore, expels the enemy, and makes up the breach, as thereby *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.*

3. You may see, from what has been said, the necessity of a particular application of the truths of the gospel to ourselves, and the reliance of every believer upon them as the foundation of his own hope. I have sometimes had occasion to observe to you, that it is very doubtful, whether any person can so much as approve in his judgment the truths of the gospel, till he perceive his own interest in them, and their necessity to his peace. Certain it is, the world that lieth in wickedness generally despises them. However, I shall admit as a thing possible, that a bad man may, either by imitation, or the power of outward evidence, embrace the gospel as a system of truth. But surely the love of Christ can neither be a source of comfort, nor a principle of obedience, unless he consider it as terminating upon himself. Without this, the whole is general, cold, and uninteresting. But when he considers, not only the certainty of the truth, but the extent of the invitation, and can say, with Thomas, *My Lord, and my God,* then indeed the ties are laid upon him; then indeed he begins to feel their constraining power; then he not only contemplates the glory of God in the grace of re-

demption, but cheerfully and unfeignedly consecrates himself to the service of his Redeemer. This leads me, in the

Fourth and last place, to invite every sinner in this assembly to accept of Christ as his Saviour, and to rely upon him as he is offered in the gospel. To the secure and insensible, I know it is in vain to speak. But if you see your own danger, what should hinder your belief and reliance on the Saviour? If you either need or desire deliverance, what with-holds your acceptance of it, when it is not only freely offered to you, but earnestly urged upon you? Can you doubt the testimony of *the Amen, the faithful and true witness*? The blessings of his purchase belong not to one people or family, but to *every nation under heaven*. The commission of those who bear his message is unlimited: Mark xvi. 15. "Goe ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." They are offered, not only to the virtuous, the decent, and regular, but to the *chief* of sinners: 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." Whoever heareth these glad tidings, he dishonoreth God, he poureth contempt on his Saviour's love, and he wrongeth his own soul, if he does not receive consolation from them. Be not hindered by what you see in yourselves, unless you are in love with sin, and afraid of being divorced from it. The gospel is preached to sinners. It does not expect to find them, but it is intended to make them holy. A deep and inward sense of your own unworthiness, unless it is prevented by the deceiver, should only make you more highly esteem the grace of the gospel, and more willingly depend on your Redeemer's love.

I conclude with the invitation which he himself gives to the weary sinner, Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30. "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."



REDEMPTION THE SUBJECT OF ADMIRATION TO
THE ANGELS.

A
S E R M O N.

I P E T E R i. 12. last clause.

Which things the Angels desire to look into.

ACTION SERMON.

MY brethren, A serious and attentive mind, on perusing the sacred volume, can hardly help being often struck both with the sentiments and language of the inspired writers on the subject of redemption. With what a deep veneration of soul, with what warmth of affection, with what transports of adoring thankfulness do they speak of the plan laid by divine wisdom, for the salvation of lost sinners, by the cross of Christ! A person possessed only of understanding and taste, may admire these fallies of holy fervor, for the elevation of thought, and boldness of expression, which a man's being in good earnest on an interesting subject doth naturally inspire. But happy, happy, and only happy, that soul who from an inward approbation can receive, relish, and apply those glorious things that are spoken of the name, character, and undertaking of the Saviour of sinners.

You may observe, that there are two different subjects, in general, on which the writers of the New Testament are apt to break out, and enlarge, when they are considering or commending the mystery of redemption. One

is, the glory of God, as it appears in it; the lustre of divine power, wisdom, and grace, which reigns through the whole. The second is, the unspeakable interest which we have in it, from the danger escaped on the one hand, and the exalted hopes to which we are raised by it, on the other. I cannot help putting you in mind, that these two things are so inseparably joined, that none can forget or be insensible of any one of them, without in reality despising both. And as a view of the divine glory seems most immediately calculated to assist and continue a proper worshipping frame, I intend, that this shall lead the way in our meditations on this occasion. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is called the *Eucharist*, or sacrifice of praise; and therefore very fit for adoring contemplation.

The words which I have read are the conclusion of the apostle Peter's account of the gradual unfolding of this great design of Providence; and they contain a striking and extraordinary sentiment, That the angels themselves are filled with a holy curiosity to search into the mystery of redemption. Few commentators have failed to observe, that the word here translated *to look into*, properly signifies, *to stoop or bend down, and examine with the strictest attention*. This, my brethren, gives us a very exalted view of the scheme of redemption, as a leading design in the government of God, that these pure and exalted spirits, not only adore it as a part of their Creator's will, but that they are lost and swallowed up in the contemplation of it, and see such a series of wonders, as they are not able to comprehend. If this is so, let us no longer postpone the following reflection: How much more are we, the interested parties, called to adore and dwell on this mystery of love, on which our salvation from deserved wrath, and possession of infinite felicity to all eternity is suspended! I cannot find a more proper subject for an introduction to the sacred and solemn service of this day; and therefore I beg your attention, while I endeavor, in dependence on divine grace, to illustrate the assertion in the text, by mentioning some particulars in the mystery of redemption, which are probably the subject of adoring

enquiry, and perhaps holy astonishment, to those celestial spirits. Having done this, I will conclude with some improvement of the subject, for assisting you in your present duty.

I. FIRST, then, we are to mention those circumstances in the mystery of redemption which are probably the subject of adoring enquiry, or perhaps holy astonishment, to the angels of God. The angels, though they are exalted creatures, are yet plainly of limited capacity. There are many things of which they are ignorant: *Matth. xxiv. 36.* "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." And as their employment is to be messengers and ministers of God, with some inferior agency, in the conduct of his providence; so it is not to be doubted that much of their happiness consists in the contemplation of the nature and glory of God, as discovered in his works. They are represented in the book of *Job* as joyful witnesses of the creation and birth of this lower world: *Job xxxviii. 6, 7.* "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof? when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." The state of the church is also represented as discovering to them the divine 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."

Let us therefore consider what circumstances in the mystery of redemption may be supposed to strike them most with astonishment and wonder. This we cannot do without finding ourselves greatly interested, and called to the deepest humility, and at the same time the highest exercise of gratitude and love. And,

I. The first thing I shall mention is the incarnation of the Son of God; the union of the divine and human nature, by the Word's being made flesh. This is indeed the first thing to be considered, both in order and in rank. O wonderful union indeed! Well might the apostle say, *1 Tim. iii. 16.* "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in

“ the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” But what view must the angels have of this event? those glorious and active beings, who are thus described, Pfal. civ. 4. “ Who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire.” Their knowledge of the nature of God, as a pure and immaculate spirit, as the eternal, uncreated, self-existent Father of Spirits, and of the Son, as one with the Father, who “ thought it no robbery to be equal with God,” must deeply astonish them at this marvellous humiliation; that he should become one person with a creature, and that with a creature lower than themselves; for it is expressly said, that “ he was made a little lower than the angels.” How astonishing, that he who is the Lord of angels, and whose distance from the highest of all created spirits is not great only, but infinite, should become a man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul!

It is more than probable from our text, especially when compared with the context, and other passages of scripture, that this discovery was made to the angels only gradually, as it was to men. They could not but have intimations of God’s purpose of mercy, which was begun and carried on immediately after the fall; this however was done in a manner comparatively dark and obscure. There have been indeed some who seem to me to have gone a little beyond their depth; and who have supposed, that God discovered to the angels, even before the creation of man, the fall, which he foresaw, and the method by which he proposed to recover a chosen remnant, viz. the incarnation of his own Son; that the superior honor done to an inferior creature, stirred up the pride and envy of Lucifer, and his associates; and that in this consisted their guilt and apostasy, for which they were punished with an immediate banishment from the abodes of bliss, and are now reserved in chains under darkness to the day of judgment.

This at best is but mere conjecture. It seems much more probable that they learned the several parts of this great design of mercy in their gradual accomplishment. It cannot indeed be doubted, that the angels who were concerned in the ministry of providence, must have known

early of the intended redemption, and the Redeemer. Yet when they are said, as in the text, to look into the things preached in the gospel, it gives reason to conclude, that the incarnation and sufferings of Christ was, with regard to them, as well as us, a mystery hid from ages and generations. Now how could those holy angels who retained their integrity, but be filled with amazement at the depth of divine councils, when they saw themselves obliged to worship a man, to worship a feeble infant, born in a stable, and lying in a manger? when they found themselves charged with publishing the glad tidings? as in Luke ii. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger. 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, goodwill towards men."

There is one circumstance in the incarnation itself, which ought not to be omitted, because it is mentioned in scripture, and is certainly as astonishing as any, That he was not only made flesh, but sent *in the likeness of sinful flesh*. What so opposite to the nature of God as sin? And what so surprising, as that the Son of God, though without sin, yet should in all respects outwardly be like to sinners? that he should be born of a sinner, taken for a sinner, treated as a sinner, and at last crucified with the utmost ignominy, as a more than ordinary sinner? I doubt not, but those angels who looked with wonder on him in the manger, looked with still greater wonder on him on the cross; that the whole host of them are considering this with holy wonder still; and that it shall be the theme of eternal wonder to the innumerable company about the throne. This leads me to observe,

2. That another circumstance which must afford matter for adoring enquiry to the celestial spirits, is the substitution of an innocent person in the room of the guilty,

and his suffering from the hand of God. When man's apostasy was first known, I reckon we may affirm with sufficient certainty, that it could not enter into any created mind, that his recovery was possible. Many are even of opinion, that some passages of scripture carry in them an intimation, that it had been proposed, and as it were a trial made, in the councils of heaven, among assembled angels, whether any remedy could be found for the guilt and apostasy of man; and that none was found either able or willing to stand in his room; as in that of the Psalmist, cited by the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. x. "5, 6, 7. "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, "he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but "a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt-offerings "and sacrifices for sin, thou hast had no pleasure: Then "said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of thy book it is writ- "ten of me) to do thy will, O God." And in the prophe- "cies of Isaiah, chap. lix. 16. "And he saw that there was "no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; "therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his "righteousness, it sustained him." I will not take upon me to affirm this interpretation of these passages; but the first of them, which is applied by the apostle to Christ, certainly implies, that he undertook the redemption of sinners when other sacrifices were found ineffectual.

Now, my brethren, let us prosecute the reflection pointed out by the text. The angels had always hitherto seen innocence and holiness attended with peace and felicity, and they had seen the apostate spirits laid under an irreversible sentence of condemnation. It is probable they looked upon it as manifestly founded on the nature of God, that he could not punish the innocent, and that he could not but punish the guilty. What astonishment then must it have given them, what new views of the boundless sovereignty and unsearchable wisdom of the Most High must it have opened to them, when they heard him saying, "Deliver "him from going down into the pit, I have found a ran- "som! How must they with wonder dwell on this part of the providence of a wise, holy, just, and gracious God, that the pure and innocent Jesus, the beloved of the Fa-

ther, should make his appearance in this lower world, the abode of guilty creatures, under manifest tokens of their Creator's displeasure ! that he should not only enter on the scene in the weakness of infancy, but with every circumstance of meanness and baseness ! How often must they have been put to a stand, what to think of the severity and persecution, the contempt and opposition which he met with from those very sinners whom he came to save !

But above all, how must they have been at a loss to comprehend his being exposed, not only to the contempt of man, but to the wrath of God ! For " it pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief." What must have been the surprize of that minister of providence, who was sent " from heaven to strengthen" him, when he found him under an inexpressible agony of suffering, making supplication with strong crying and tears, saying, " Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me !" And what created spirit is able to reach the unfathomable meaning of his complaint upon the cross, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" In the sufferings of an innocent person in the room of the guilty, in the sufferings of the well-beloved Son of God from his Father's hand, there is such an unsearchable depth, as no finite understanding is able to comprehend. At first view it seems to contradict the rectitude and holiness of the divine nature ; but on a nearer inspection, there is such a striking discovery of wisdom, holiness, justice, and mercy, that angels desire with a holy curiosity to contemplate and adore it.

3. As immediately founded upon the former, another circumstance in the plan of redemption through Christ, which will afford matter of wonder to the celestial spirits, is the free justification of sinners, and their acceptance with God, through the imputed righteousness of Christ. If it appears astonishing, that God, who distributes favor and punishment with the most perfect equity, should punish the innocent, it appears equally so, that he should shew favor to the guilty ; that he should forgive their sins, accept their persons, and visit them with his loving-kindness, and all this for the merit and obedience of another, What ! (may it be said), is he not unchangeably holy ?

Is he not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Are we not assured that evil cannot dwell with him, nor sinners stand in his presence? How shall he receive into his favor these offending rebels? how shall he take into his bosom such polluted wretches? And what can be the meaning of imputation? Can personal worth be transferred? Can he commit so great an error, as to view them with complacency for the merit of another?

Must not this appear a new and extraordinary plan to the angels, who, by personal and perfect obedience, retain the favor of their Creator, and who had been hitherto strangers to the influence and intercession of a mediator? who had seen no such thing take place when their brethren had sinned? Heb. ii. 16, "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." The holy angels, not inclined to say, as more presumptuous men too often do, "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound," will rather say, "Let us step aside, and see this great sight." They will then see, that there is no way more proper for maintaining the dignity of the divine government: nay, that it is the only way by which those who have been sinners can be received into favor. They will see and confess, that there is no circumstance whatever that tends more to level the pride of the sinners heart, and bring him to universal submission, and absolute subjection to the sovereignty of God. I am persuaded indeed, that even angels who never sinned, have more of submission to the divine sovereignty, and dependence on the absolute grace of their Creator, than many are apt to imagine; yet surely our world is the great theatre of divine grace. The same infinite benignity which shews itself in heaven in favor to the worthy, is displayed on earth, to the astonishment of heaven itself, in mercy to the guilty.

Suffer me, my brethren, to embrace this opportunity of observing, that nothing is more groundless than the accusation of men of corrupt minds, against the doctrine of divine grace, as encouraging to sin. It hath the very contrary effect, and that on these two accounts.

(1.) It is so mortifying to human pride, that the power of sin must be broken at least, before it can be truly and cordially received. There is not so difficult a duty in the whole compass of the moral law, as an unfeigned denial of our own righteousness and strength, and being willing to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. To receive forgiveness as mere mercy to those who had deserved to perish, without any complaint either against the strictness of the law, or the severity of the sanction, is not so easy as many seem to imagine, and what no man is brought to but by the Holy Ghost

(2.) As the sinner must be really subjected to God the Creator, before he can lay hold of his mercy through Christ the Redeemer; so it is plain, that the most effectual measures are taken to continue and perpetuate this subjection. It is plain, that the infinite unmerited love of God to his soul, is the most powerful and operative principle of obedience that can dwell in the human heart: 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. "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." Such confidence has the same apostle in the strength of this principle, he bids defiance to all trials and opposition: Rom. viii. 35. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And again, ver. 38, 39. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, or principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These great principles of sanctification are new to the angels. When therefore they see the holiness of God shining in the free justification of sinners through Christ, it will add new force and new meaning to that song of praise which they are represented as singing, Rev. iv. 8. "And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

4. In the *last* place, Another circumstance in the mystery of the gospel which will be matter of wonder to the angels, is the application of redemption, or the manner and means of translating sinners "from darkness to light," and "from the power of Satan unto God." Before the plan of divine grace with regard to fallen man was opened to them, they had seen no examples of sinners but the fallen angels. From their irreversible sentence, and blaspheming rage in their torment, those who remained in their happy state, would be apt to conclude, that there could be no recovery for a creature who had once departed from his integrity at all. But when they learned something of the divine purpose for the salvation of fallen man, especially the amazing and unspeakable grace that appeared in the appointment of the Mediator, and the universal unlimited offer of salvation in his name, what would be the effect? I dare say they would certainly conclude, that it would be received with the highest transports of joy, by all those unhappy criminals who were lying under the curse of a broken law. Accordingly the angel, in his message to the shepherds, calls it good tidings of great joy to all people.

What then must have been their additional surprize, when they heard the prophet saying, Isa. liii. 1. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" when they saw that this gracious Saviour was "despised and rejected of men?" when they observed so many turn a deaf ear to the most importunate calls of the gospel? when they found them cavilling themselves out of eternal happiness, and advancing their own blinded and bewildered reason in contempt of the infinite wisdom of God? What must those holy angels, who are filled with gratitude for creating goodness, think of those heirs of hell, who pour contempt upon redeeming love? I cannot touch upon every thing that rises here to our view, but I am persuaded that the administration of the covenant of grace is as full of mystery to the celestial spirits, as any part of the plan. Instead of every sinner humbly imploring reconciliation with an offended God, our Redeemer, as a Sovereign Lord, as the Prince of Peace, first conquers those as enemies, whom he afterwards cherishes as

friends. He is endued with all power for this great work; and the Psalmist gives a beautiful description of its influence and effect, Psal. xlv. 3, 4, 5. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty; with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies whereby the people fall under thee." He hath sent forth his Holy Spirit as an almighty agent, to reconcile sinners unto God. Is there not also a depth of divine sovereignty to be seen in the choice of the vessels of mercy? The apostle Paul in the midst of the fury of persecuting zeal, Mary Magdalene from the midst of the flames of unclean lust, Zaccheus from the heart hardening crimes of covetousness and oppression, and many others of the chief of sinners, have been made the trophies of divine grace, and may say, in the words of their great example the apostle Paul, 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."

It deserves also particular notice, that faith itself is said to be the operation and the gift of God: Eph. ii. 8. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." And indeed the change in general which constitutes the new nature, is considered as a birth or creation from above; 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." It appears plainly, from many express declarations of scripture, from the power necessary to overcome their obstinacy, and from the seat of the disease itself, which lies in the will, that sinners, while they continue so, instead of desiring, resist their recovery. What a subject of contemplation presents itself to the angels here! What an unknown view is given them of the infinite evil and malignity of sin! What a humbling sense of created weakness! What a lesson of caution for their after conduct! It hath been conjectured, not without apparent reason, and some countenance from scripture, that the great purpose which the human system is

intended to serve in the universal kingdom of God, is to be an everlasting monument, that a rational creature who has once departed from its innocence, and obedience to its Creator, never can again return to the same state, but by his own almighty power and sovereign grace. Upon the whole, from this faint view of the plan of redemption, as lying open to the attention of principalities and powers, we may say with the apostle Paul, Rom. ii. 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

I proceed now to conclude the subject, by some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

1. What you have heard will contribute, I hope, by the divine blessing, to shew the guilt of those who despise the gospel, and serve to remove the offence of the cross. It required no small measure of fortitude in the apostle Paul, to declare that he was not "ashamed of the cross of Christ," which at its first publication was "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The doctrine of the cross, in its simplicity and purity, has been matter of offence in every succeeding age, to men of proud and worldly minds. God knows, there are not wanting many at this time, who treat the doctrine of the cross, and salvation by grace, with as much contempt and insolence as they dare. Nor is it at all impossible, that there may be some among you who are infected with these poisonous and destructive principles. Be persuaded, O deluded soul! that "the weakness of God is stronger than man," and "that the wisdom of man is foolishness with God." This glorious and gracious plan hath the approbation and admiration of angels, though it hath the contempt of sinners. It astonished the angels, therefore no wonder though it should astonish us. You will perhaps say, It is indeed astonishing above measure; it teaches me to believe an *incarnate God, a suffering Saviour, the innocent punished, and the guilty forgiven.* It is attended with so many surprising circumstances, that I cannot help saying, How can these things be? But as Samson said in his riddle, "Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came

“forth sweetness;” so out of the suggestions of your corrupt minds, I would derive some evidence of the truth. A cunningly devised fable would be dressed by the deceiver in a manner suited to the human taste; but this doctrine hath not upon it any of the marks of human wisdom. I do not think if it had not been revealed, that it could have entered into any human mind; and therefore we may justly say, “Salvation belongeth unto God.” It is because he is God, and not man, that we, the children of men, “are not consumed.”

2. You may learn, from what has been said, the encouragement that is given to sinners to return to God through Christ. The very circumstances that are most astonishing and admirable in this great dispensation, are the undeserved love and unexpected condescension of God to guilty and miserable sinners. I know that the inward and effectual call can only be given by the Holy Ghost; but I know also, that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Therefore, in expectation of the blessing of him who “hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and turneth them howsoever he will,” I proclaim in the hearing of every sinner within these walls, “that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but might have everlasting life.” I repeat the universal call, that “him that cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out.” Are there not many in this house under the power of sin, and the curse of a broken law? Nay, who is there that is not condemned by these important words, which you will find Gal. iii. 10. “Curst is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” This sentence stands uncanceled against all who are not reconciled to God by faith in Christ Jesus. Is the application difficult? Ye slaves of sin, drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, envious and malicious slanderers, retainers of unjust gain, and all without exception who are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, ye shall be slain all of you; “as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.” Remember the misery of those who

die in an unconverted state: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who can abide with devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Admire the infinite grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and admire the infinite wisdom of God that hath laid help for you upon one who is "mighty to save." May I not say, that, on this solemn occasion, your Saviour speaks to you, not only in his word, but from his cross? See the justice of God in the cross of Christ, and thence learn the evil of sin. See the power and wrath of God in the cross of Christ, and tremble at your own state. See the matchless love of God in the cross of Christ, and be persuaded to return to him with weeping, with supplication, and with mourning. Let the eye of faith be pointed at the dying Saviour, and say unto him, "O almighty sufferer, look down, look down from thy triumphant infamy, pity and pierce this hard heart with a sense of guilt and misery. Thou hast said, that when thou shouldst be lifted up from the earth, thou wouldst draw all men unto thee: let this promise be fulfilled to my experience. *Draw me, we will run after thee.* Lord, take away my complicated guilt; Lord, renew and pacify my un sanctified affections, form me for thyself, that I may serve thee here, and afterwards see thee as thou art!"

3. From what hath been said upon this subject, you may examine your title to partake of the holy ordinance of the Lord's supper; or, in other words, your right to the favor of God, and to eternal life. No disposition more suitable, none more necessary, at a communion-table, than a grateful and admiring sense of redeeming love, Not only the profane blasphemer, or the scornful despiser, is unfit to sit down at this feast, but the self-righteous formalist who never saw himself undone. It is true indeed, that when angels themselves are put to a stand, all our thoughts must soon be lost and swallowed up. But, my brethren, do you desire to look into it? Do you feel a sensible pleasure and delight in this sacred employment? Do you, in some measure, see the glory of divine grace, though you are not able to measure its dimensions? There

is no subject so obscure and unintelligible to those who are strangers to the power of religion, as the mystery of redeeming love; no subject so odious and distasteful to those whose minds are formed upon the maxims of the world, as the doctrine of salvation by grace. Christ upon a cross, Christ upon a throne, Christ the believer's rock and refuge, the source of his strength, and the source of his comfort, they are neither able to relish nor comprehend. All the warm expressions of gratitude and attachment, which are unspeakably sweet and ravishing to a serious soul, appear to them in the light of enthusiasm and visionary folly. But as many as it hath pleased God to bless with an inward and personal conviction of their lost state by nature, will see the greatest beauty in this plan of salvation, and will rather rejoice, than shrink, at sharing with their Redeemer himself the contempt of the world. They will say, with the apostle Paul, Gal. vi. 14. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is a beautiful opposition stated by the same apostle, between a believer's understanding the love of Christ, and yet being unable to search it to the bottom, in the following passage, Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

4. In the *last* place, From what has been said, learn what is your most proper employment at the Lord's table. Adore and contemplate the riches of redeeming grace, that great theme which "the angels desire to look into." Think, with humble amazement, on the boundless mercy of God, which reached even to you, and with the highest thankfulness on the honor to which you are admitted, of receiving the sensible pledges of his love. Dwell on this impenetrable mystery of "Immanuel God with us—" "God manifested in the flesh." Think on this awful proof of divine justice and holiness, the wrath of God poured out upon his own Son. Think on the perfection of that

atonement which is made for the sins of the world. Rejoice in the fulness of that Saviour who is now made "head over all things to the church;" and draw, by faith, from his fulness, every necessary supply to yourselves: and as you are now to commemorate his death, with a view to his second coming, think on that "day of salvation," when he shall come "to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe;" when you shall enter in triumph into the holiest of all, where no doubt the mystery of redemption shall be more fully discovered; when saints and angels shall jointly sing that new song, Rev. v. 12. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing;" when the whole plan of divine grace shall be completed and closed, and the mediatorial kingdom itself brought to a period; for "then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father;" when confirmed angels, and redeemed sinners, when the whole host of heaven shall unite in one acclamation, "Hallelujah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

A

S E R M O N.

GALATIANS vi. 14.

But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ACTION SERMON.

MY brethren, we are this day met to keep up the remembrance of our Redeemer's sufferings and death in our room. We are to commemorate an event the most important, the most interesting, and the most astonishing, that creation ever beheld. We are to contemplate a subject the most wonderful and mysterious that ever was offered to the mind of man. The *incarnation* of the *Son of God*, the *King of kings* found in the form of a *servant*, and the *Prince of life* expiring on an *accursed tree*. What is this but the union of things the most opposite and seemingly inconsistent that can possibly be conceived? the union of the most distant extremes of strength and weakness, glory and baseness, honor and shame?

In a sort of correspondence and analogy to this great subject itself, nothing can be more opposite than the sentiments formed by believers and unbelievers with regard to it. To the one it hath a dignity and majesty unspeakably amiable; to the other, it hath a meanness and baseness that is shameful and contemptible. The Apostle

Paul often takes notice of this, that it was “to the Jews a “a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;” and he often discovers his own inviolable attachment to his Saviour, by an open profession of esteem for those circumstances in his character and appearance which a blinded world were most apt to treat with derision and scorn. This is particularly the case in the text, “But God forbid that “I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

By the cross of Christ, in the New Testament, we are sometimes to understand the sufferings of believers for Christ’s sake; but more commonly, and, I think, evidently in this place, it signifies his humiliation in general, and particularly his crucifixion, to which circumstance our attention is directed, because it was the most base and ignominious of the whole. In this the apostle says he would glory: nay, he expresses his abhorrence at the thought of glorying in any thing else: “God forbid that “I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Nothing can be more suited to the employment of this day, and nothing more proper to distinguish between the friends and the enemies of Christ, than this, when carefully attended to; for the one will undoubtedly *glory* and the other will as certainly *be ashamed* of his cross.

In discoursing further on this subject, what I propose, through divine assistance, is,

1. To explain the import of the apostle’s glorying only in the Saviour’s cross.
2. To shew what good reason every real Christian hath to glory in it. And,
3. To make some practical application of the subject.

I. In the *first* place, then, let us explain the import of the apostle’s glorying only in the Saviour’s cross. What is this object in which the apostle says he would glory? Very wonderful indeed. It is, That Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, was subjected to a long life of sorrow, reproach, and contempt: That towards the close of it, he was arrested, accused, condemned as a malefactor; and after innumerable and unspeakable indignities, was at last nailed to a cross, an engine of torture of the most cruel

and painful kind, and so shameful, that it was a manner of punishment appropriated to the most detested criminals of the basest rank. What is there here to glory in? and what does the apostle mean by this expression? It means,

1. That he had a high esteem of it, as an event of the greatest moment, and an object worthy of the highest regard. We do not glory in common things, but in things of peculiar dignity and worth. It was not then in his view merely what it seemed. He did not consider it, surely, as the execution of a criminal; but said, with the centurion on Mount Calvary, Truly "this was a righteous man;" Truly this was "the Son of God." He considered it as the effect of the infinite love of God, who sent his only begotten Son to die for our sins. He considered it as an infinite price paid for the pardon of our offences, as the only way of deliverance from guilt, as the sure and certain pledge of peace to an awakened conscience. In this view, how does it rise in his esteem? While others are disposed to scorn, pitying their madness, he is constrained to worship and adore. Think of it, Christians, how different were the sentiments of his insulting enemies and his mourning disciples, when he hung upon the cross. The one consider him as a guilty sufferer, the other as a loving Saviour. The hearts of the one were boiling with hatred, or filled with contempt; the hearts of the other were swallowed up in admiration, or melted with love.

2. The apostle's glorying in the cross, implied his having a strong, though humble confidence of his own relation to and interest in it. I think it is impossible to separate this from our idea of the apostle's meaning. We do not glory or boast of any thing in which we have no concern. A man of great genius, or uncommon worth, I may admire and honor, merely for the eminent qualities of which he is possessed, and I may do him all justice by commendation; but I am never disposed to glory in him, nor have I any title to do it unless he is somehow related to me: but if I add, that he is my child, or he is my brother, I may be truly said to glory in him, or to boast of him, because the honor that is given to him, is, in some measure reflected upon myself. Again, I may speak of

the riches and magnificence of some great city ; but I am then only said to glory in it, if I add any circumstance of relation ; as that it is the place of my nativity, or the place of my residence, or the place in which I have property and interest. When therefore the apostle says, “ God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” it certainly implies a humble persuasion of his own interest in it, and his happiness to flow from it. This indeed naturally arises from a real and spiritual discovery of its proper glory. None can see the transcendent beauty of this object, till they have seen their own guilt and misery in the sight of a holy God. And no sooner do they discover the excellence of this atonement, its perfect sufficiency for all, and the unrestrained offer to all, than they fly to it as their security, and rest on it as the ground of their hope. The word here translated *glorying*, signifies at the same time *exulting*, or *rejoicing*; and therefore to glory in the cross, is the same thing as to rejoice in the Saviour. The truth is, it is but seldom that this apostle mentions the death of Christ without some appropriating expression : 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 ;” 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.”

3. To complete the idea of the apostle's glorying in the cross, it implies such a sense of its comparative worth, as prompts him to a public and open profession of esteem, with a sovereign contempt of the judgment or conduct of others, who set themselves in opposition to it. Glorying always signifies the declaration of our mind to others ; and is not ill illustrated by that expression of the apostle Paul in writing to the Romans, chapter i. 16. “ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” The opposition be-

tween the sentiments of others, and his own, he often mentions; as 1 Cor. i. 18. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness: but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God." And verse 23. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." When he glories in the cross, therefore, it implies an open and resolute adherence to this despised cause. This meaning is particularly carried in the word *cross*. It had been less wonder, if he had said, he gloried in his Saviour's divine power exerted before his crucifixion, or that he gloried in his triumphant resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of God after it; but, instead of this, he says he gloried in his *cross*, in his very abasement, in what was most vile and contemptible.

A late very eminent writer and champion for the cross, in a sermon on the same subject, makes a remark to the following purpose: " * That through the veneration of many ages, and the disuse of that punishment among us in the execution of malefactors, the word *cross* does not carry so base an idea to our minds; but that in the ear of a Galatian, it sounded as if the apostle had said, he gloried in a gallows, a gibbet or a halter." And in a note upon this passage of the sermon, when published, he expresses himself thus: " Some persons, I am informed, were disgusted at these words, *halter, gallows, gibbet*, they are so horridly contemptible: to whom I would reply, That the cross, in point of ignominy, implied all this; and in point of torture, much more. Unless the English reader forms to himself some such image as this, he will never be able to apprehend the scandalous nature and shocking circumstances of his divine master's death. The words, I must confess, were diversified, and the sentiment reiterated, on purpose to affect the mind with this astonishing truth. Neither can I prevail with myself to expunge the expressions, unless I could sub-

* Mr. Hervey.

“ stitute others of a more ignominious and execrable im-
 “ port in their room. Only I would beg the serious reader
 “ to spend a moment in the following reflection. Is it so,
 “ that a polite and delicate ear can hardly endure so much
 “ as the sound of the words? How amazing then was the
 “ condescension, how charming and adorable the goodness
 “ of God’s illustrious Son, to bear all that is signified by
 “ these intolerably vile terms, bear it willingly, bear it
 “ cheerfully, for us men, and our salvation!”

Before concluding this head, it will be proper to observe, in what it was the apostle did not glory. There is plainly a tacit opposition in the form of his expression, to some things in which others were apt to glory, and he as heartily despised: “ God forbid that I should glory save in the
 “ cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He says in general, Phil. iii. 7. “ But what things were gain to me, those I
 “ counted loss for Christ.” We find elsewhere, in his writings, express mention of those particulars which he renounced as any subject of boasting. 1. His learning as a scholar; 2. His privileges as a Jew; 3. Even his zeal and activity as a minister of Christ. Let us consider each of these by itself.

1. He would not glory in his learning as a scholar. The apostle Paul had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and seems to have been well accomplished in every branch of human science. Yet he speaks of it with great neglect, or rather with a noble disdain, when compared with the doctrine of the cross: 1 Cor. i. 17. “ For
 “ Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel:
 “ not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should
 “ be made of none effect.” And again, ver. 19, 20. “ For
 “ it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and
 “ will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.
 “ Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the
 “ disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the
 “ wisdom of this world?” It may perhaps be asked, What is the meaning of this renunciation of human learning and wisdom? Is there any real opposition between learning and the cross? Would not the legitimate use of human

wisdom lead us to embrace it? To this I answer, that it seems to imply these three things.

(1) An admiration of the divine glory in that which had not on it any of the marks of human wisdom : in consequence of this, a steadfast adherence to the doctrine of the cross, though those who were wise in their own conceit might be tempted to despise it, and to despise him for its sake. This great scholar, then, was not unwilling to suffer the derision and contempt of other scholars for his glorying in the cross.

(2) It implies such a superlative admiration of this glorious and interesting object, that all the knowledge he possessed, and the honor he could otherwise acquire, seemed to him unworthy of regard : his attention was wholly fixed upon, and his affections wholly engrossed by, his Redeemer's cross.

(3) It implied, that though he certainly ought, and certainly did use the noble parts and accomplishments of which he was possessed, with zeal in his master's cause ; yet he did it with that humility and self-denial, with that noble contempt of vain embellishments, which showed he was not building a monument to himself, but seeking the honor of his Saviour. The doctrine of the cross should be treated in a manner some how correspondent to it ; not with a learned and ostentatious self-sufficiency, but with a meek and truly evangelical self-denial.

Mistake me not, my brethren : I am not speaking against learning in itself ; it is a precious gift of God, and may be happily improved in the service of the gospel ; but I will venture to say, in the spirit of the apostle Paul's writings in general, and of this passage in particular, Accursed be all that learning which sets itself in opposition to the cross of Christ ! Accursed be all that learning which disguises or is ashamed of the cross of Christ ! Accursed be all that learning which fills the room that is due to the cross of Christ ! And once more, Accursed be all that learning which is not made subservient to the honor and glory of the cross of Christ !

Well then, the learned and eloquent apostle renounced the wisdom of words ; and how do we apply this in gene-

ral? By a small comparative esteem of all natural advantages; and by thinking it, in the heart, a greater honor and a higher privilege to sit down at Christ's table, and to find acceptance with him, than to possess beauty, wisdom, learning, riches, and honors in the highest possible perfection: and may God grant, that every one in this assembly may be able to say, in sincerity, that, in what things he thinks he excels, these he is willing to "count lofs for Christ!"

2. The apostle would not glory in his privileges as a Jew. This we find him affirming in many places of his writings: Phil. iii. 4. "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man think that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Toward the latter end of the Jewish commonwealth, there was a very prevailing and gross mistake among them, to look upon their external privileges as entitling them to the favor of God, and making a difference between them and others. We have reason to be sensible, that much of the same disposition is ready to adhere to men in every age. But one great design of the gospel is, to level the pride of man, to throw down all distinction in point of merit before God, and to show, that the power of the Redeemer is equally necessary to, and equally sufficient for, all without exception: Rom. iii. 22. "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." Rom. x. 12. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him." Col. iii. 11. "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."

3. The apostle did not glory in his personal character, not even in his zeal and activity as a minister of Christ. This appears through the whole of his writings, where he is at particular pains to destroy every foundation of

boasting or glorying in ourselves: Rom. iii. 24.—28. “ 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; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. 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.” Nay, we find that all his public services he considers as quite unfit subjects for boasting, even when he is obliged to mention them for his own vindication: 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10. “ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

I am persuaded that those who, from really Christian principles, serve God in their generation with the greatest zeal, will be most ready to renounce all plea of merit upon that account. I have read with pleasure the following account of the temper expressed by John Knox, that eminent instrument in the reformation, when he was drawing near to his dissolution. Some person present mentioned to him, what comfort he might now have in his extraordinary labor and great usefulness in the church: to whom he answered, “ Forbear to puff up the flesh with vanity, to which it is of itself sufficiently prone. The part I would be in at, is that of the free grace of God, through the merits of my blessed Saviour.” The truth is, these are but the sentiments which shall not only go with us to death, but continue with us to eternity. A deep sense of redeeming love, and grateful celebration of the Redeemer's glory, is not only the language of the church on earth, but the delightful worship of the church triumphant in heaven: Rev. v. 11, 12, 13. “ 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 thou-
 “ sands ; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb
 “ that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom,
 “ and strength, and honor, 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 honor,
 “ and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the
 “ throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

II. We proceed now to the *second* general head of discourse, viz. To consider what reason every real Christian hath to glory in the cross. This indeed opens to us a subject of the most amazing compass and extent. Though there is nothing here but what is vile and contemptible to an unbelieving worldly mind ; by the eye of faith, every thing that is wonderful, amiable, and valuable, is discovered in the highest perfection. I cannot particularly enumerate every subject of glorying in the cross ; and therefore shall just point out to you the three following subjects of meditation, which though they often run into one another, may be considered in distinct and separate lights. 1. The glory of divine perfection shines in it in the brightest manner. 2. The riches of divine grace are manifested in it to the most astonishing degree. 3. The sanctifying efficacy of it is so transcendently superior to that of any other mean, as shows it to have been the appointment of infinite wisdom.

1. The glory of divine perfection shines in it in the brightest manner. Would we directly contemplate the glory of the invisible God, as it shines in his works and ways ? let us look upon the cross. It hath been sometimes, and very justly, said of the works of God, that they have usually in them something much more wonderful and excellent than appears at first view. It hath also been further observed, that, in this respect, there is a complete contrast and opposition between the works of the Creator and those of the creature. Every thing that flows from

God, the more strictly we examine it, and the more perfectly we know it, the more we shall admire it; but every work of the creature, the more perfectly it is known, the more its inherent weakness always appears. This discovers itself, even in comparing the produce of the field with the effects of human art. Naturalists observe, that the finest and most admirable human manufactures, when seen, as by a finer sense, with the assistance of a microscope, appears quite coarse and irregular; but that if you look at a pile of grass, or any thing natural, with the same assistance, you will see still more exquisite and delicate strokes of the almighty operator.

If this is the case even in the material productions of natural power, how much more must it be so in the unsearchable mysteries of God's spiritual kingdom? In none will it hold more than in this chief of the works of God, this glorious though despised object, the cross of Christ. Here indeed the glory of God appears in all its lustre. It appears in so strong and so various lights, that the highest angels are employed, delighted, and lost in the contemplation of it: 1 Pet. i. 12. "Which things the angels desire to look into." 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. O what a display of power in the union of God and man! What an almighty arm was required to make these things meet, which were infinitely distant! The Creator of the ends of the earth born of a woman! the Self-existent become a feeble infant! the Lord of glory covered with shame! The Judge of all condemned to suffer! The Author of life giving up the ghost!

What unsearchable wisdom appears in finding a victim able to bear almighty vengeance! in finding a way by which sin might be at once punished and pardoned, justice fully satisfied, even where mercy is extended! Little wonder indeed that the angels desire to look into this mystery. They had tasted the fruits of divine benignity in the happiness of innocent creatures; they had seen the glory of divine justice in the perdition of the rebel-angels:

but the cross of Christ was the first thing that discovered to them the glory of divine mercy, in pardoning the chief of sinners, without in the least obscuring the brightness either of justice or holiness, nay to the illustration of both. In the cross of Christ there is a more awful and penetrating view of the justice and holiness of God, than could have been given by the irreparable destruction of the whole race of Adam. And at the same time, his not "sparing his own Son," but "delivering him up for us all," is a more astonishing effect of love, than pardon without satisfaction could have been, had that been a thing in itself possible. There is no end or measure to our views of this subject; but I hope many of you will now say, with the apostle Paul, what I dare say he has not yet done repeating in heaven, Rom. xi. 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

2. The riches of divine grace are manifested in the cross of Christ to the most astonishing degree. It is not merely a wonderful work of God, which all his intelligent creatures may behold with admiration, but it is a design in which we ourselves have an immediate and an infinite concern: For, Isa. liii. 5. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." O what an amazing display of unmerited love! Every divine perfection indeed appears in it very clearly, but chiefly love. The tender mercy of our God predominates, actuates, and reigns through the whole. Christ's undertaking, in general, is the fruit and evidence of the everlasting love of God: John iii. 16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Salvation, in the whole of its purchase and effect, was the fruit and expression of the infinite love of Christ: Rev. i. 5, 6. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." The believing soul

is never more at a loss than when attempting to confess its obligations to redeeming love. The human mind never feels its weakness more than when it attempts to conceive, or to illustrate, this truly incomprehensible subject.

The grace of redemption may be considered and illustrated in a great variety of lights: From the greatness of the misery from which we are delivered; for "we are saved from wrath through him:" From the greatness of the happiness to which we are entitled; for we are made "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ:" From the guilt and unworthiness of the objects of this love; for it was "when we were enemies" that "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." But besides these considerations, there is more than enough of divine mercy to excite our wonder in the cross of Christ, the price paid for our redemption.

Great sufferings usually melt the heart to sympathy and tenderness, though we have no immediate concern in them at all: but how much more must every source of tenderness be opened, when we consider the sufferer as an innocent person, and as suffering in our room! Remember the person, remember the nature, remember the greatness, remember the end, of his suffering; the eternal Son of God, the great Immanuel, covered with shame, dragged to an unrighteous tribunal, not to abide the decrees of justice, but to bear the effects of blinded rage! See him, O shocking sight! blindfolded, buffeted, and spit upon, severely scourged, crowned with thorns, arrayed in purple, adored in derision! See him nailed to the cross! O shameful, O tormenting, O most accursed manner of death! Is it possible to conceive the grace of this amazing humiliation, this infinite condescension? I would even call it incredible condescension, but that happily it carries upon it this great truth, That God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. Apply it therefore, O sinner! and see how it magnifies the love of God. Was all this abasement, all this shame, all this suffering for me? and shall I not glory in the cross? Shall I even glory in any thing but the cross? As it magnifies the di-

vine power, as it magnifies the divine mercy, so it magnifies the sinner. Is it any less to our honor than to his shame? We can never appear so valuable as when our salvation is purchased by our Saviour's dying groans.

3. In the last place, The real Christian has reason to glory in the cross, for its efficacy as a principle of sanctification. This is plainly implied in the clause immediately following the text: for "by it the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The apostle certainly has this also in view, when he celebrates the doctrine of the cross as the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation. And indeed to every believer the cross, considered only as the truth, and as operating by faith on the understanding and heart, is such an argument to duty, as there is not another in the whole compass of human knowledge that may once be compared to it. Does any thing set in so strong a light the obligation of God's most holy law? Does any thing set in so strong a light the infinite evil of sin? the infinite holiness of God? the infinite danger of sin? Must not the reflection of every believer be, "Who can stand before this Holy Lord God? If such things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

But what is the great source, evidence, sum, and perfection of sanctification? Is it not the love of God? And how shall this be produced? how shall it be preserved and improved, in so effectual a manner, as by believing views of the cross of Christ, the most tender and costly expression of his love to us? 1 John iv. 19. "We love him; because he first loved us." How does this fill the Christian with indignation against sin, which he must consider as "crucifying him to himself afresh!" &c. How does it endear to him his Saviour's commands! how does it inspire him with zeal in doing his will, and fortitude in suffering for his cause! Will any thing so effectually determine us to love our fellow-creatures, as his command and example? Will any thing so effectually persuade us to discharge the most important duties to others, I mean, seeking their eternal welfare, as the value of a precious soul estimated by the cross? Will any thing so effectually dis-

pose us to the most difficult duties to others, I mean meekness, patience and forgiveness, as the great debt cancelled to us by his sufferings on the cross? Is it possible that his own words, in that awful season, can ever be forgotten, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do?" I cannot at present enlarge further on these views; but well might the apostle, and well may every Christian, glory in his Master's cross, for the unspeakable benefit he receives from it: For, 1 Cor. i. 30. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

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

I. From what hath been said, you may learn what is the great and leading doctrine of the gospel, the sum and substance of the truth as it is in Jesus, *viz.* the doctrine of the cross, or Christ suffering the wrath of God, to redeem us from hell. This was the great design formed in the councils of peace, early intimated in the first promise, gradually unfolded in after ages, and completely manifested in the fullness of time. The Saviour was the subject of the ancient promises, the hope of the ancient patriarchs, the substance of the New-Testament dispensation, and the burden of the everlasting gospel. He saith of himself, Rev. i. 8. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." On his glorious character, and precious blood, the inspired apostles delighted to dwell. Did they then mistake their message? did they mislead their hearers? No; it was, and it shall ever remain an unchangeable truth, what the apostle declares, 1 Cor. iii. 11. "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

On this foundation, every thing that is agreeable to the will of God, in doctrine or practice, must be built. Every other part of the word of God derives light and beauty from the cross; every other part of the word of God derives force and meaning from the cross; every other pa

of the word of God derives life and efficacy from the cross. Let us therefore remember its influence and value, and never lose view of it. Let us despise the ignorant reproaches of those who slander it as unfavorable to moral virtue. I dare not say indeed, that it is very favorable to an ostentatious parade of human merit; but I am sure it is the only way of producing self-denied obedience to the will of God.

2. From what hath been said, you may see the guilt and danger of the enemies of the cross, and at the same time may learn who they are who deserve this character. They may be divided into two distinct classes: 1. Those who are enemies in principle to the cross, who have no sense of their own unworthiness, of the evil of sin, or the necessity of an atonement. Such may sometimes retain the name of Christians, and contend that they ought to retain it, while they oppose, with the utmost virulence and malice, its most important and fundamental truth. I cannot think, without horror, on the guilt and ingratitude of all such persons, and the fearful punishment which they shall meet with at last, when this despised Saviour "shall come in the clouds, and every eye shall see him." 2. They are also enemies to this truth who are governed in temper and practice by a spirit directly opposite to that of the cross. The shame and reproach which the cross implied are not sufficiently attended to, nor the humility and self-denial necessary to all those who would be the followers of a crucified master. Are there not many who will have no religion but what will be pliable, and accommodate itself to the maxims of the world? Loaded with prudence, they are unwilling to break measures, either with the good or the bad. Dazzled with human pomp, they despise every thing in religion, but what, either in substance or circumstances, is grateful to human pride. Fashionable practices, however dangerous or vicious, they have not courage to oppose. It were well, if they would consider the ancient form of confession at baptism. Do you renounce the devil, and all his works? I do. Do you renounce the world, its pomps, its pleasures, and its vanities? I do. And this was not merely Heathenish

idolatry, and ceremonies of false worship, but that indulgence of vanity, and that gratification of appetite, in which worldly men, in every age, place their supreme delight.

3. What hath been said may serve for the support and consolation of real believers, under the trials to which they are exposed in the present state. It is melancholy to think, how frequently, and how easily, we are unhinged by distress; what discontent and impatience we are apt to discover under suffering. Alas! my brethren, are you not ashamed of impatience, when you consider the unparalleled sufferings of your Redeemer in your room? A believing view of the Saviour's cross, one would think, might stop every mouth, and compose every murmuring thought. Has he suffered so much for us? and shall we refuse to suffer from him, and for him? His sufferings should make us patient, as they shew us the evil of sin, and what we have deserved. Did we really deserve avenging wrath? and shall we dare to complain of fatherly correction? Did he suffer with patience who did no sin? and shall we complain who are punished less than our iniquities deserve? His sufferings should teach us patience, because they take away the bitterness and malignity of our sufferings, and turn them from a poison to a medicine: he hath exhausted, if I may speak so, the whole wrath of God, and left nothing for us but what is highly salutary. And as he hath changed the nature of all the sufferings of life, he hath taken away the sting of death, which is the end of all our suffering. That blood which speaks peace to the wounded spirit, should be a healing balm to the wounded body.

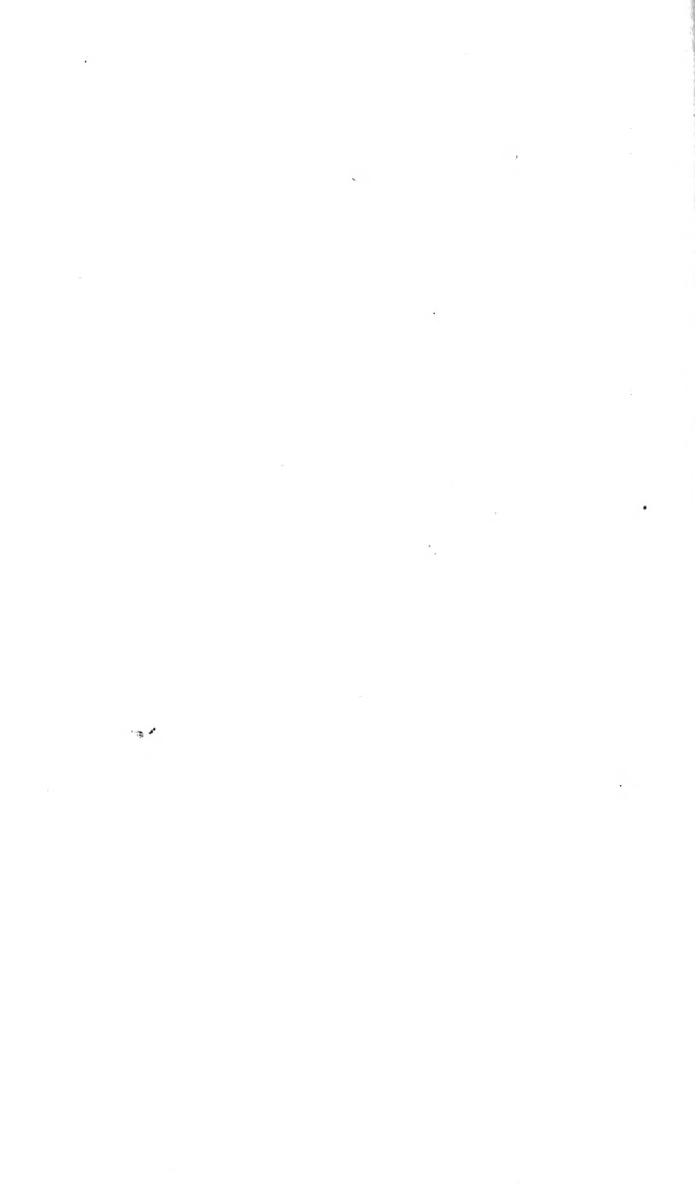
But of all the different kinds of suffering, if we pretend to glory in the cross, we ought to be least afraid of the reproach thrown upon us for adherence to our duty. To glory in the cross, is indeed to glory in shame. The form of expression used with regard to Peter and John, Acts v. 41. is very remarkable. They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. It would greatly tend to fortify us against this trial, if we would lay up in our

hearts what hath been said on the doctrine of the cross. If it is impossible to avoid it, we must needs fit down composedly under it. And if our attachment to our great master is what it ought to be, we will cheerfully follow him even without the camp, bearing his reproach.

4. In the *last* place, By what hath been said, you may try your title to sit down at the Lord's table, and learn your employment there. This ordinance is a sensible memorial of our Redeemer's cross and passion. It was on the cross that his body was broken, and his blood shed, for you. Are you then to commemorate it? You cannot do so, either in an acceptable or profitable manner, unless you can join the apostle in glorying in it. Have you seen any thing of the excellence and amiableness of this despised object? Nothing so tasteless and insipid to the proud and self-righteous; nothing so delightful and refreshing to the broken in heart. Have you seen any thing of the glory of the true God, in the sufferings of Christ? and can you say with the apostle Paul, Heb. ii. 10. "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Do you see the glory of infinite mercy in the cross? and are your hearts drawn with the cords of love to him who "loved you, and gave himself for you?" Have you experienced the sanctifying influence of the cross? are your corruptions weakened and mortified by looking upon it? Is it your unfeigned desire, that they may be finally destroyed by it?

To draw to a conclusion of the subject: I cannot point out your duty to you in a manner more suited to this day's employment, or more proper for your after security and comfort, than to turn the three reasons for glorying in the cross into the form of exhortations.—I beseech you, my beloved hearers, contemplate the glory of God in the cross of Christ. See him, infinite in power, infinite in wisdom, infinite in holiness. You may see a faint emblem of his glory in the book of nature; but you can only see his transcendent majesty in the book of God. And may "he who at first commanded the light to shine out of dark-

“ nefs, fhine in your hearts, to give you the light of the
“ knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jefus
“ Chrift !”—Adore and apply the riches of divine grace.
Let the convinced, fearful, trembling finner, fly to this
atoning blood, reft his hope upon it, and be fecure.—And
neglect not to ufe the crofs of Chrift for mortifying your
corruptions. Let your views of it now be lively and
ftiong, and carry the fame impreffion away, to be your
great prefervative from daily temptation. Make no image
of the crofs in your houfes ; but let the remembrance of it
be ever on your hearts. One lively view of this great ob-
jeét will cool the flames of unclean luft : one lively view
of this great objeét will make the unjuft man quit his hold :
one lively view of this tremendous objeét will make the
angry man drop his weapon : nay, one look of mercy
from a dying Saviour will make even the covetous man
open his heart. In one word, believing views of the crofs
of Chrift will unite the Christian more and more to a re-
conciled God, will make his prefence comfortable, his
worship delightful, and excite a humble longing for that
time when we fhall fee him no more through the help of
thefe elements, but as he is in himfelf, exalted on his
throne, where his worship and fervice are everlasting.



THE WORLD CRUCIFIED BY THE CROSS OF
CHRIST.

A

S E R M O N.



GALATIANS vi. 14. last clause.

— *By whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.*

THE character of a servant of God is sometimes described in scripture by particular dispositions or instances of obedience, and sometimes by a general view of the spirit that runs through the whole of his temper and carriage. Each of these ways has its own advantage and use. Each of them is to be found in its proper order in the holy scriptures, and stands there as a proof of their fulness and perfection. The whole of this passage, but particularly the last clause, upon which I am now to insist, is of the general kind, and, in the apostle's own example, gives us a very comprehensive view of what ought to be the temper and disposition of every real Christian: "By whom," that is, by Christ crucified, or, "by which," that is to say, by the cross of Christ, "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

This description will serve, if carefully attended to, as a trial and touchstone of sincerity; and, in particular, will serve to distinguish real religion from some of its most deceitful and plausible counterfeits. At the same time, it will furnish the sincere Christian with very important di-

reflections for his preservation and improvement, by pointing out the most fatal and dangerous rocks of temptation, which it is his interest to avoid. Having explained the words in my discourse upon the former part of the verse, I now only observe, that the proposition contained in them is, "That the world is crucified to the believer, and he to the world, by the cross of Christ." This naturally resolves itself into two parts, which I propose to consider distinctly, *viz.*

1. What is the import of a believer's being crucified to the world, and the world to him.

2. What influence the cross of Christ hath in producing this effect. Having done this, I will,

3. Make a practical improvement of the subject.

I. **FIRST**, then, we are to consider the import of a believer's being crucified to the world, and the world to him. This seems to deserve the greater attention, that through the whole New Testament, there is a direct opposition stated between the world and the disciples of Christ; an opposition of character, an opposition of interest, and a continual conflict in consequence of both; John xv. 18. 19. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." In this passage the world seems to be taken chiefly for the men of the world, or its inhabitants. It is, however, taken in a more extensive sense in the two following: 1 John ii. 15. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 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." Here, no doubt, it signifies not only men, and our hopes or fears from them, but every thing in the present life that may be the object of carnal affection, of sinful or undutiful attachment.

The expression in the text, "The world is crucified to me" is figurative; but abundantly plain, and exceeding-

ly strong. It might be considered very extensively, and several things upon it may probably afterwards occur. Let it suffice at present to make two observations. 1. This intimates the sincerity and heartiness of the believer's opposition to the world. It must be remembered, that crucifixion was a death the most painful and disgraceful that could possibly be inflicted. When this image therefore, is borrowed, and applied to the believer's separation from the world, it implies not only an indifference to it, but the most sovereign contempt of it, from the deepest and strongest conviction of its absolute vanity. Nay, as no persons were crucified, but who were hated as well as despised by their judges, to be crucified to the world, implies an unfeigned abhorrence of its pollution, and a dread of being enslaved by it.

2. The same thing intimates the perpetuity and fixedness of the Christian's opposition to the world. Those who were crucified were devoted to destruction, when they were nailed to the tree; they were not only tormented for a season, but fixed there till death concluded the scene: so I apprehend the apostle intended to signify, by this expression, his final separation from the world, without the least hope or desire of ever returning to it.

After taking this short and general view of the import of the expression, it will be necessary more distinctly and fully to consider what is implied in being crucified to the world. This ought to be done with the greater care, that it is at once an important and difficult duty. To be truly crucified to the world, I am afraid is exceeding rare; and even those who are so in sincerity, upon the whole, are far from being so in the degree that they ought to be. The punishment of crucifixion is a strong image, in one particular, of the believer's character. Though it was certain death, it was slow and lingering; so worldliness, in many persons, continues long vigorous, and dies very slowly.

There is another reason for treating this subject with care, that men are very apt to consider such expressions as extravagant, and carrying matters an unreasonable length. Mistaking the nature of the duty, they are neither con-

cerned themselves to practise it, nor will they allow that any body else does so in reality. I will therefore endeavor to shew you. 1. What is not implied in crucifying the world; 2. Wherein it immediately and properly consists.

On the *first* of these, I beg your attention to the following particulars.

1. The world's being crucified to us, does not imply that there is any evil in the natural world, considered in itself, and as the work of God. The whole frame of nature, as it was produced and is preserved by God, and the whole course of Providence, as conducted by him, are perfectly faultless. We may even say more, the creation carries on it such an image of its Maker, as the materials are able to bear. In this view, it is our duty to look upon the world with reverence, and adore the glory of God in all its parts, from the highest to the lowest. The evil arises wholly from ourselves, and our disposition to sin. When we say a corrupt enticing deceitful world, it is but another way of speaking for the corruption of the human heart.

2. It does not imply that we should undervalue or be insensible of present mercies. Every gift of God is good, if it be received with thankfulness, and used with sobriety. The more the world is crucified as it ought to be, the more we will discern the goodness of God, even in common mercies. It is matter of daily experience, and well worthy of observation, that those who idolize the world most, as an object of sinful desire, do usually despise the world most, as the subject or ground of thankfulness to God. A voluptuous, ambitious, or envious person, who pursues the world with eagerness, and never thinks he has enough, is commonly discontented and unthankful. His eyes are so wilfully fixed on what he wants, that he neither remembers nor values what he already has. On the contrary, the self-denied and mortified Christian, though despising the world as an object of pursuit, is yet deeply sensible of the kindness of Providence, in his daily preservation, or liberal provision. A mind formed upon the principles of the gospel, may look down with contempt upon the lustre of a throne, and yet know the value, and feel a sense of gratitude in the possession of a crumb.

3. It doth not imply that the world is useless to a believer, even with regard to his spiritual benefit. It is not only certain that he may have, but that he will have, the sanctified improvement of every state: Rom. viii. 28. "And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The same mercies which make a wicked man insolent, make a good man thankful. They also extend his power of doing good to others. You may see, by our Saviour's advice, how the world may be profitably employed: Luke xvi. 9. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." See also the account of his procedure at the great day, Matth. xxv. 34.—36. Then "shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

4. It does not imply that we ought to retire from the employment or business of the world altogether. Though there is a manifest danger in being too much involved in business, as well as too much devoted to pleasure; it is an error, on the other hand, to place religion in voluntary poverty, in monkish austerity, or uncommanded maceration of the body. This is not doing, but deserting our duty: it is not crucifying the world, but going out of it; it is not overcoming the world, but flying from it.

But let us now consider, directly and positively, what is implied in the world's being crucified to us, and we to the world. And that the after illustrations may be at once more intelligible and more convincing, it will not be improper to begin by saying, in general, that we must be crucified to the world in those respects in which man, at his first apostasy, fell away to the world from God. While man continued in innocence, the world, which in itself

is without stain, was never put to any but a sacred use. It was then a theatre of divine glory, as indeed it is still; but not a scene of human guilt, as it is now. It was intended for a place of trial, however, in which man was left to the freedom of his own will; and therefore it was capable of being abused. Thence came that sacrilegious attachment to the world, from which it is so much our interest to be effectually delivered. But to explain this matter a little more at large, the world must be crucified to the believer in the following respects; which, though I confess they all come at last to the same thing, yet I think it is proper and necessary to mention distinctly.

1. *As it is the subject and occasion of, or a temptation to sin.* It is very plain, that however faultless and excellent the whole works of nature and providence are in themselves, from the corruption of our nature they become the food of carnal affection, the fuel of concupiscence. The very liberality of Providence, and rich provision made for the supply of our wants and the gratification of our appetites, becomes a temptation to gross sensuality, and criminal indulgence. This is well described by the apostle John, 1 Ep. ii. 16. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." In this view, we ought to hold it in the utmost abhorrence. But how is this to be done? By seriously considering the unhappy and powerful influence it hath in soliciting us to evil. Instead of being taken with its charms, we ought to dread their force, we ought to be sensible how unequal we are to the conflict, and how unable, without superior strength, to keep ourselves from its pollution.

When we see persons in honor and power, and are tempted to envy their distinguished rank in life, we ought to consider how naturally exaltation tends to intoxicate the mind, how few are able to bear honor or reputation with humility, and how little reason we have to confide in our own steadiness and resolution. When we see the splendor of a rich and affluent state, we ought to consider the strong temptation which commonly arises from riches, to contempt of God, oppression of others, sensuality of temper,

and forgetfulness of eternity. Suffer me, on this subject, to make every man his own reprove. How few are there in a rich and affluent state, whose conduct in the application of riches you can wholly approve ! Are you not constantly blaming them for covetousness and oppression on the one hand, or prodigality on the other ? How is it, then, that you entertain no suspicion that you yourselves would be led astray by the same means ? Is not this a strange infatuation, and blindness to divine truth, even where every word of the Spirit of God is ratified by daily experience ?

When we see and are tempted to envy the votaries of pleasure, those who live delicately and fare sumptuously every day, we ought to consider, what a dangerous enflaming thing appetite is, how it steals upon men insensibly, and at last enslaves them absolutely ; how hard it is for the most cautious to set proper bounds to it, as well as how dreadful and fatal the excessive indulgence of it. To crucify the world, then, as a temptation to sin, is not to consider its charms by themselves, but always in connection with their probable effects. This seems to have suggested the wise and well-conceived prayer of the prophet Agur, Prov. 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." On the same thing is founded the advice of Solomon, with regard to the sin of sensuality : Proverbs xxiii. 31. " Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright."

2. The world must be crucified to the believer, *as it would be his supreme felicity and chief good.* This is no otherwise to be distinguished from the former consideration, than as the general course and stream of our affections differs from particular acts of transgression. It is very necessary, however, to attend to it ; for there are many under the habitual government of a worldly mind, who do

not think themselves, and who perhaps are not justly chargeable with gross acts of irregularity and excess. I bleed inwardly to think, how many of the ordinary professors of religion are here included. How many are there, who, if conscience would be faithful, must confess, that the favor of God, his worship, his sabbaths, his people, are not their supreme delight! Yet that this is essential to real religion, or rather is the substance of all true religion, I think we have repeated assurances in the holy scriptures. It is plain from the language of the Psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." It is plain from the sum of the moral law, Luke x. 27. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself;" as also from that trying passage, Matth. x. 37. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."

Take heed then, my brethren, to this important truth. If the world would keep its distance, so to speak, it might be esteemed, and used, in its proper place, and to its proper end; but if it will needs pretend to be what it is not, and to promise what it cannot give, we must take it for a deceiver, and hold it in detestation. Your Maker formed you for his own glory: He must be the rest and consolation of your souls, or they never shall have rest; he must be their happiness, or they shall be miserable for ever. But if the world would seem to be your home, if it promiseth you content and satisfaction, if the possession of it is the ultimate end at which you aspire, so that you do not heartily, and with affection, look any further, it is usurping its Creator's throne; and therefore down with the idol, and tread it in the dust.

Is not this the great question with regard to us all, Whether the objects of faith, or of sense, things present or things to come, God or the world, has the possession of our hearts? A believer who will thankfully receive and use the blessings of a present world for their proper end, will notwithstanding hold it, and all its possessions, in the high-

est degree of contempt, when compared with the one thing needful. He will say, from the bottom of his heart, in the presence of an all seeing God, "Lord, let me never have my portion in this world only. The glory of a throne, the most inexhaustible mines of gold and silver, without thy favor, I would not only despise, but abhor."

Whence arises this disposition in the believer? From a conviction of the unsatisfying nature of all earthly enjoyments; from an inward persuasion of this truth, That "the world, in its best state, is altogether vanity;" from a sense of the infinite disproportion between the possession of the creature, and the favor of the Creator; but, above all, from a deep and abiding conviction of the precariousness and uncertainty of all earthly things. However undeniable it is, that the fashion of this world passeth away, few there are who live under the strong and lively practical impression of it. The deceived hearts of sinners believe the contrary. How well are they described by the Psalmist, Psa. xlix. 11, 12, 13. "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honor, abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve of their sayings!" One would think, nothing more should be necessary to crucify the world, than to reflect upon the many descriptions given us in the word of God of its uncertain duration; Psa. xxxvii. 35, 36. "I have seen the wicked in great power; and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Isa. xl. 6. "And the voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." I shall only add our Lord's description of the sudden call of a worldly man to death and judgment; Luke xii. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will

“ pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all my fruits, and my goods. And I will say to my foul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy foul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.”

3. The world must be crucified, *as it pretends to be necessary to our felicity*. This is chiefly directed against those who love the world to excess, though at the same time they at least pretend to love God more. They seem to have chosen God as their supreme ; but it does not appear, that they have chosen him as their sufficient portion. The world still bulks so much in their eye, that they know no happiness or comfort of which it makes not a part. They see, or think they see, the insufficiency of the world, without the favor of God, as a refuge when the world fails ; but they can no more rest satisfied in God without the world, than in the world without God. I have no doubt, you will be sensible there are many amongst us in this condition : nay, I am afraid there will be not a few within themselves secretly justifying this character and conduct. They will say, ‘ Is it possible to deny, that the world is necessary to us while we continue here ? is it not so to you as well as to us ? and therefore why should it not be regarded in this light ?’

To all such I answer, The world, in a certain proportion, is indeed necessary to us ; but this proportion is not to be ascertained by us. It must be left to the disposal of infinite wisdom, without any conditions. When there is a divorce or separation between the believer and the world, it is entire and complete, without reserve or limitation. He gives up all as the object of carnal affection, that he may receive again, for a nobler purpose, that measure which seems necessary to the sanctified will of God. He is just in the situation of a man who, having contracted obligations which he is unable to discharge, has surrendered his all into the hands of another ; and has no further use of what was formerly his own, than as much, or as

long as the new proprietor shall think fit. I know no image that more properly represents the condition of the believer; with this difference, that in human affairs the change is usually for the worse; but in spiritual things, the renunciation is an infinite advantage, and the seeming loss an unspeakable gain.

Think not, my brethren, that this is carrying matters to excess. It is what our Saviour expressly requires of all that would embrace his doctrine: Luke ix. 23. "And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." It is indeed one of the hard sayings of the gospel. You have heard it sometimes said, that every Christian must be a martyr in resolution; and doubtless the world is not thoroughly crucified, unless our attachment to every worldly enjoyment, without exception, be so broken, that we are ready to resign it whenever God, in his Providence, shall see fit to demand it. We have an excellent lesson to this purpose, in the trial to which our Saviour put the young man in the gospel, with a decent and regular profession: Matth. xix. 21, 22. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." To crucify the world, then, is to count no worldly enjoyment whatever necessary, either to our present comfort, or everlasting happiness, but to put an absolute and unshaken confidence in the wisdom and goodness of a reconciled God. This is excellently expressed by the prophet Habakkuk, chap. iii. 17, 18. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olives shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

4. In the last place, The world must be crucified, *as it is a separate and independent good, without its due relation to God.* God himself alone is independent. All other

things stand in an inseparable relation to him, and should be used in subserviency to his honor: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." Every rational creature, who continues in, or returns to his duty, discerns this relation, and maintains this subserviency. It was the first idolatry and sacrilege, to break the ties that join the Maker to his works, and love the creature for its own sake. But he that is crucified to the world, will consider every earthly enjoyment as the gift of God: he will confess the goodness of God in bestowing it, and will obey the command of God in the use and application of it. That this is the duty of a Christian, is plain from the general strain of the holy scriptures; and particularly from this express and positive declaration, 1 Cor. x. 31. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The world, then, as a separate independent good, or as a mere gratification of carnal desire, is to be crucified. It was not given us for so low a purpose as the indulgence of appetite, but for nobler ends. But perhaps it will be necessary to observe, that some of the mystic writers have raised a variety of improper questions on this subject. Some have affirmed the unlawfulness of tasting any of the sweetness of created enjoyments more than was barely necessary for subsistence. It is easy to see, that it must be very hard, in many such cases, to fix the bounds between necessity and convenience, use and pleasure: hence the conscience is involved in unspeakable and endless perplexity. Upon this I would observe, that the general reference of all things, even common actions, to the glory of God, is sufficiently and clearly established upon the passage of scripture above mentioned. But in order to do this in the most profitable manner, some subordinate ends also must be considered: and therefore, not only what is necessary to health and comfort must be used with this view, but the enjoyment of many of the creatures may be allowed as the fruits of divine bounty, and tending to inspire an habitual cheerfulness and gratitude to God.

I shall conclude with giving you these two general rules to be observed in the enjoyment of outward mercies.

1. That we have greater reason to guard against sins of excess and intemperance than of abstinence. The first are unspeakably more common and prevalent than the other: they always have been so, and are always likely to be so. If some few have gone into superstition, by extraordinary mortification, thousands have been betrayed into sin, and at last brought to perdition, by the charms of a sensual life.

2. If any are in danger of erring on the opposite side, the way to discover when we are going wrong, is to consider, whether the mortification renders us more spiritual, and more active, or, by excess of scrupulosity, we are consuming our time, and neglecting our duty. The deceptions of Satan are very subtle: he fills some persons with so many doubts upon every particular, that they are like one who makes little progress in his journey, from continual uncertainty, and frequent stopping to enquire the way. It is certainly far better to carry on the general ends of God's glory, and point to this as our ultimate purpose, than every now and then to entangle and embarrass ourselves with questions of little moment.

Before proceeding to the second general head, I shall finish this discourse by a few observations for the improvement of what hath been already said. And,

1. From what hath been said upon this subject, you may learn the great *importance* of the duty; that it is the distinguishing character of a real Christian, to be crucified to the world, and the world to him. Alas! how many deceive themselves in this particular! How many satisfy themselves with a name to live, when they are dead; with a form of godliness, while they deny the power thereof! How many, with a decent and regular outward profession, are yet wholly devoted to the world! Their meditation dwells upon it; their affections centre in it; their care is bestowed upon it; and their delights entirely flow from it. Let it be considered, that there is nothing more contrary to true religion. The world, or created good, is the great competitor with God for the heart. All the honor and esteem that is given to it is taken from God. All the service and obedience that is bestowed upon it is resu-

fed to God. Call to mind some of the passages of scripture referred to in the preceding discourse; particularly the following: 1 John ii. 15. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

My dear brethren, there are many who would look with contempt or indignation on those who are guilty of particular scandalous and disgraceful sins, for example, on a profane swearer, drunkard, or unclean person, while yet they themselves are as much wedded to the world, and have as great an inward aversion at the practice of piety, and the power of the spiritual life, as any of them all. Other sins are but the body or the members: worldliness is the soul and spirit of irreligion. Other sins are but the acts or expressions, worldliness the inward principle that gives them life.

How important a part this is of the Christian character, will plainly appear from these two considerations: 1. Worldliness may be itself the principle which restrains men from many other sins. A desire of reputation, a delight in the esteem of others, is often the cause of outward decency; nay, it is not seldom the cause of apparent zeal and eminent hypocrisy. 2. There may be as great a degree of worldliness with as without a profession of piety. Men may retain a form of godliness chiefly to set themselves free from the reproofs of conscience, that their present enjoyments may have the higher relish. Nay, I cannot help observing, that though covetousness is one of the gross sins mentioned in scripture, as entirely subversive of religion, there is scarcely any sin that can be carried to such a degree, without casting off the profession of it. Hence it plainly appears how important a part of the character of a real Christian it is to be crucified to the world. Without this the soundest principles, and the strictest profession, will avail nothing; for they that are "Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts."

2. From what hath been said you may see, not only the importance, but the great *extent* of the duty. The world itself, and all that is therein, in the sense formerly explained, must be crucified. That you may, in

some measure, conceive the extent of this, consider the common division of worldly enjoyments, viz. riches, honors and pleasures. All these, without exception, and all these equally, must be denied by the Christian. You shall often see, that the covetous man will despise and hate the prodigal, and even express the greatest zeal against riot, and extravagance of every kind. The sensualist, on the other hand, despises the miser, as glued to the world, and a slave to the most sordid of all human passions. And the ambitious man, eager in the pursuit of honor and dignity, vainly conceives himself superior to both. But they are all equally opposite to, and inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. If your supreme delight, if your portion and happiness is here, it is of little consequence whether your hearts are set upon "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life." It is with the soul as with the body: there are many different diseases taking place in different parts, and shewing themselves by different symptoms, but which will equally end in death as their effect.

3. You may hence learn the *difficulty* of the duty; to be crucified to the world, and yet to live in the world; to be crucified to the world, and yet to possess the world; to be crucified to the world, and yet to have a great part of our thoughts and love necessarily employed about the world. The temptation is ever present, and, through the corruption and treachery of our own hearts, fatally strong. Ought we not hence to infer the absolute necessity of continual vigilance, and continual prayer? continual vigilance in our duty, and jealous of every temptation that may be in danger of diverting us from it? continual prayer to the Father of lights, in the name of Christ, for supernatural strength? Every exercised Christian knows from experience the danger of the world as an enemy, and how hard it is to keep such clear views of the things of eternity, as to be preserved from an undue and sinful attachment to the things of time. The world is dangerous even to those who maintain an habitual jealousy of it, and hold it as an enemy: how much more must it be ruinous and fatal to those who love and prosecute it as the object of their chief desire:

4. I shall now conclude, by improving this subject for the purpose of self-examination. And surely no serious hearer will be backward to bring himself to the trial. My beloved hearers I speak to all of every rank, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, who profess to bear the name of Christians: Are you, or are you not, crucified to the world, and the world to you? All real believers are so. If you are not, your riches or your poverty, your honor or your shame, your regular behavior, or even your zeal for public duties, will avail you nothing in the day of Christ's appearance. I am sensible, that the decision of the question, Whether you are, or are not, crucified to the world? may often be attended with no little difficulty. I will therefore, as far as I am able, endeavor to assist you in the trial. For which purpose, I beg your attention to the following observations.

1. You are crucified to the world, if you do not habitually allow your thoughts to dwell upon it, and your desires to run out after it. The cross was an abhorred object, which no body could look upon with delight. Worldliness is often as much discovered by our desires after what we have not, as by the use or employment of what we have. There are many whose great delight seems to arise from the fond expectations they entertain of worldly happiness to come: nay, there are many who are so slothful as not to pursue the world, and yet feed themselves with the very imagination of it. Their thoughts, and even their language, constantly runs upon idle fancies, and romantic suppositions of the happiness they should enjoy, were they in such or such a state. Now, my brethren, he that is crucified to the world will make conscience of restraining these irregular desires; and, from a deep conviction of the vanity of the world, will find little pleasure in the contemplation of it.

2. You begin crucified to the world will appear in the moderation of your delight and complacency in what you possess of it. You will not, if I may speak so, give yourselves up to it, but will always qualify the enjoyment of it by a reflection upon its vanity in itself, and its short duration as to any connection we shall have with it. We

are ready to pity the weakness of children, when we see them apply themselves with so much eagerness to trifles, and so greatly delighted with their amusements and enjoyments. A parent, looking on them when hotly engaged at play, will be at once pleased to see them happy, and at the same time filled with a tender commiseration of their want of reflection. Something of the same view one crucified to the world has of all earthly enjoyments. Many a grown person will smile at the play of children, while he himself is perhaps as eagerly engaged in the schemes of ambition, in political struggles, and contests for power; which are often as great trifles as the play-things of children, only that they are the play-things of men.

3. You are crucified to the world if you have low hopes and expectations from it. It is hope that stirs us up chiefly to action in all our pursuits. And so long as we entertain high thoughts of what the world will afford us in some after-season, we are not crucified to it. There is a common proverbial saying, "If it were not for hope, the heart would break:" just so, when our hopes from the world are destroyed, the heart of the old man is broken. We are exceeding ready to think, that were such or such a difficulty or uneasiness removed, could we obtain such or such an advantage in view, we would be happy. But there is always a deception at bottom. We vainly think, that happiness arises from the creature; but he that is crucified to the world judges, by past experience, that it hath little comfort to give; and therefore he will place but little dependence upon it.

4. He is crucified to the world who hath truly subdued all invidious dispositions towards the possession of it. There are many who seem to have little comfort from their own enjoyments; but there is reason to fear, that it arises not so much from self-denial, as from discontent. The world may be said to be crucified to them, but they are not crucified to the world. It is by this that worldliness expresses itself chiefly in the lower ranks of life. Those who are obliged to live moderately and hardly, from mere penury, often shew, by their carriage and language, that they have as much sensuality in their hearts, as those who live

dulge their irregular desires to the greatest excess. But he that is crucified to the world, not only sees all its pomp and splendor in others without repining, but will often bestow a thought of compassion upon the great, for the enflaming circumstances in which they are placed with regard to their souls. And surely they are of all others most to be pitied. May the Lord, in mercy, convince them of their danger; and, in the mean time, preserve his own people from being led astray by their influence and example.

THE WORLD CRUCIFIED BY THE CROSS OF
CHRIST,

A

S E R M O N.



GALATIANS vi. 14. last clause.

—*By whom the world is Crucified to me, and I unto
the World.*

INOW proceed to the second thing proposed, which was, To show the influence of the cross of Christ in crucifying the world. This, my brethren, deserves your most serious attention, as pointing you to the great and vital principle of the Christian's sanctification, the true and only source of spiritual comfort and peace. The cross of Christ is always considered in the apostolic writings as an object of the highest dignity and merit; and the believer is there taught to speak of it in expressions of the warmest attachment and regard. Witness the words of the text itself, in the preceding clause: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." We may perhaps be easily induced, in a time of external quietness and peace, to adopt this sentiment as an opinion, or to use it as a form; but happy, and only happy, those in whom it dwells as an ever present truth, and operates as a daily governing principle!

Taking the subject in great latitude, I might observe, that the cross of Christ being the price paid for the blessings of salvation in general, every illuminating discovery in the mind, and every gracious affection in the heart,

which are the work of the divine Spirit, may be justly ascribed to it. But I propose, at this time, to consider it singly as an object of faith, and to shew how the firm persuasion and frequent recollection of this great truth tends to crucify the world to us, and us to the world; the rather, that we find elsewhere our victory over the world ascribed to faith, and this faith particularly terminating on the Son of God: 1 John v. 4, 5. "For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" For the further illustration of this subject, then, let us observe,

1. That the cross of Christ crucifies the world, as it gives us an immediate and striking view of the mortality of our nature, as well as the original and general cause of this mortality. The vanity of created things is in nothing more manifest, than in their precarious nature, particularly our own tendency to the dust, by which all earthly relations shall be speedily and entirely dissolved. In this view, indeed, you may say, that the death of any other person, sickness, and all its attending symptoms, or a funeral, with its mournful solemnities, tends to crucify the world: and most certainly they do. But there is something still more in the cross of Christ. There we see, not only the death of our nature, but the death of the Son of God in our room. There we are carried back to a view of the great cause of the universal reign of the king of terrors, sin. Sin first brought death into the world; and this made it necessary that Christ "should taste of death for every man," that we might be restored to spiritual life. Mortality, therefore, is written in the most legible characters on the cross of Christ. Nay, the curse of creation itself is written upon the cross of Christ. We cannot look upon it, therefore, in a serious manner, without being deeply affected with the doom which we ourselves have still to undergo: "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." It is impossible to avoid knowing that we must die; but those only discover the moment of this truth, who see its procuring cause. Those only have just and abiding

impressions of the speedy approach of natural death, who are filled with concern for their own deliverance from the power of the second death.

2. The cross of Christ crucifies the world to a believer, as it shews him how little he deserves at the hand of God. Believers on the cross of Christ see him standing in their room, and bearing the wrath of an offended God, which was their due. When this is not only professed with the mouth, but received into the heart, it gives a deep conviction of the evil of sin, and lays the sinner prostrate in humility and self-abasement. Must not this greatly weaken and mortify all worldly affection, which takes its rise from pride and self-sufficiency? It is, if I may speak so, a sort of claim and demand upon Providence, as if something were due to us. Worldly persons, in prosperity, not only cleave to the world as their portion, but may be said to assert their title to it as their property. The same inward disposition may be discovered by their carriage in the opposite state. When their schemes are broken, and their hopes blasted, by repeated disappointments, or when their possessions are taken from them by unexpected strokes, they resist and rebel with impatience and indignation, as if some person had done them wrong.

But when men are sensible that they deserve nothing at the hand of God, this mortifies their earthly desires, and puts their complaints to silence. See how Job expresses himself after all his calamities, as sensible that he had lost nothing of his own, chap. i. 21. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Let me speak of this, my brethren, as a gracious disposition, which, alas! is too often but weak, yet surely hath place in the heart of every child of God. Let me suppose him convinced, that he is unworthy of the least of all God's mercies; will he not keep his possessions the more loosely, and will he not quit his hold the more easily? But where shall we learn real self-abasement so well as from the cross? where shall we learn how little we deserve that is good, so well as in that place which shews we have indeed deserved every thing

that is evil? where shall we learn to make moderate demands of created mercies, but where we see, that not only the creature, but life itself, was forfeited by our guilt? Let me suppose a condemned criminal carried, with many others, to a scaffold, there receiving a pardon, and witnessing, in the execution of others, what was the sentence of the law upon himself; will he, at this instant, think you, be impatient or thankful? Will he be jealous of the honor or respect paid to him? will he quarrel about the dignity or convenience of the place assigned to him? No surely. Lost in the consideration of the fate he has escaped, and the favor he has received, he will pay little regard to matters of small comparative importance. Just so the Christian, placed by faith at the foot of the cross, deeply moved by a discovery of the wrath of God, which he had deserved to suffer to eternity, and taking an immediate view of what his Redeemer suffered to deliver him from it, will be little thoughtful of the world, or any of its enjoyments.

3. The cross of Christ crucifies the world, by reversing all worldly maxims, and shewing of how light estimation worldly greatness is in the sight of God. So long as worldly maxims prevail, and worldly greatness is in high esteem, the cross of Christ is a despised object. But so soon as this object acquires bulk and value in the believer's eye, by being taken for what it really is, the world is disgraced in its turn. It pleased God, in his infinite wisdom, for the salvation of sinners, to send his own Son into the world, in the human nature: and as it was in itself a deep step of humiliation, for the Son of God to be found in fashion as a man; so, even in this assumed nature, he was attended with every circumstance of meanness and baseness. No retinue of illustrious ministers to serve him; no splendid or elegant apartment to receive him; but born of a mean woman, brought forth in a stable, and laid in a manger. Memorable and instructive history indeed! which shall never be forgotten where the gospel is preached, to the end of time.

Remember, my beloved hearers, though divine sweetness and benignity adorned his carriage, though divine

power and energy attended his ministrations; yet poverty, slander, and contempt were his continual portion; so that he could say, in the language of the prophet, "Reproach hath broken my heart:" and again, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Some of the ancients have represented the Saviour as of extraordinary beauty of countenance and comeliness of form, founded perhaps on a literal interpretation of that expression in the Psalmist, Psa. xlv. 2. "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever." Without being positive, I shall only say, that this does not correspond much with the other circumstances of his incarnation. And indeed some have supposed directly the contrary, founding their opinion upon the language of the prophet Isaiah, chap. lii. 14. "As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men);" as also, chap. liii. 2. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness: and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." Whatever be in this, it is beyond all question, that the whole course of his life, and particularly the remarkable conclusion of it, was one continued tract of suffering and mortification.

Does not this, Christians, bring a reproach upon worldly greatness, and stain the pride of all human glory? Does it not show how little it is esteemed of God, and how little it is an evidence of his acceptance or approbation? What an influence must this have upon the believer to crucify the world? How must it endear to him a mean and despised, and reconcile him to a suffering state? With what propriety does the Christian, when he is baptized in the name of Christ, renounce the world, its pomps, and its pleasures? Does not a single reflection on the despised state of our Redeemer, in the days of his flesh, make you patient under contempt, and extinguish the desire of applause? Have you any remaining uneasiness at seeing others getting before you in the career of ambition, over-

topping you with titles, eclipsing you with splendor? Do you not now see the propriety of the account given of the carriage of the apostles, when the world and they were at variance, Acts v. 41. "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Whether do you now envy the conqueror or the sufferer, the prince or the martyr? Wherever there is a real Christian raised to opulence by the will of God, or surrounded with ensigns of dignity and honor, will not this consideration fill him with deep humility and self-denial, and a holy jealousy, lest he should abuse his influence, or misapply his talents? The highest honor of real ability is usefulness, the brightest ornament of worldly greatness is self-abasement. All this shews, in the clearest manner, how the cross of Christ crucifies the world, by reversing every worldly maxim, and giving a new turn to the principles of honor and of shame. This leads me to observe,

4. In the *last* place, That the cross of Christ crucifies the world, by putting a quite different object of desire and affection in its room. Our limited powers can attend but to few things at once; and therefore, when any one acquires an interest in our affections, it must comparatively weaken or destroy the interest of others, especially those of an opposite or independent kind. Make a new bed to a river, and turn its stream in that direction, and it will immediately dry up its former channel. Now, the cross of Christ presents to us an object of infinite importance, peace and reconciliation with God here, and everlasting happiness in his presence hereafter. Can any worldly object be laid in the balance with these? What esteem or attention can it merit in comparison with these?

Whether we consider the end or the means of salvation, the cross of Christ tends to supplant the world, by improving our views of and increasing our affection to both. It shews the infinite importance of eternity and its consequences: and what more proper to deliver us from an undue attachment to the things of time? Eternity, by its greatness, makes time itself to shrink into a point, and annihilates all those little temporary distinctions on which

worldly affection entirely depends. What doth it signify to him that views eternity aright, whether he be for a few years in health or sickness, riches or poverty, on a throne or in a cottage? How immense, according to human measure, appears the difference between the possessions of some persons in the world and others! But of all the generations before us, who have now fallen asleep, how equal is the condition in this respect! The monarch and the slave, when laid in the dust, fill nearly the same space.

If we consider the means of religion, the cross of Christ applied by a convinced sinner, opens to him such a prospect of the infinite unmerited love of God, and of this astonishing expression of it, the death of his Son, as at once captivates the heart, and, if I may speak so, occupies so much room there, as leaves but little for any other object. How soon did it open the heart of the publican Zaccheus, and expel the spirit of covetousness and extortion! Luke xix. 8. "And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: "and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." In how strong a manner does the apostle Paul express his comparative esteem of the cross of Christ! Phil. iii. 7, 8. "But what things "were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 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." This is the very same disposition with that which he expresses in the text; and it differs no otherwise from that of every Christian, than that it is probable he had a particular view to his calling as a minister and an apostle. Captivated with a sense of his Redeemer's love, filled with a view of the glory of his cross, and devoted to his service in the ministry of the gospel, he renounces all worldly prospects, and sets at defiance every thing that might distract his attention, or divide his care: "God forbid that I should glory "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the "world is crucified to me, and I unto the world."

III. I proceed now, in the *last* place, to make some practical improvement of what hath been said. And as, upon this interesting subject, it is necessary that I should speak with all seriousness and fidelity, as well as at some length, so I most earnestly beseech you, as you regard your present peace, your comfort in the hour of death, and the everlasting happiness of your souls, to hear it with attention and application.

I. I must take the opportunity to reprove the sin and shew the danger of those who are wedded to the world. I would willingly interrupt that comfort, and break that peace, which will end in perdition. For this purpose, and in order to make the reproof more distinct and effectual, I shall direct it separately to the three following characters.

(1) To those whose love of the world is so great, that they scruple not to use, occasionally at least, if not habitually, sinful means of getting or keeping possession of it. This indeed opens to us a very extensive field: it leads us to consider all the particular sins which an inordinate love of the world may produce, or increase. It is melancholy, my brethren, to think what contention and variance, nay what hatred and violence, even amongst the nearest relations, the division of worldly property occasions. What envy and grudging, what slander and evil-speaking, between person and person, between family and family! And even in the ordinary way of traffick, what art and dissimulation, what falsehood and equivocation, are to be found between man and man! But what I have chiefly in view is, to speak a few words to those who, in order to promote their worldly ends, have been guilty of direct dishonesty, and known injustice. How many are there whose consciences, if they would be faithful, must tell them, that they are now in possession of the fruits of unlawful gain! Oh! the blindness of those deluded unhappy souls! if an inordinate love of the world, however honestly acquired, is not only sinful, but destructive of your eternal interest; what shall become of those who have trodden under foot the laws both of God and man, in order to obtain it? If an excessive love of the most lawful enjoy-

ments, father and mother, wife and children, is inconsistent with salvation; what must become of those who have loved and followed the gain of unrighteousness? what must become of those who, to clothe their backs, or feed their bellies, or gratify their pride, have not scrupled to be guilty of breach of trust, or breach of promise, of open oppression, or secret fraud? If every poor worldling must stand trembling upon the brink of eternity, when he sees all his painted shadows ready to sink into everlasting darkness; what horror must seize upon the dying sinner, who is just about to surrender all his dear possessions to another, while his conscience is loaded with the guilt of fraud or perjury? and this he cannot leave behind him. Oh! my dear brethren, tremble at the thoughts of dishonest gain; loathe it; return it; shake your hands clear of it. It will embitter your enjoyments: it will be a moth in your substance, a fire in your consciences on earth, and a hell to your souls after the earth itself, and all that is therein, is burnt up.

(2) I would address this reproof to those who are apparently more decent and regular, whom a sense of honor, or a desire of approbation of their fellow-creatures, preserves from grosser crimes, or whom perhaps natural conscience persuades to take up the outward and ordinary part of religion as a form. Many such persons are wedded to the world. Their thoughts are there, their delights are there, their hopes and expectations are only there. Bear with me, my brethren, in pressing this a little; and do not turn away, and refuse the charge. Worldliness is the reigning sin, and will be the eternal ruin of many persons of better rank, to whose conversation, a more liberal way of thinking, and a sense of decency, may give even an amiable appearance. I would beseech the attention of such persons to what shall now be said; not from any disrespect to their state and situation in civil life, God knoweth! but from fidelity to their souls. Consider, I pray you, the extreme danger of worldliness of mind. It is itself a great and aggravated sin, and is the parent of many others. It is a sin, where it hath dominion, inconsistent with salvation. Hear the words of the Lord

Jesus: "He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me." There are some sorts of sinners on whom you would look with contempt or abhorrence; but you may possibly deceive yourselves. The strict and regular, but covetous Pharisees, little thought that the publicans and sinners were nearer the kingdom of heaven than themselves. I do not say this to extenuate sin of any kind, but to guard you against the power of delusion and self-deceit. I know that none but the Searcher of hearts can make a certain judgment of the degree of depravity in different characters; and therefore I do not so much urge the comparison for your condemnation, as caution you against relying upon it for your justification. The unalterable rule, taken both from the law and the gospel, is this: Which of the two has the supreme commanding interest in your affections, God or the world? As an eminent author expresses it, 'He is the most wicked man that hath in his heart the strongest interest that is opposite to God; and all that is not subordinate to him is opposite to him: I say again, the greater creature-interest, the more sinful the state. Though you be neither thieves, nor extortioners, nor adulterers, your sin may be as deep rooted, and the interest of the world as predominant, or more so, in you, than in some of them. Alas! Sirs, the abstaining from some of these sins, and living like civil and orderly persons, though it is so far commendable, is not enough. If the world be not crucified to you, and you to it, such abstinence will but hide your sin and misery, and hinder your shame and repentance, but not prevent your eternal damnation. Your lands and your houses, and hopeful posterity, and other provision you have made for the flesh, may have more of your hearts, than the world hath of the heart of a poor wretch who never had so much to idolize.' Upon the whole, my brethren, let me only put you in mind, this exhortation is not less necessary to you than the like cautions were to the hearers of Christ in the days of his flesh, whom he warns against the dangers of an affluent state: Luke viii. 14. "And that which fell among thorns, are they, which when they have heard, go forth, and

“ are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” Matt. xix. 23, 24. “ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” It ought to give you great consolation, that he adds, v. 26. “ With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

(3) I would address this exhortation to the children of God, in whom I know the world is crucified upon the whole; yet, alas! it still retains such a degree of interest as is provoking to God, offensive to others, and hurtful to their own peace. In what glass can you see more clearly the weakness of faith, and every other gracious disposition, than in their little influence in restraining the motions of carnal affection? Had the great objects of faith and hope that place in our hearts, and that entire dominion in our affections, which they ought to have; would there be so much conformity to worldly maxims and practices, as is daily to be seen? would there be so much emulation in all the outward expressions of pride and gaiety, in dress, furniture, and equipage? would there be so much desire of the increase of wealth and greatness? would there be so much envy of those who are successful, and go beyond us? Shall I tell you how a Christian should look upon those who prosper remarkably in their worldly affairs? If they are truly pious, he should rejoice with them; for here is so much wealth and influence put into such hands as will employ them in doing good. On the other hand, if they are wicked, he should sincerely pity them, as immersed in the most dangerous temptations. If we were thoroughly dead to the world, and the world to us, would the loss of wealth or reputation wound us so deeply as they generally do? would the malice or slanders of others make so sensible an impression? It should be pitied, as it is their sin; but it may easily be despised, as it is our danger. Try this by the condition and conduct of the opposite character. A wicked man is dead to God

and spiritual things. What then, does he value the loss of any thing of that nature? Tell him, that he hath lost such or such an opportunity of communion with God, in his worship in public, or in family; that he hath lost an opportunity of excellent instruction, in a sermon or discourse; with what manifest contempt will he receive the information, and smile at your weakness and credulity in shewing any attachment to such things! Were we crucified to the world as we ought, would there be so much impatience under the hand of God in poverty, sickness, the loss of relations, or calamities of any kind? The lopping off a limb or member that is dead, gives little or no uneasiness: it is the life that remains which occasions the pain of separation. If the world sat loose upon us, its removal would scarcely be felt; but we must needs suffer at the very heart when any thing is withdrawn that hath its hold there. Let me therefore beseech you, in this, to confess your sin, to be humbled for it, and to pray, that you may be daily more and more delivered from it.

2. I shall improve this subject for pointing out the use of affliction, and the ground of your consolation under it. This world at best is but a scene of sorrow; and we then reap most comfort from it when we are sensible that it is so. The very purpose of affliction is, to shew us the vanity and uncertainty of all created comforts, and deliver us from an excessive attachment to them. It is much more difficult to crucify a smiling than a frowning world. It is not easy to hate it in its loveliest form, or, if I may use such an expression, to speak harshly to it when it is speaking kindly to us? But in the time of affliction, when we are obliged to confess its variety, is it not reasonable to expect, that our affection for it it will be abated? I have said, that this seems the natural effect of suffering; because it is the lesson evidently carried in it. And accordingly the prophet Isaiah says, chap. xxvi. 9. "For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." I am sensible, however, that the reception which affliction meets with, and the effects which it produces, are very different in different persons. It makes the worldly man curse his idol in the rage of de-

repair; and it makes the child of God abhor the idolatry, and dwell with complacency on his unchangeable portion.

Consider this, I beseech you, my brethren; for you are all liable to the stroke of affliction, young and old, rich and poor, holy and unholy. It is indeed lamentable to see the fretful impatience of those to whom the world is blasted from without, but the love of the world, in all its strength, still subsisting within. They have no source of consolation in themselves; and nothing comfortable can be spoken to them by others in a manner consistent with truth and duty. To deal faithfully with them, we must do our utmost to add the bitterness of repentance to their other sufferings; and this the cruel kindness of surrounding relations will seldom permit to be done. In the case of dying persons, in particular, with what concern have I heard friends and physicians telling the grossest falsehoods, in order to keep off, for a few moments, the apprehension of what they knew must immediately and certainly take place, and be the more terrible for the surprise!

On the other hand, it is comfortable to reflect, that the sanctifying influence of afflictions is no less the language of experience than of scripture. Many have borne their testimony, and set their seal to it. Some have been so effectually mortified to pride and vanity, by the injuries or the slanders of others, that they have even felt consolation in the reproach itself. But in a particular manner, I have been often pleased with young persons to whom the world, and all their expectations from it, have been crucified by early affliction, expressing themselves, not merely with submission, but with serenity and thankfulness. Bear with me in mentioning a real instance, known to myself, of a young man, who had been long confined with a diseased member, and had a near and certain prospect of his dissolution. When, at the desire of some person present, his loathsome sore was uncovered, he expressed himself, to the best of my remembrance, in these very words: 'There it is; and a precious treasure it has been to me! It saved me from the folly and vanity of youth; it made me cleave to God as my only portion, and eternal glory.'

“ as my only hope ; and I think it has now brought me
 “ very near to my Father’s house.” Now, what a spring
 of consolation is here ! Our duty, our business, our interest
 is, to crucify the world, and to be crucified to it. May
 we not, then, with the utmost gratitude, as well as pati-
 ence, receive the appointments of that God who has pro-
 mised, not only to deliver us from all our sufferings in due
 time, not only to make up and recompense our losses with
 something better, of a different kind, but has assured us,
 that these very sufferings and losses, as their immediate ef-
 fect, shall crucify sin, and further our meetness for his
 own presence ?

3. Let me improve this subject by earnestly exhorting
 you to endeavor to acquire more and more of the temper
 and state of mind expressed by the holy apostle, in the text,
 “ By whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the
 “ world.” Be persuaded, my beloved hearers, to look
 upon all created things with the eye of faith. Remember
 their relation to God. He is their Maker and yours ; and
 they must not be loved or served but in subordination to
 his glory. Do not place your chief happiness in them ;
 do not esteem them too highly ; do not love them im-
 moderately ; do not persecute them too violently. Place
 your chief happiness in the favor of God, in communion
 with him on earth, and the well-grounded hope of the per-
 petual enjoyment of him in heaven ; and let your regard
 to earthly things be no other, nor greater, than is suited to
 this end. That I may press this resolution upon you, al-
 low me to propose the three following considerations.

(1) Consider the unsatisfying nature of all earthly en-
 joyments. They do not at all carry in them that sweet-
 ness and excellence which worldly men suppose. Sin
 has drawn a mist of delusion over the minds of men. The
 inflamed and disordered appetites of our corrupted nature
 always promise themselves, in worldly possessions, a satis-
 faction infinitely greater than they are able to afford. We
 have this from the confession of many who have made the
 experiment with every possible advantage. The book of
 Ecclesiastes is an admirable and animated description of
 the vanity of human enjoyments. Solomon seems to

have been raised up in providence, for this among other ends, that he might leave behind him an account of the vanity of earthly greatness. And this is the title that he hath left written upon all that the world can give: Eccles. i. 2. "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Power and wealth, dignity and fame, variety of pleasures, nay knowledge itself, as a source of present comfort, he affirms the vanity of them all: Eccles. ii. 11. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." And towards the close of the same book, ch. xii. 12. he says, "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Have there not been innumerable examples of the same testimony in every age and country? And what says your own experience? or your observation of others? Do men indeed rise in comfort and satisfaction, in proportion as they rise in station or opulence? On the contrary, do they not rather commonly increase in anxiety and discontent? Do you indeed think, that those who appear in gilded equipages have always on that account the most joyful hearts? Alas! there cannot be a greater mistake. Could you see what passes within, there would appear un-governed passions, ungratified desires, and disappointed hopes; and could you enter their houses, you would find weariness and impatience, family-distresses, family-disorders, and family-quarrels. It has been an old, and it is a most just observation, particularly upon avarice, That the desire still grows with the possession. It is the same with every other sinful passion. Indulgence does not gratify so much as it inflames them. Let a man climb ever so high on the ladder of ambition, he sees still others before him; and emulation and envy are as strong, or stronger, between those who stand on the adjoining steps at the top as at the bottom. There is one particular remark, that serves at once to show the vanity of the world, and the sinfulness of human nature: 'The greater variety of the worldly com-

forts any person possesses, he is not the more, but the less content, under the want of any one. The more and the longer any person hath been accustomed to obsequiousness or flattery, he is the more impatient of the least contradiction. The more abundant and universal respect that has been paid to any person, he is the more deeply wounded by neglect or contempt; as Haman, notwithstanding all his greatness, was quite unsatisfied while there remained one poor man in the king's gate who would not do him reverence. Take but one example more. If a man hath great and extensive possessions, and is without children, he is but the more distressed to think, that so noble an estate and family should be without an heir, and will often envy the families of the poor, as if it were hard measure, that he who had so many temporal mercies should not have all. Upon the whole, you may see, that there is a double vanity in the present state. Created comforts are unsatisfying on the one hand, and human desires are insatiable on the other.

(2) Consider the uncertainty of all earthly enjoyments. No circumstance whatever should more abate our attachment to the world than its instability. What happiness can we receive from, or what value should we put upon those possessions, which may be taken from us the next moment? The speedy, unexpected, and melancholy change, which often takes place from health to sickness, from wealth to poverty, from honor to contempt, I leave every hearer to meditate upon, from his own knowledge and observation of human life; only I cannot help mentioning to you the strong language of the holy scriptures, Prov. xxiii. 5. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." But the circumstance upon this subject to which I would particularly and chiefly point your attention, is, that our possessions and enjoyments of every kind are under the immediate and constant direction of Divine Providence. Believe it, Christians, and remember it, the providence of God reaches to every event that befalls you, however inconsiderable it may seem. It is God that "giveth you

“power to get wealth.”—It is he by whom you are “diminished and brought low.”—It is he that “raiseth up one, and putteth down another.”—It is he that makes the “voice of joy and health” to be heard in your dwellings, or that “chastises you with pain, and the multitude of your bones with strong pain.” If this is the case, what reason have you to be afraid of giving that love and service to any worldly enjoyment that is due to God? Will you “provoke him to jealousy? are you stronger than he?” If you set your affections immoderately on any temporal possession, he can immediately remove it, or turn it into gall and wormwood.

Instead of enumerating the several kinds of present enjoyments, I shall only mention one, the desire of which is commonly very strong, viz. children or posterity. Now, how easily can a holy and righteous God take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke? Nay, in how many instances is the life of children a heavier trial than their death itself? For I must say upon this subject, as I have said often in your hearing, that to one that truly fears God, I do not know any temporal calamity equal to that of having profane or profligate children.

But perhaps some attentive hearer will hesitate a little, and say, ‘I have not observed this to hold true in experience. Even pious persons seem generally to bear the irregularities of their children, though some of them very scandalous, much better than their deaths. Neither is it unfrequent to see them excusing or palliating the worst practices, from the partiality of natural affection.’ Perhaps then I must retract, or alter the assertion, and say, it is either the heaviest trial, or the most dangerous temptation. But, after all, who can tell what floods of tears are shed in secret on this subject? Parents may be often obliged to conceal their sorrow from the world, because they know it would be treated with derision. I rather incline to this supposition in many cases; for where indifference or partiality to the sins of children is so plain that it cannot be denied, I should greatly suspect the piety of such persons, let the appearance or profession be as flaming as it will.

All your mercies, then, are in the hand of God, who can give or withhold, continue or withdraw them at his pleasure. But there is something more still: your life itself is in his hand. Though outward things were ever so stable in themselves, they are altogether precarious as to us. We know not what a day or a night may bring forth, or at what time our souls shall be required at our hands. This surely ought, and if it be seriously attended to, certainly will weaken our attachment to the things of a present world; according to the inference drawn from it by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31. "But this, I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

(3) Consider that there is really much more real satisfaction to be found in a crucified than in an idolized world. This to many will appear a contradiction; but it is a great and certain truth. It is impossible for any person to pass ever so little the limits of duty in the use of the creatures, but it is to his own prejudice. This I do not mean only of its after consequences, but even in point of present comfort. There is a more genuine sweetness in those things that are used with moderation and self-denial, as the gospel requires, than in any sinful gratification. But if this holds even with regard to the simple enjoyment, it holds much more strongly when we consider the benefit of a sanctified world. He that, from a humble sense of the divine mercies, can rise to a grateful acknowledgment of the giver of all good; he who is thereby inspired with a holy zeal to serve him in his generation, and values no temporal blessing, but so far as it may be useful in promoting the glory of God, and the good of others, has a delight from them, infinitely superior to what arises from the licence of criminal indulgence. He enjoys his mercies without sting, he possesses them without the fear of losing them; nay, he can even rejoice in the surrender it-

self, as a part of the will of God. Is this fabulous, my brethren, or extravagant? I hope not. I believe and trust it is matter of real experience to the children of God. Did the Psalmist David say, it was good for him that he was afflicted? did the apostles of Christ take joyfully the spoiling of their goods? did they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name? I hope that many others will rejoice, that they have been enabled to use their substance in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and other useful purposes. I am persuaded, that a pious and liberal mind tastes a more exquisite delight in relieving a poor family, than in the most costly and sumptuous entertainment; and that he who values his reputation only for his usefulness, will give thanks to God for the esteem in which he may be held; and when reproached for doing his duty, will have a pleasure in submitting to it without complaint, greater than the proud and selfish can possibly receive from the daily incense of flattery and praise.

4. In the *last* place, As this subject has the most intimate connection with the power of religion, I shall conclude with offering to serious persons a few particular directions for their daily practice.

(1) Remember that your great care ought to be the one thing needful. Salvation is your great work, heaven is your home, the world is but your passage to it. If you can keep this constantly upon your minds, you will immediately perceive the danger of the world, as a temptation to sin. You will not be able to forget, because you will daily feel, what influence it hath in helping or hindering you in your journey heavenward. A traveller who hath his thoughts still fixed on the place of his destination, and is anxious to get forward, will sensibly feel every incumbrance from the weather, or the way, by which his progress is retarded. It is by misrepresentation that the world leads us astray; true and just apprehensions of our own state, would keep our affections in their just measure with regard to it.

(2) Be particularly upon your guard against the un sanctified use of lawful comforts. A person who hath any

principle of conscience, would be filled with horror at the thoughts of gross sin, such as uncleanness, injustice, or sensuality; yet such may be in great danger of placing their affections upon the world, and resting on it as their portion. Their houses and lands, their children, their name and reputation, may inroach upon them, and usurp dominion in their hearts. Be careful, therefore, habitually to improve these to the glory of God; learn to give him thanks for them, as the blessings of his providence, and to serve him by them, as they are talents or opportunities of usefulness, for which you must render an account in the day of judgment.

(3) Be attentive to the course of Providence, and improve the characters and conduct of others to your own profit. If you see one man grow proud and self-sufficient as he grows rich, if you see him forgetful of God while he continues in prosperity, tyrannical to others because they are in his power, then fear lest you also be tempted. If you see wealth suddenly poured in upon any persons make them anxious, quarrelsome, and impatient, then moderate your desires of prosperity, and "be content with such things as you have." It is very common to enumerate and censure the faults of others, that we may nourish our own pride by the comparison; but it is infinitely more beneficial, to improve the weakness of others for our own humiliation. What is the ordinary style in conversation? Were I such a person, had I his estate and possessions, I should not grudge to be more liberal to the poor; I would do something for the public; I would do every thing for my friends. Truly you do not know what you would do. Were you raised to the same situation, perhaps you would be ten times more proud and covetous than the man you blame. And as you would observe the sins of others, so observe the ways of God towards them. If an oppressor is at last overtaken in his wickedness, if he is held as a wild bull in a net, and, instead of humility, it produceth nothing but the rage of impatience and despair; adore the righteous judgment of God, and be sensible that neither mercies nor trials will change the heart, unless they are accompanied with the power of divine grace. If

it pleaseth God to bring down any from riches to poverty, or from honor to disgrace, remember that he visits his people in mercy for their correction, and his enemies in vengeance for their punishment; so that, whether you are the one or the other, you have no charter of security from the same calamities.

(4) Think much of mortality, and the innumerable sufferings which are every where to be seen among our fellow-creatures. The wise man tells us, Eccles. vii. 2, 3. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." There are some who, from mere tenderness of heart, and a strong attachment to sensual delight, are not able to look upon scenes of misery and distress. They fly from them, therefore, and deceive themselves into a dream of security by intoxicating pleasures. But, my brethren, it is infinitely better to fortify yourselves against the fear of death, by faith in him who is the resurrection and the life; and then the frequent observation of others in affliction, will have the noblest and most salutary influence in mortifying worldly affections. You may also sometimes see the triumph of faith in the joyful departure of believers, which is one of the most edifying and comfortable sights that any Christian can behold.

(5) In the last place, I would recall to your minds, and earnestly recommend to your meditation, what made a principal branch of the doctrinal part of this subject, "the cross of Christ." By this the believer will indeed crucify the world. Reason and experience may wound the world, so to speak; but the cross of Christ pierces it to the heart. Shall we murmur at the cross, when our Redeemer bore it? Are not the thoughts of what he suffered, and what we deserved, sufficient to eradicate from our minds every the least inclination to what is provoking to him? Are not the thoughts of what he purchased, sufficient to destroy in our hearts the least disposition to place our happiness here? The thoughts of the cross of Christ

are strengthening as well as instructive. We are drawn as it were by the power of sympathy, emboldened by his example, and animated by his conquest. Is not the Christian, when he is in full contemplation of this great object, saying, ‘O most merciful Saviour, shall I any more idolize that world which crucified thee? shall I be afraid of their scorn who insulted thee? shall I refuse any part of his will, who, by the cross, has glorified thee?’

Let us conclude by attempting to say, in faith, what God grant every one of us may be able to say in the awful hour of the last conflict: “O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

FERVENCY AND IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER.

A

S E R M O N.

GENESIS xxxii. 26.

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

MY brethren, real communion with God is a blessing of such inestimable value, that it cannot be fought with too great earnestness, or maintained with too much care. If it is no fable, that God vouchsafes to his people, on some occasions, a sense of his gracious presence, and, as it were, visits them in love; with what fervor should they desire, with what diligence should they improve, so great a mercy! In a particular manner, when a good man hath in view, either an important and difficult duty, or a dangerous trial, it is his interest to implore, with the greatest importunity, the presence and countenance of God, which only can effectually direct him in the one, and support him in the other. This, my brethren, ought to be our concern at present, as we have in view a very solemn approach to God, viz. laying hold of one of the seals of his covenant: what trials may be before us, or near us, it is impossible to know.

The words I have read relate to a remarkable passage of the patriarch Jacob's life. He was now returning from Padan-aram with a numerous family, and great substance, and had received information that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. We are told, v. 7. of the chapter, that he was "greatly afraid and distressed," being, in all probability, quite uncertain

whether his brother was coming with a friendly or a hostile intention ; or rather, having great reason to suspect the latter to be the case. He rose up, we are told, long before day, and sent his wives, his children, and cattle, over the brook Jabbock : and as it follows, in the 24th verse, “ Jacob was left alone : and there wrestled a man with him, “ until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that “ he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of “ his thigh : and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of “ joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me “ go, for the day breaketh : and he said, I will not let thee “ go, except thou blest me.”

Some of the fathers, and also some of the Jewish writers, suppose, that all this was done in prophetic vision, to represent to him the difficulties that were yet before him, which, by faith and patience he was to overcome. But it is more reasonable to think, that this was in truth the appearance of an angel to him ; and indeed most probably of the angel of the covenant ; because, from the passage itself, it appears that he had “ prevailed with God.” The same thing we are assured of by the prophet Hosea, chap. xii. 3, 4. “ He took his brother by the heel in the womb, “ and by his strength he had power with God : yea, he had “ power over the angel, and prevailed : he wept and made “ supplication unto him : he found him in Beth-el, and “ there he spake with us.” From this passage also we learn, that it was the same who met with him at Beth-el. Some think, with a good deal of probability, that this attack was made upon him by way of punishment for the weakness of his faith ; that though he had received the promise, he should yet be under so great a terror at the approach of his brother. In this indeed he was an example of what happens to believers in every age. Past mercies are forgotten at the approach of future trials ; therefore the same God who visited at Beth-el, and promised to be with him, now meets him in displeasure, and threatens to destroy him : but by “ weeping and supplication ” he not only obtained his preservation, but a further blessing. It is also the opinion of many, that the wrestling or conflict was literal and real for some time, and that Jacob perhaps

took it to be one of Esau's attendants who had come to surprise him in the night; but that at last he perceived his mistake, when the angel, by a slight touch of his thigh, shewed him, that, if he had pleased, he might easily have destroyed him. Then, as he had contended with his supposed adversary, he now continues the struggle, by insisting upon a blessing; which he obtains, in such terms as carry in them a commendation both of his constancy and importunity: v. 28. "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed." The last part of this verse is supposed indeed to be wrong translated; and that it should be, "as a prince thou hast had power with God, and therefore much more shalt thou prevail over men;" which was a promise not only of present security, but of future prosperity and conquest.

But though this remarkable event had a particular and immediate relation to Jacob, there is no doubt, that the Spirit of God, in putting it on record, had a purpose of further and more extensive usefulness. It is plainly an example of importunity, and, as it were, holy violence in prayer. So uniform and general has this sense of the passage been, that fervency and importunity in prayer has been generally called *wrestling with God*. This is a subject which well deserves our most serious attention; the rather that I am sorry to say, the practice has fallen into much disrepute; and I am afraid the expression itself is in some danger of being treated with derision. In discoursing further on this subject, I shall,

1. Explain and illustrate a little the nature and subject of this holy wrestling and importunity in prayer.
2. The duty and reasonableness of it.
3. The great benefit arising from it. And,
4. In the last place, I shall make some improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction.

I. FIRST, then, I am to explain and illustrate a little the nature and subject of this holy wrestling and importunity in prayer. Wrestling necessarily supposes some re-

sistance or opposition to be overcome. Prayer indeed, of itself, and in the simplest cases, may be said to carry this idea in it; because he that prays stands in need of something which he can only obtain by prevailing with, or bending the will of another to bestow: Matth. vii. 7. "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." But as there are many gracious assurances of God's readiness to hear our prayers, the subject we are now upon leads us particularly to the consideration of the obstructions or difficulties that lie in the way, either of our praying as we ought, or praying with success. These two things must be joined together, because they are in their nature inseparably connected: James iv. 3. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James i. 5, 6, 7. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Now, for the illustration of this duty and practice, in a way suited to the condition and daily experience of the children of God, I shall mention some of the chief obstructions or difficulties we have to wrestle with in our access to God, and which must be overcome by the importunity and holy violence of prayer.

1. The first of these I shall mention is a sense of guilt overwhelming the soul. This, which is the strongest of all arguments for the necessity of prayer, is often found in experience to hinder the performance. When any person is arrested of conscience, when his multiplied transgressions appear before him in all their variety, and in all their aggravations, it is apt to fill him with a jealousy of God, a dread of entering into his presence, and in some sort a despair of obtaining his mercy. This hath been often seen in great profligates, overtaken by a visitation of Providence, and stung by the reproaches of conscience. When they have been urged to apply for divine

mercy, they have answered, 'I cannot pray:' or, 'How can I pray, who have been so monstrous a sinner?' Nay, it may be frequently observed, that men who live in security, without any just conviction of their sinful state, will maintain some sort of form of religion, will even go through their form with some pleasure, and place some dependence upon it. But when conscience begins to rise a little upon them, and they see the enormities they are guilty of, though it cannot make them forsake their sins, it makes them speedily forsake all their religion. It is taken notice of by Dr. Doddridge, in his life of Col. Gardiner, that when he was indulging himself in all manner of wickedness, he began, from a natural sense of duty, to pay some acknowledgments to God; but as he was not resolved to forsake his sins, the daring profanity of it struck him with horror. He therefore determined, says the author, 'to make no more attempts of this sort; and was perhaps one of the first that deliberately laid aside prayer from some sense of God's omniscience, and some natural principle of honor and conscience.' In this last reflection, the worthy author is undoubtedly mistaken; for he was not the first, nor will he be the last, who has been driven from prayer by a sense of sin, and a horror of his Maker's presence.

I have described this difficulty in its most hideous form, if I may speak so, as it stands in the way of wicked men. But there is often too much of it to be found even in good men themselves. A deep sense of sin often fills them with a slavish fear, mars their confidence before God, and tempts them to keep at a distance from him. Ps. xl. 12. "For innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me." He that wrestles in prayer, refuses to yield to this discouragement. He still ventures, though at a distance, to look to his offended God. Though he is filled with tribulation and fear, he will not give up his plea. He says with the Psalmist, Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8, 9. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for

“ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.” He endeavors to take such views of the glory and extent of divine mercy as will give him some ground of hope. He maketh supplication with strong crying and tears. Against hope he believeth in hope; or resolves, that if he perish, he shall perish at the footstool of mercy. And nothing is so proper to bring him to this resolution, nay, nothing is sufficient for that purpose, but the freeness of salvation, as it is offered in the gospel of Christ, where all confidence is derived, not from the goodness of the sinner, but from the power and grace of the Saviour.

2. Another difficulty to be overcome in prayer is, a frowning Providence discouraging the mind. When this is added to the former, as they commonly go together, it augments the difficulty, and adds to the distress. When great calamities are brought upon the believer, when one stroke follows upon the back of another, when sin challenges, and Providence punishes him, he is then in danger of giving up his condition as desperate, and without remedy. See the reflections of Job in this strain, notwithstanding he is commended to us as a pattern of patience, Job xix. 8, 9, 10. “He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. He hath stript me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree.”

When the rod of correction falls heavy, the Christian finds it very difficult to believe that it comes from the love of a father, and is rather apt to tremble under it as the severity of a judge. So did Jacob himself, after all his experience, in the close of life, Gen. xlii. 36. “And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.” Sometimes the course of Providence in general has the same effect. The prosperity and insolence of sinners, the oppressed state of the children of God, the disappointed endeavors of his

servants, make them often call in question his presence, his faithfulness, or his power. This is the subject of the whole 73d Psalm, and summed up in the 10th and 11th verses: "Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?"

He that wrestles in prayer, therefore, considers the depth of Divine Providence with reverence. He dwells upon the wisdom and power of God, who alone can bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. He taketh hold of his covenant, and the sure and everlasting mercy that is contained in it, and humbly and earnestly prays for universal and absolute resignation to the divine will. This, my brethren, is one of the greatest and most important objects of prayer, and what believers should wrestle for with the greatest fervor and importunity. They should cry mightily to God, and expostulate earnestly with their own hearts, as the Psalmist, Ps. xlii. 9, 10, 11. "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me: while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." I am not here to go through all the grounds of encouragement on which the suffering and pleading believer may place his dependence, drawn from the perfections of an unchangeable God, from the power of a Saviour upon a throne, from the precise and express promises in scripture of support or deliverance, and the daily experience of the faithful. It is sufficient that I have pointed out to you the state and practice of a distressed and afflicted Christian wrestling with God.

3. Another difficulty often arises from unbelieving thoughts, and inward temptations distressing the spirit. Prayer takes its rise from and is carried on by faith. Prayer indeed is little else than the immediate and lively exercise of faith: Heb. xi. 6. "For he that cometh to God,

“ must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of “ them that diligently seek him.” On this account, dutiful and acceptable prayer is called the *prayer of faith*. Who would apply, or who can apply, to God, for any mercy, but from a persuasion, that he is present to hear, and that he is able and willing to bestow? Now, when this faith begins to fail, either from its natural weakness, from our sinful negligence, from the subtle insinuations, or the more violent assaults of the adversary of our salvation, it must be a great hindrance to the exercise of prayer.

Many are the difficulties of this kind which the Christian, from time to time, hath to struggle with. Sometimes he is made to doubt of the certainty, and sometimes of the meaning, of the promises. We see some distressed persons so embarrassed with scruples, or so misled by controversy, as to lose the relish and spiritual comfort of the word of God, while they are contending about it. Sometimes they are made to doubt their own title to apply the promises, which appear like a rich and sumptuous table, encompassed with a flaming sword, forbidding their approach. Thus they are led away from the consolation of Israel, and made to seek in vain for a foundation of comfort in themselves. How often do we see, that the very sense of sin, and fear of danger, the very misery and necessity which particularly discover the fitness and excellence of the truths of the everlasting gospel, are made use of to discourage us from embracing them!

Sometimes the truths themselves are perverted, or set in opposition one to another, and mutually destroy each other's influence. Thus, while the constant and overruling providence of God should be the great foundation both of our faith and prayer, it is sometimes set in opposition to both. The false reasoner will say to himself, Why should I pray for deliverance from this distress? why should I pray or hope for the possession of such a mercy? The whole order and course of events is fixed and unalterable. If it is appointed to happen, it shall happen, whether I speak or be silent; if it is otherwise determined, the prayers of the whole creation will not be able to obtain it.

How unhappily do men thus reason themselves out of their own peace! not considering the unspeakable absurdity of making our weak and imperfect conceptions of the nature and government of God to stand in opposition to his own express command. The influence of second causes, moral as well as natural, is a matter of undeniable experience. If you acknowledge it in the one, should you deny it in the other? Is not intemperance the cause of disease? is not slothfulness the way to poverty? is not neglected tillage the cause of a barren field? and is not restraining prayer also the way to barrenness of spirit? Believe it, my brethren, fervent prayer is as sure and effectual a mean of obtaining those mercies which may be lawfully prayed for, as plowing and sowing is of obtaining the fruits of the ground.

Again, sometimes by the cunning of Satan, the believer is driven to the brink of the precipice, and made to doubt of the very being of God, and the reality of all religion. It is easy to see, that this must wholly take away the necessity and use of prayer. But even when it is not so powerful as to prevent the practice, yet doth it, in a great measure, cool the fervor and destroy the comfort of prayer. He that wrestles with God has often these difficulties, in a greater or lesser degree, to struggle with. Some of them it is his duty to oppose by reason, and some of them directly and immediately to resist and banish as temptations; and I think an exercised Christian will usually make the matter of his complaint the subject of his prayer. This is indeed defeating the tempter with his own weapons: it is bringing sweetness out of the strong, and meat out of the eater, when the difficulties thrown in the way of our prayers serve to excite us to greater ardor, importunity, and frequency in that necessary and profitable exercise.

4. Another difficulty with which the believer hath to struggle, is the coldness and slothfulness of his own heart. This is as great a hindrance of prayer as any that hath been named; and I believe it is of all others the most common and prevalent. At the same time it affords a very mortifying view of our own character and state. Strange indeed! that when we consider the great and eternal God with

whom we have to do, we should find so much difficulty in maintaining a serious and attentive frame of spirit ! that when we lie under so great and unspeakable obligations to his mercy, our sense of gratitude should be so weak and languid ! that when we have blessings to ask of so inestimable value, we should notwithstanding do it with so much indifference ! And what is stranger still, are there not many who have tasted, in some degree, the sweetness and consolation of communion with God, and yet are ready to return to a state of coldness and negligence !

I am persuaded I need not tell any serious person in this assembly the danger or frequency of the Christian's being seized with a slothfulness, coldness, or security of spirit. It is probable many are at this moment inwardly ashamed on being thus barely put in mind of it. How often is it the reproach and stain of all our worship, in public, in family, and in secret ! how easily do we degenerate into a form ! how hardly is the spirit and affection kept alive ! How many are there over whom conscience has so much power, that they neither dare absent themselves from public ordinances, nor discontinue the form of secret duty ; and yet they may continue long in a heartless, lifeless, and unprofitable attendance upon both ! Times of deep conviction, of heavy affliction, or harassing temptation, are more distressing ; but they are not so insinuating, as this leprosy that creeps upon us in a season of quiet and serenity. The other difficulties, if I may speak so, force us to wrestle with them, because they leave us no peace ; but this tempts us to sit still under it, because it gives us no disturbance.

He that wrestles with God in prayer, then, must maintain a conflict with the slothfulness of his own spirit, and endeavor to preserve that vigor and fervency of affection so necessary to the right performance of the duty. You will say, perhaps, With what propriety is this called wrestling with God ? it is rather wrestling with himself. But when we consider, that every gracious disposition must come down from above, from the Father of lights, and author of every good and perfect gift ; and, in particular, that the spirit of prayer is one of his most precious and

excellent gifts; the justness and propriety of this language will manifestly appear. The coldness of our hearts, and deadness of our affections in worship, ought, on the one hand, to be imputed to ourselves as the immediate and sinful cause, and, on the other, may be considered as a part of God's most holy providence, who withdraws his Spirit in righteous judgment. Thus the Psalmist very beautifully says, Pf. lxxv. 4. "Blessed is the man whom thou chusest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." And thus the spirit of supplication is a remarkable gospel-promise: Zech. xii. 10. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born."

My brethren, there is the greatest reason for every Christian, not only to wrestle against a slothful disposition as a sin, but to fear its influence as a judgment; for it among spiritual judgments it holds a chief place, when God giveth "the spirit of slumber; eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;" it ought to be treated in the same manner with all other obstructions, that is to say, encountered by vigorous resistance. Like all other enemies, it acquires courage by success; like all other sins, it is strengthened by indulgence. And yet, alas! how often is this very circumstance made use of as an excuse for the omission of prayer? When the Christian finds himself lifeless and indisposed to prayer, it makes him either neglect it altogether, or slur over the performance in a careless and trifling manner, saying to himself, "I am not now in a fit temper for it." Nay, sometimes he reasons himself even religiously out of his duty, saying, "I shall but dishonor God by such a heartless sacrifice; and therefore I had better delay it till I be in a frame that is fitter for it." But if the time and other circumstances call for the duty, our own indisposition of heart is, of all others, the most foolish and criminal excuse. How much better would it be to wrestle as Jacob

in the text, and insist upon the blessing; which cannot be more sensibly illustrated with respect to this particular branch, than by mentioning to you a resolution which an eminent Christian entered into for his own practice: That he would not be baffled by a treacherous spirit; for he would never give over the work of praise, till his affections were stirred, and he was brought to a sense of gratitude for divine goodness; and that he would never give over enumerating and confessing his sins, till his heart was melted in contrition and penitential sorrow!

5. I may mention one other difficulty with which we have to struggle in prayer, *viz.* when it pleases God to postpone, for a season, his compliance with our requests. Though his ears are always open to the cry of his people, he sometimes carries in such a manner, as if they were fast closed against them. Though their petitions be offered up in faith, and on a subject agreeable to the will of God, they may not always be granted in the manner, in the measure, or in the season that they themselves desire, or even in their imperfect judgment may think most proper. Many examples might be given of this. A minister praying for the success of his labors, may be heard in mercy, though it do not happen so soon, and though he cannot see it so clearly, as it is natural for him to desire. He may have many seals of his ministry, although he meet with disappointment in some of those on whom he looked with the most favorable eye. A parent may pray for the salvation of his children, and his desires may have gone up with acceptance before the throne, although the accomplishment be yet far distant, and they seem, for the time, to increase unto more ungodliness. An afflicted person may have actually obtained the sanctified improvement of his affliction, although he cannot yet perceive the ends of Divine Providence in it, the comfortable discovery of which may be a feast reserved for him at some future season; or, in general, a mercy may be granted with advantage and increase, though it be suspended for a time.

In this interval, however, the Christian's eyes may be ready to fail with looking long; he may be in danger of ceasing his application, or abating his fervor, through de-

spair of success. Therefore we have many exhortations in scripture to perseverance and importunity in prayer. We are exhorted to pray without ceasing, and to continue instant in prayer. Our Saviour, Luke xviii. 1. spoke a parable on purpose to teach men, that they ought always to pray, and not to faint: Heb. x. 36, 37. "For ye have need of patience; that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Habakkuk ii. 3. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry." To which passage I shall only add Lamentations, chap. iii. 25, 26. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

I shall conclude this head by observing, that all these obstructions are at the direction and disposal of Providence, for the trial of the faith and patience of believers; and therefore their perseverance under, and constancy in opposition to them, is, with great propriety, considered as an imitation of the patriarch Jacob in his wrestling with God.

Before proceeding to the remaining part of this subject, suffer me to make a practical improvement of what hath been already said. And,

1. Let us hence learn the infinite grace and condescension of God, who not only admits his people to communion with him, but invites and encourages them to the most pressing importunity, and even, to speak so, to offer a holy violence to him. The reasons of this will be more fully opened in the next discourse. In the mean time, let us make it the subject of wonder and praise. Well may we say with Job, chap. vii. 17, 18. "What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" This is the dignity of human nature indeed, not from

what he is in himself, but what he may be by union with God through Christ; for through him we have all access by one Spirit unto the Father. And if nearness to God is so great a privilege, who would not covet it? who would not cultivate it? Surely all but those who, to their final condemnation, disbelieve and despise it.

2. Let us learn from what hath been said, to defend the exercises of piety, and particularly this honorable privilege of the saints, from the scorn and reproach of the enemies of vital religion. I am abundantly sensible, that there are some, and some amongst ourselves, who treat this subject with contempt and disdain, and look upon a believer's wrestling with God in prayer, his being sometimes in, and sometimes not in a frame for his service, as the raving and incoherent effusions of weakness and enthusiasm. This is not only an evidence of their being themselves strangers to true religion, but is indeed directly contrary to sound judgment and reason. I have laid down to you the meaning and subject of this wrestling and importunity in prayer; and is there any thing more clearly founded upon truth, nature, and experience? Hear, ye unbelievers; might I not transfer every particular, and illustrate it in the intercourse of man with man? If you had a favor to ask of another, and were sensible that you had done him a great, recent, and unprovoked injury, would not this fill you with jealousy? would it not keep you at a distance? would it not make you, as the common saying is, afraid to look him in the face? If he had carried himself as your enemy, and seemed in many instances, to set himself in opposition to you; would not this give you even more than suspicion and uncertainty as to the issue of your application? If by the suggestion of his enemies, you were made to believe him resentful and implacable; would not this extinguish your hope, and break up all correspondence? If your own heart were naturally too proud to intreat, or too careless to give attendance, would not the suit be neglected? Or if you had presented your petition, and for a long tract of time no answer was returned; would you not give up all hopes of it as forgotten or rejected? Is not this an image of the state of the Christian in many instances? And therefore,

if prayer is a part of natural religion, if it is a matter of duty or necessity at all, it must often have the above difficulties to overcome, and, on that account, be justly considered as a species of wrestling with God. And why should the Christian's being in or out of frame for his duty to God, be made the subject of derision? Is there not something similar to it as to every object of study or application? Are there not some seasons when you say, your mind lies to your book, your work, or even your play, and then it goes on sweetly and pleasantly? Are there not others, when it is against the grain, and then every trifle is a difficulty, and even the air is a burden. If you consider these things, you must be sensible, that all to whom eternity is the highest concern, and therefore religion their chief care, must be attentive to the state of their hearts towards God. And if this is the case, every thing, whether inward or outward, that promotes or hinders their acquaintance with him, will appear to them of the utmost moment. The truth is, whoever takes the liberty to despise and ridicule the concern of serious persons about communion with God, must excuse me for saying, because it is my deliberate judgment, either that they are enemies to religion in their hearts, or that they are wholly ignorant of the important subject.

3. As we would defend the duty above explained from the scoffs of infidels, let us also guard it from abuse, and distinguish it from any corruption that may pretend, or may be thought to resemble it. Particularly, let us beware of allowing in ourselves, or approving in others, any gross indecent familiarity, either of speech or carriage. You see, my brethren, that wrestling with God arises from a deep impression of the infinite and unspeakable importance of the blessings in prospect, and their absolute necessity to the petitioner. This will make him still insist, and urge his request, and, as it were, refuse to let go his hold. But it is also constantly attended with a sense of the holiness of God's nature, and the greatness of his power; which, when set home upon the wounded conscience, is often the principal cause of the distress. Is there not then the justest reason for earnestness and concern? But is it

not also plain, that this must preserve the believer from impropriety : and that it cannot lead to any foolish or indecent familiarity, which is often mistaken for it, and often reproached in its room ?

What hath been said upon the subject, I hope, will point out to you the just middle between every vicious extreme. Such real concern, such fervor of spirit, will not indeed lead any to study in their prayers a nice, vain, or ornamented style. This is the language of a mind at ease. It is but of little value at any rate : but O how misplaced ! O how unfuitable in prayer to God ! This is best carried on by plain and ardent expressions of the very temper of the soul, when the fulness of the heart gives a ready utterance to the tongue. But neither will the views which the wrestling believer hath of the glory and majesty of God, of the strictness of his law, and the terror of his wrath, suffer him to give way to any trifling, slovenly, or ridiculous manner of addressing himself to the throne of grace. It must be observed indeed, that there will be a difference, according to the different circumstances, station, and capacity of the persons concerned. There may be many a serious Christian, who knows what it is to pour out his heart before God, and spread his sins and sorrows at his feet, who would not be fit for leading the devotion of a public or promiscuous assembly ; yet he may be the person who, as a prince, hath power with God, and prevails. The prayers of such a wrestler, with all the blemishes that attend them, are probably far more effectual, than those of such over-nice persons, as despise the weakness of his understanding, or make themselves merry with the homeliness of his style : nay, I must say further, that we sometimes meet with persons whose language in prayer is so unspeakably superior to their abilities or performances of other kinds, as to show that they have an unction from the Holy One ; and that they are examples of the accomplishment of that promise, Psa. xxv. 14. “ The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him : and he will shew them his covenant.”

4. I must conclude the subject at this time with earnestly exhorting you all to the diligent exercise of this duty.

And that it may be the more distinct and effectual, I shall briefly point out to you the following objects of prayer.

1. Be fervent in prayer for the improvement of the spiritual life in your own souls. Prayer is at once the security and the comfort of a Christian. Hate, fear, prevent as much as in you lieth every thing that may obstruct your regularity and earnestness in this duty.

2. Be earnest in your supplication, and importunate in your pleading for the church of Christ, and the glory of his kingdom, especially in your native country. The character of real Christians, in this respect, is well described by the prophet: *Is. lxii. 6, 7.* "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." The languishing state of religion in this nation, and the threatening aspect of Providence, should press us to this duty: and surely, in proportion as our belief of the truths of the gospel is real and prevalent, we must behold transgressions with grief, and be ready to intercede for a "time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

3. Be earnest for a season for the power of God at this approaching communion. We serve an all-sufficient and unchangeable God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, who is able to pour down his Spirit in a large and plentiful measure, and make it a happy time for the espousal of many sinners to Christ, and for edifying his saints, that they may go on their way rejoicing, and eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart. Let us plead his own promise, *Is. xlv. 3, 4.* "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

4. Pray for the ministers of the gospel. The apostles often ask this assistance of the faithful: *Col. iv. 3.* "Withal, praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds." If you believe the efficacy

of prayer, you must be sensible that your diligence in this respect will prepare ministers for you, and you for them. This is to point the eye of faith beyond the servants to the master of the feast; and you will probably both look for and receive your answer from himself.

5. In the *last* place, I would earnestly recommend to you the exercise of joint and social conference and prayer. There is great danger of extinguishing the heavenly flame, if while you are necessarily surrounded with a flood of ungodly men, you do not often associate with the excellent ones of the earth, and place your delight there: Malachi iii. 16. "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." There is a great advantage in society for every purpose. If we know the benefit of united bodies for business and trade, if we find the pleasure of joining together for mutual entertainment and social converse, must not as great a benefit result from a more sacred union? Serious persons, by associating together, direct each other by their counsels, embolden each other by their examples, and assist each other by their prayers. There is also a particular promise of efficacy to social prayer: Matth. xviii. 19, 20. "I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Now, may the Lord himself visit you with his gracious presence, and make you to say with Jacob at Bethel, Gen. xxviii. 16, 17. "And he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S.

Philadelphia, July 26th, 1799.

DR. WITHERSPOON's character as a writer is so highly and deservedly esteemed by all the friends of Evangelical truth, who have been acquainted with his publications, that it is presumed to be superfluous to solicit their patronage by any commendation of the work now proposed for publication. To those who have not been favored with the perusal of the Doctor's Sermons and Essays, the Subscriber takes the liberty to observe, that their merit is superior to his praise.

JOHN B. SMITH, Minister
of the Third Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

Philadelphia, July 30th 1799.

SIR,

IT has given me much pleasure to hear that you are about to publish an edition of the works of the late Dr. WITHERSPOON. I know not how you could do a greater service to the public, than by this undertaking; and I sincerely hope you may find it advantageous to yourself. In all the Doctor's tracts there is manifest that closeness and clearness of thought, that acuteness of discernment and accuracy of discrimination, that faculty of separating the matter discussed from every thing extraneous, that constant attention to radical principles, and systematic consistency, that lucid order, and that power of presenting his whole subject in the most striking and impressive manner to the mind of the reader, which distinguish the writer of penetration and comprehensive views. His style is uniformly simple, and nervous,—perfectly intelligible to those who have not had the advantages of education, and yet pleasing to those whose taste is the most cultivated and correct. The Doctor has given specimens of talent as a critic, a tyrant and a politician, which demonstrate that he might have attained high eminence in each of these characters. But from a sense of duty, as well as from a love to the employment, he devoted himself principally to the discussion of religious truth; and always with a view to

its practical application. His Sermons and Essays on various topics in divinity, will be read with pleasure and with profit by serious Christians of all denominations.—The pious and eloquent *Wilberforce* has noticed them with approbation in his late popular book.

If the Doctor's works had been generally read in this country, it would be equally unnecessary and assuming for me to characterize or recommend them. But for ten years past, I believe they have not been vended by any American bookseller, and I am informed they are now out of print in Britain. If, therefore, you suppose that my opinion of them will be any way serviceable to you in their publication, you are at liberty to use what I have here written for that purpose.

Your's Sincerely,

ASHBEL GREEN.

MR. WOODWARD.

New-York, August 6, 1799.

DEAR SIR,

IT was with singular satisfaction I learned you were issuing proposals for printing the works of the late Rev. Dr. WITHERSPOON—Those already in print, are justly esteemed by all good judges on both sides of the Atlantic, among the first in our language on the Subjects of which they treat—the addition you contemplate of several Discourses and small Tracts never yet published, will not a little enrich your collection, and render it deservedly acceptable to the Friends of Literature and Piety of all Denominations. Your success in this business will give heart-felt Pleasure to

Your Friend and Humble Servant,

JOHN RODGERS.

Mr. William W. Woodward, printer, Philadelphia.





