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SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

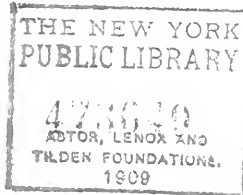
NEW SERIES.

WITH A

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

SPRINGFIELD :
A. G. TANNATT & CO.
1821.



DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit* .

District Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twenty eighth day of April, A. D. 1821, in the forty-fifth year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. G. TANNATT & COMPANY, of the said District, have deposited in this office the title of a book the right whercof they claim as proprietors in the words following, *to wit* :

“ Sermons by the late Rev. Joseph Lathrop, D. D. pastor of the first church in West Springfield, Mass. New Series. With a memoir of the author's life, written by himself.”

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JOHN W. DAVIS, *Clerk of the
District of Massachusetts.*

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PREFACE.

THE author of the following discourses has, nearly three years since, retired from his public labours, on account of the infirmities of age, and more especially of the failure of his sight. He had no intention of appearing again before the public; but the urgent solicitations of some of his friends, and a suggestion from several of his brethren in the ministry, that another volume of sermons might be useful, have induced him to give his consent to the present publication.

In making the selection, the great imperfection of his sight has obliged him to be less particular than he could have wished; though the volume is principally composed of sermons which he had revised toward the close of his ministry.

He is sensible that he is just upon the confines of another world; and if these discourses, or any which he has formerly published, may be the means of protracting his usefulness, in any degree, beyond his life, his highest wishes concerning them will be answered.

JOSEPH LATHROP.

West Springfield, Dec. 6, 1820.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It may not be improper to observe, that when the contract was made for the copy-right of the following sermons, in October last, the Reverend Author indulged little hope that he should live to witness their publication—The foregoing preface was, however, written and the manuscripts prepared for the press, when the godly man ceased from the earth.

The existence of a memoir of his life, written by himself, being made known, the publication of the sermons was delayed with a view to the addition of this interesting biography.

THE PUBLISHERS.

Springfield, August 20, 1821.

MEMOIR

OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF THE

REV. JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.

MEMOIR.

THE REV. JOHN LATHROP, a minister of Barnstable, in England, arrived at Scituate, 28th Sept. 1634, with several sons. He settled in the ministry at Barnstable, a town in Massachusetts, so called from the town of the same name in England. A number of his former flock came and settled in the same town.

Samuel, his youngest son, came to Norwich in Connecticut, and there settled in a family state. He was my great grandfather. He, and my predecessors after him, all lived and died in that town. There I was born, Oct. 20, 1731, O. S. My father's name was *Solomon*. He married *Martha*, the eldest daughter of Deacon *Joseph Perkins*. She was then the widow of *Thomas Todd* of Rowley, with whom she had lived but about four months. He died without issue.

My father died May —, 1733, aged 27. He left a daughter older than myself, who died a few weeks after him. From memoirs which he left, and from letters which he wrote to his particular friends, and which I have seen, I have formed an opinion of him, as a person of early and eminent piety, of good natural talents, and of more than a common education for that day. This idea has been confirmed by information from some of his contemporaries.

In his writings I have seen very serious and grateful acknowledgements of the wonderful preservation of his life in a moment

of imminent danger, when he was a youth. The town of Norwich was building a bridge over Shattucket river, near to which my grand-father lived. The bridge was high, and designed to be strengthened by geometrical works above. The people had made some progress in raising the structure, when, by some inattention in the managers, the whole work gave way and fell in a general crash. My father, who, at that moment, was on the top of one of the highest posts, nearly forty feet from the water, fell with the bridge. He was taken up as dead, and laid on a stick of timber. Indications of life soon appearing, he was taken off and carried home. He was much injured; but in a few weeks was restored to health and soundness. Several, though apparently in less danger, were more grievously wounded; and, I think, one was killed. I have seen in my youth a printed narrative of the catastrophe; but many circumstances are now lost to my recollection.

My situation was remote from school; but my mother paid particular attention to my education. She instructed me in reading and writing, and in the principles of religion. She was a person of exemplary piety.

In the year 1739, when I was in the eighth year of my age, my mother married to a Mr. Loomis, of Bolton, with whom I lived till I became a member of college. He was a sensible, good man; he treated me with much kindness; nor could I ever accuse him of undue partiality in favour of his own children. At the age of fourteen, I chose him my guardian, nor did I err in my choice.

About this time there was a general attention to religion in the country, and it reached the vicinity in which I lived. Many youths were exceedingly agitated with religious terrors for a time; and then were wrought into high comforts and joys. My mind was not wholly unaffected with what I saw and heard; but it

was calm and unruffled. I often wished to experience the strong sensations which some others seemed to feel, but could not attain to them in the same degree. My mind, however, was serious and attentive. I often retired for secret prayer, read much, thought I found benefit in reading pious books, such as Alleyn's Alarm, Stoddard's Safety of Appearing, and some of Bunyan's works, &c. (and I have never lost my relish for Bunyan.) I hoped that religion was radically formed in my mind. But, alas! I have found reason to lament that my subsequent life came so much short of my early resolutions.

At the age of about sixteen I felt a strong desire of a public education. I realized the difficulty in my way. My patrimony lay chiefly in lands, and none had power to sell them for the purpose which I contemplated. I ventured, however, one evening, to propose the matter to my step-father, who gave it a more favorable attention than I expected: but said, that for certain reasons, of which I felt the force, the business must be delayed for a few months. After a little time, it was agreed between him and an uncle of mine in Norwich, that they would sell a part of my lands, give a bond for a deed, and take on themselves the risk of my life and fidelity. This was a generous action. I secured them as soon as I was legally able.

I prepared for college under the tuition of Rev. Mr. White, of Bolton, an accurate linguist and able instructor. I entered Yale college in 1750, being then in my nineteenth year, and graduated in 1754. While I was a member of college, I had two fits of sickness; but by the good hand of Providence was carried safely through both. In my last year, I fell into a languid state, which continued for some months; but by returning home and applying myself moderately to the labours of the field, I regained my usual health. At college I had too much neglected bodily exercise, which is absolutely necessary for the health of students.

In the course of this year, there were some deaths in college, which deeply impressed my mind with a sense of the uncertainty of life, the necessity of religion and the importance of a good hope. I felt a conviction of my sinfulness, lamented it before God, sought His mercy, and seemed to myself, as if religion was my choice ; but was much discouraged by an apprehension, that I was one of the non-elect. I spent much time in secret exercises. As I was walking and meditating, one day, in solitude and anxiety, I reasoned thus with myself. "A Saviour has come to open a way of salvation for sinners. Salvation is offered, and the terms are stated. The offer is to all, and the terms are the same for all. In God there is no insincerity. To Him belong secret things ; things only which are revealed belong to me. There can be no decree, which frustrates the Divine promises. If I comply with the terms, the benefits promised are mine. God has chosen men to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. It concerns me to make my election sure by adding to my faith, virtue, &c. By faith and patience I may inherit the promises."

By thus arguing with myself, my anxiety was relieved, my mind composed, and my hope strengthened. Soon after this I made a profession of religion in the church in Bolton ; and there, for the first time, I came to the Lord's table.

After I had taken my degree, I came to Springfield, first parish, to teach a grammar school, and was admitted a boarder in the family of Rev. R. Breck, the minister of the parish, who kindly assisted me in my professional studies. I had the happiness of the company of Mr. *Whitney*,* a licensed candidate, who then resided in the family.

* The Rev. Dr. Whitney of Brooklyn, Conn. The friendship which commenced between them at this early period was mutually cherished, till the close of Dr. L's life. Doctor W. survives his venerable friend, and it is understood that he is now at the advanced age of 90, in comfortable health, and in the possession of a good degree of intellectual vigour.

In January, 1756, by advice of Mr. Breck, I offered myself as a candidate for the ministry, to an Association of ministers then sitting in Suffield, who examined, approved and recommended me.

In March following, in consequence of advice from neighboring ministers, I was invited by the parish, of which I am now the pastor, then vacant by the death of Rev. S. Hopkins, to preach as a candidate for settlement. In July I received an unanimous call, and in August received ordination. This was the only vacancy, in which I preached as a candidate, and I was the only candidate employed by the parish.

Some time after my ordination, realizing, from a little experience, the greatness of my work and my own insufficiency for it; considering how much might depend on my fidelity in it, and fearing I had undertaken it presumptuously, I set apart a day for secret devotion, having a special regard to my ministerial work. My meditations and resolutions on that day I committed to writing for my future use and benefit.

After invoking God's presence and assistance, I called to mind the mercies which I had experienced from my childhood to that time, more particularly marking such as had been distinguished. I acknowledged my high obligations, lamented my unworthy returns, sought forgiveness of sins past, and implored grace for the time to come.

I then made a fresh dedication of myself to God, with resolutions of future obedience to His will, and of fidelity in His service.

My resolutions were, in substance, as follows :

With regard to my devotions, I resolved,

That I would direct my morning thoughts to God, and spend some of my earliest moments in conversing with Him—That at evening I would recollect the sins and errors of the day, seeking God's mercy for pardon, and His grace for future security, and would review occurrences in Providence with suitable reflections

upon them—That I would anticipate the seasons of devotion, when I foresaw probable diversions—That I would transact ordinary business in the fear of God, set Him before me, and act under a sense of His presence—That I would seek a more intimate acquaintance with religion in its doctrines and duties, and make it the rule of my conduct and the source of my comfort.

With regard to the government of myself, I resolved,

To use God's creatures with sobriety—To exclude vain and sinful thoughts—To suppress rising corruptions—to avoid foreseen temptations, and resist such as might suddenly assail me—To set a watch before me in places of known danger—To guard against rash and unadvised speech—To keep my passions in subjection, and acquire, as far as possible, an habitual command of them.

In my treatment of men, I resolved,

To preserve a sacred regard to truth in my words, and to justice in my conduct—To be tender of characters—Kind to the needy—Meek under supposed injuries—Thankful for favours—Hospitable to strangers—Condescending in cases of difference—Courteous and peaceable to all men.

In my ministerial character and work, I resolved,

To cultivate in my heart, and exemplify in my life, that religion which I had undertaken to preach—To compose my sermons with perspicuity, and accommodate them to the circumstances of my people—To attend on my ministry, even though I might incur worldly loss—To select subjects of real importance, and handle them faithfully, though I myself should fall under the censure of my own preaching—To improve Providences in my preaching—To commend myself to the consciences of my hearers—In things indifferent, to make, not my own will and humour, but the common peace and edification the rule of my conduct—To visit, advise and comfort my people as occasion might

require; but not to spend, in ceremonious and useless visits, the time which ought to be employed in my study—To attend to the calls of rich and poor indifferently, without preferring one before another—To write my sermons with care, and seek Divine direction when I entered on the composition of them—To approach God's house with collection of thought and with a petition for the presence of his grace—To speak that only which might be profitable, and to keep back nothing that was so—To choose out acceptable, but upright words—To pay particular attention to the youth in my preaching—To examine what effect my preaching has on myself, and pray that it may have a saving effect on my hearers—To commend my people often to the grace of God, and to remember at his throne their various particular cases—In all my religious inquiries to make the sacred oracles my guide, and never to receive for doctrine the commandments of men.

Having formed and written these resolutions, I laid them before God, and concluded with this prayer:—"My gracious God, these resolutions I have formed in thy presence, and, I hope, in thy fear. My performance will depend on thy grace. This I now humbly implore. Let it be present with me, and sufficient for me. I plead no worthiness of my own, for none have I to plead; but other and better arguments abound. They are such as thou hast put into my mouth and into my heart. Let these prevail. I plead thine abundant mercy; the righteousness and intercession of thy Son; the power and goodness of thy Spirit; the free offers of thy help made in thy word; thy command that I should seek thy Spirit, and the promise annexed to the command. May I not also plead my relation to thy people? Thou hast put me into the ministry. I know not how much the salvation of others may depend on my fidelity. Let not my sins and my unworthiness hinder my receiving such a supply of thy grace, as may be necessary to the success of my ministry. Let not my iniquities stand in the

way of the salvation of any one among my fellow-sinners. However it may ultimately fare with me, my heart's desire and prayer for my people is, That they may be saved."

The transactions of this day I have repeatedly reviewed; and the review, I hope, has quickened me to duty; at least it has humbled me for my neglects.

In the evening of March 30, 1758, there was an occurrence, which I ought to remember with admiration and gratitude.

Late in the evening I was called to visit a family on a particular occasion, at the distance of two miles from my lodging. When I returned it was nearly midnight. Within about fifty rods of home, my horse stumbled, fell and threw me over his head. When he rose, I found my left foot entangled in the stirrup. As I attempted to disengage it, the horse, being affrighted, cast up his heels and ran, dragging me after him. My situation forbade the hope of human aid, and prevented all efforts of my own. I committed myself to Providence, perhaps with as much calmness as my condition would permit; at least with as much as my mind was capable of. The horse made several turns, some so short that he almost trode on me. I was not in a situation to measure time, or ground; but the horse must have run with me a number of rods. At length my foot was disengaged, and I rose without feeling any injury, except some contusions by being dragged on the rough and frozen ground. A circumstance, trifling in itself, was the probable cause of my preservation. I had, on the preceding day, exchanged my shoes, and put on a pair in a state of decay, which I had not worn for a length of time. As it was evening, when I rode out, I wore the shoes which I had on. The horse, in plunging, pressed my foot so far forward, that the stirrup came over my shoe buckle, and there hung. The leather being old and tender, gave way, and the strap which held the buckle

was torn off with a part of the quarter. Had the leather been firm, my foot probably would not have been released.

Life often depends on circumstances, which are beyond human intention, or fore-thought. The way of a man is not in himself. A horse is a vain thing for safety. A life preserved by God's interposing providence, ought to be devoted to the kind preserver.

May 16, 1759, I was married to Miss Elizabeth Dwight, younger daughter of Capt. Seth Dwight, of Hatfield. This connection laid a foundation for much family comfort. She has ever been a great blessing in her place, and in all her relations.

Oct. 19, 1767, my fourth child, *Samuel*, aged ten months, died with the rattles. His mother was with her friends at Hatfield. O, what agonies he felt, wholly unconscious of the moral cause. When, in his suffocation, he earnestly whispered "Pa—, Pa—," stretched forth his trembling hands and directed his anxious eyes to me, I plainly perceived what confidence he placed in my ability to relieve his distress. He seemed to wonder at my neglect.

What relief I should have felt, if I could have told him my impotence! His earnest looks toward an impotent parent, whose attention he had before experienced, admonished me to direct my faith toward that heavenly Parent, who wants neither goodness, nor power.

My steady aim in preaching has been to promote real religion in temper and practice, and to state and apply the doctrines of the gospel in a manner best adapted to this end. Keeping this end in view, I have avoided unprofitable controversy. I have never started objections against a plain doctrine to shew my agility in running them down. I have been careful not to awaken disputes, which were quietly asleep, nor to waste my own and my hearers' time by reproving imaginary faults, or indifferent customs. Among these I have reckoned the *fashions of dress*. I was once, and once only, requested to preach against prevailing fashions. A remote

inhabitant of the parish, apparently in a serious frame, called upon me one day, and pressed the necessity of bearing my testimony against this dangerous evil. I observed to him, that as my people were generally farmers in middling circumstances, I did not think they took a lead in fashions; if they followed them, it was at a humble distance, and rather to avoid singularity, than to encourage extravagance—that as long as people were in the habit of wearing clothes, they must have some fashion, or other, and a fashion that answered the ends of dress, and exceeded not the ability of the wearer, I considered as innocent, and not deserving reproof. To this he agreed; but said, what grieved him was to see people *set their hearts* so much on fashions. I conceded, that as modes of dress were trifles compared with our eternal concerns, to set our hearts upon them must be a great sin. But I advised him to consider, that to set our hearts *against* such trifles was the same sin, as to set our hearts *upon* them; and as his fashion differed from those of his neighbors, just in proportion as he set his heart *against theirs*, he set his heart *upon his own*. He was therefore doubly guilty of the very sin which he imputed to others. And I desired him to correct his own fault, which he could not but know, and to hope that his neighbors were less faulty than himself, and less faulty than he had uncharitably supposed them to be.

I could not but reflect, how easily men deceive themselves, and how necessary it is, that we often apply the questions which our Saviour puts to the hypocrite, “Why beholdest thou the mote in thy brother’s eye and considerest not the beam in thine own?” It is very unhappy if we make a censorious spirit toward others, a sign of grace in ourselves. “Let nothing be done through vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

As I enjoyed the friendship of my people without interruption, so I was happy to see them in peace among themselves. They were undisturbed by any religious controversy, until the year 1772, when the baptistical controversy arose, which, for a short time, gave them some disquietude, and me some concern.

Some years before my settlement, a baptist society had been formed in that part of this town, which was afterward the second parish. They had settled a minister of public education, respectable talents, and a liberal mind; the Rev. *Edward Upham*. A few members of the baptist society belonged to my parish. The society being small, his support failed, and he removed to Newport. The second parish afterward settled a minister, under whom both denominations united with apparent cordiality. The members of the late baptist church covenanted with their pedo-baptist brethren to commune at the same table. In 1772 Mr. Upham returned to occupy a farm, which he owned in the place. At the instance of some of his former hearers he resumed his ministerial functions, in consequence of which there was a considerable defection from the second parish; and three, or four families within my parish, who had been his former hearers, now attended his ministry. He preached, a few times, at private houses in my parish, and administered baptism to two or three subjects. On these occasions he introduced the baptist controversy. At the same time, pamphlets in opposition to infant baptism and sprinkling, were industriously circulated among my people; particularly *Anonymous letters to Bishop Hoadly*. I felt it my duty to preach on the controversy. The sermons which I preached were soon published at the desire of my people, and have been several times re-published.

The people who withdrew from my ministry, shewed no bitterness. They appeared to act on principle; they treated me with friendly respect, occasionally attended my meeting, requested

my presence in their family afflictions, and always seemed to be gratified by my visits. Such as survived Mr. Upham's ministry, returned to enjoy mine. One of them, I recollect in particular, requested the assessors to assess him in the parish taxes, for, he said, he wished to aid in supporting the gospel, where he enjoyed it. He desired communion with our church, to which he was cheerfully and unanimously admitted.

Those baptists in the second parish, who had covenanted to commune with the pedo-baptists, were stedfast in their covenant. The church, thus composed, remained unbroken, even after the parish was almost in a state of dissolution. The baptists in this town appeared, in that day, to be generally men of candour and integrity.

While the baptistical controversy was existing among us, a gentleman from a respectable town, at some distance, then vacant, conferred with me to know, whether I would accept an invitation to settle in that town. Though the question was unexpected, I needed no time to deliberate on an answer. I told him, I felt my insufficiency for the place mentioned to me; at present I perceived no disaffection to me among my people; I was decently supported by them; and my removal at the present conjuncture, however lucrative to myself, might be peculiarly dangerous to them; I therefore thought it my duty to stand in my lot.

The paper currency, which in 1775 began to be emitted for carrying on the revolutionary war, subjected me to the same embarrassments, which were experienced by many of my brethren. My salary being reduced to a small pittance, I was obliged to attend to agricultural cares and labours more than I chose. My ministerial labours were also increased by frequent conferences and lectures, and by the pastoral visits, to which a sickness prevalent for three successive seasons, indispensably called me. And my health began to be sensibly impaired. In the beginning of

the year 1778, the small pox became so rife in my vicinity, that I judged it prudent to inoculate myself and family, as none of us had had the disease. In March we went into the hospital. We all had the disease favourably. But not considering the debility naturally consequent to the disease, and to the regimen during its continuance, I immediately resumed my ministerial labours, which were much increased by instances of danger and mortality in the hospitals, where no other minister could attend. I soon felt my constitution yielding; in August I wholly desisted from my work. In December I had, by journeying and other means, regained so much strength, that I ventured into the pulpit; but after about four months, my complaints returning, I took leave of the pulpit, little expecting ever to stand and speak there again. However, after about eighteen months, I had collected so much strength, that from a seat in the meeting-house, I spake to my people about fifteen minutes; but by that time I was so overcome, that, leaving the assembly to pray and read among themselves, I retired to my house and to my bed. Feeling no lasting injury from this short exercise, I ventured to repeat it, and by October was able to perform one short service in a day.

My people were now in a state of great tranquillity, faithfully attending at God's house, patiently hoping and waiting for my recovery, satisfied with my poor and short performances, and such better supplies as I sometimes procured for them, and, when both these failed, accepting the pious and charitable labours of the deacons and other christian brethren. But in this encouraging period, there was an occurrence which much disturbed the harmony of the people, and probably retarded the return of my health.

Toward the end of October, 1780, a *John Watkins* came into the parish, and began to preach in its extremities without my knowledge. He came originally from England, but directly from France, in an American ship, on board of which was a young

man of my parish, with whom he there contracted an acquaintance. He professed to have had the charge of a large congregation in England—to have been a warm advocate of the American cause—to have suffered much by pleading and writing in its defence—to have left his country, flock, family and interest, and to have fled hither, that he might escape the rage of political persecution. He made great pretensions to piety, called himself a disciple of *Whitefield*, talked much about his conversion, expressed great indifference to the world, an ardent affection to my people, an anxious concern for them in their destitute condition, and an earnest desire to serve the interest of their souls. He brought no credentials from England; but imputed the omission to the precipitancy of his flight in a moment of danger, having by force effected an escape from a king's ship, on board of which he had been impressed by the direction of the officers of government, to prevent his influence in favour of America. (But though his flight was so sudden, I found that he had leisure to collect and bring with him large parcels of manuscripts.) He exhibited some testimonies, that he had sometimes officiated as a chaplain on board the ship, in which he came from France.

The defect of credentials was easily overlooked in a man of so much patriotism, piety and benevolence; especially under the existing circumstances of my people. He was invited into the pulpit to supply for a single Sabbath. Some who heard him, wished to hear him again. He soon was hired, by desire of the parish, to supply for a number of Sabbaths. His manner of preaching was vehement and vociferous; but his matter generally crude and unconnected. There were some good observations, which seemed to be delivered from his manuscripts; but there was much trash and error, of which the judicious hearers gave *him* the credit.

He appointed frequent lectures and conferences in different parts of the parish, and seemed to prefer *evening* exercises. He

acted as officially as if he had been the settled minister of the parish ; I was seldom consulted, and seldom seen by him, except on the Lord's day. He laboured to disaffect the minds of my people to me, and in some instances he was for a time successful. In those whom he thought friendly to him he endeavored to excite prejudices against such as he judged to be otherwise. In short he acted in the genuine character of an impostor.

After he had preached in the pulpit seven sabbaths, and also a thanksgiving, on which his performance was more intolerable than usual, the dissatisfaction of the people became so apparent, that he abruptly left the pulpit, and set up a private meeting, on which a small number attended for a short time. But he proceeded not far, "for his folly was made manifest to all men ;" and he withdrew, and went where he could find a place.

He, however, left some minds soured with the prejudices, and tinctured with the errors, which he had infused by his preaching, especially by his private lectures and conferences. He had publicly and privately reviled the standing ministry—had taught that every saint has a right to preach, who can find hearers—that saints certainly know each other's hearts, and all whom *they* cannot fellowship are unregenerate—that the church ought to admit none to communion, but those whom she *knows* to be regenerate, and none ought to offer themselves to communion, but they who know themselves to be such—that, in scripture, besides the *literal*, there is a *mystical*, *spiritual* sense, which none but *saints* understand, and which is immediately communicated to them by the *spirit of God*, &c. &c. And these sentiments *some* had imbibed.

A few of the members withdrew from the church. A committee was appointed to confer with them. The reasons which they assigned in justification of their conduct were, "that the church was impure, discipline lax, the unregenerate were admitted and retained." In this period I hired supplies for the pulpit, and de-

sisted from preaching, except when supplies failed. But as soon as I had recovered a competency of strength for application to my studies, I endeavored to correct people's sentiments on the before-mentioned subjects.

I preached two sermons on the *marks of false teachers, or wolves in sheep's clothing*, which, about five years after, were published at the desire of a number of my people, and some of my brethren in the ministry, to whom I had communicated them. They have had about ten editions; one in Edinburgh, by the influence of Dr. Erskine, who politely sent me a copy.

About the same time I preached two sermons on the qualifications for *church membership*, and the nature of *christian fellowship*. These were, sometime after, published in the *American Preacher*, and have since passed through two, or three editions.

I also preached a sermon on the presumption and impiety of all pretensions to a *certain knowledge* of other men's sanctity. This was not published. It has since been inserted in a volume.

I preached a sermon on the *perspicuity of the scriptures*, and the absurdity of seeking a *mystical*, in distinction from the plain literal sense. This was published in the *American Preacher*, and has since been re-printed in one of my volumes.

These sermons appeared to have a happy effect on the minds of many who heard them.

By reason of my infirmity, the *Lord's supper* had, for an unusual length of time, been discontinued. But as soon as I thought myself able to administer it, I appointed it, and was so happy as to have the assistance of one of my ministerial brethren, in the solemnity. There was a general and serious attendance upon it, and a blessing seemed to follow it. Animosities and evil speakings subsided, and brotherly affection revived. On this occasion I could not but reflect on the error of some churches, which, when diffi-

culties arise, discontinue this festival of love; as if the existence of sickness were a good reason for the disuse of remedies.

Though the church judged the reasons of withdrawalment assigned by their dissenting brethren insufficient, yet candidly hoping, that their conduct proceeded from mistake, rather than perverseness, and that time and reflection would correct their error, she resolved not to censure them, but leave the door open for their return. Most or all of them returned; some very soon, and harmony was restored. I regained my health in a comfortable degree, and my services were as acceptable as in former times. Painful experience seems to have operated to fortify the minds of my people against the influence of intruding and disorganizing teachers.

Before the dissatisfied brethren returned, one of them, a sensible and serious man, made me a friendly visit, and we entered into free conversation. I asked him the reason of his withdrawalment. He said, it was the neglect of discipline in the church. I requested him to substantiate his charge by pointing out an instance of gross and criminal neglect. He named a member, who, he said, was habitually and grossly intemperate. I admitted the fact, and asked him, what ought to be done? He said, the brethren ought to deal with him and endeavor to reclaim him. I inquired, "Have *you* ever dealt with him?" He acknowledged he had not. I demanded, "Do you know that nobody else has?" "No," said he, "but I never heard that any pains were taken with him." I told him, the church had done all that they could, except actual excommunication, which he was ever ready to prevent by a confession. Individuals had treated with him. A number of members, convened for the purpose, had admonished and reproved him. "Now, brother," said I, "you have imputed to the church a sin, of which you know yourself to be guilty, and know not that any other member is so. Go, deal with that broth-

er, whom you have inexcusably neglected. If you reclaim him, you will do him an eternal kindness, and give joy to the multitude of your brethren.”

It was not long before this brother returned to our fellowship. But, alas! the unhappy offender remained unreformed.

An honest man, through error of judgment, may take a wrong step; but when he thinks on his ways, he will, like this man, return to the way of truth. But he who is drawn away by worldly lust, will endeavor to justify himself, and will wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

When church members withdraw from the communion of their brethren, the common excuse is, “Discipline is neglected.” This is the stalking horse, on which they ride off.

I rarely have known an instance, where the brother, who assigns this reason, will dare to say, he has ever taken one step, administered one reproof, spoken one word, to reclaim the persons, with whom he pretends to be dissatisfied. The charge, which he throws on the church, recoils on himself. The honest christian, who cannot bear them that are evil, will be ready to assist his brethren in reforming them. He will be watchful and strengthen the things which remain. Many who withdraw from the church under pretensions of pious zeal, manifestly betray their own duplicity and corruption.

The apostle speaks of some, who withdrew from the churches of Christ, as acting under the influence of a *charm*, or *fascination* practised upon them by artful deceivers. This is doubtless the case with some in the present day. They are influenced, not by rational conviction, but by urgent feeling.

A very serious woman belonging to this church lived in the neighborhood of a man, who, though he never belonged to any church, nor professed any religion, yet was assiduous in his labours to detach her from her present connection, and induce her to join

the baptists ; and she was sometimes visited by a baptist preacher, and finally persuaded to attend his meeting. A continual din in her ears disturbed her nerves and affected her mind.

She came to me with a request to be *dismissed* from this church. She seemed to entertain an idea, that her covenant vows were binding ; but *our dismissal* of her would release her from them.

I told her, that her covenant with God and his people was sacred, her vows had been recorded in heaven, and we could not dissolve them. If she should violate them, the guilt must lie on herself. I observed to her, that there could be no dismissal, but by excommunication for obstinate wickedness, or by recommendation to some regular church—that if on good reasons she desired a recommendation to such church, doubtless we should grant it.

She said, if she could not be dismissed, she wished to be recommended to such a baptist church, in a neighboring town. I asked, if that church would receive her on our recommendation. She said, no—she must be baptized anew in *their* way, and she did not know but *their* way was as good as *ours*.

I endeavored to convince her of the validity of her infant baptism, and the sacredness of her covenant-obligations, and of the guilt and danger of renouncing them. Her reason seemed to be convinced ; but her feelings remained the same. She gave me this summary answer ; “ I *hope* it is right to join the baptists, for I *feel* as if I *must* go.” I advised her to delay, and look well to her goings. But no delay was allowed. The next sabbath she was plunged. In two or three years the family removed to another town. She returned not to the church ; but it was manifest, she was not perfectly satisfied with the step she had taken, and a little delay would probably have prevented it. She acted under the influence of a *charm*.

1781, Autumn. Travelling for my health, I called at a tavern for refreshment. The landlord soon introduced to me a gentleman, who, he told me, was a *universalist*. I supposed his aim was to bring forward a dispute on the subject of future punishment. After customary civilities, I told the gentleman my health was not good; I conversed but little, and wholly declined disputes; I should, however, be gratified, if he would give me his opinion on the controverted question. He was very courteous, and readily answered me in this manner: "I will state my opinion by reference to the story of the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt. The people came to the *red sea*, saw the Egyptians on their rear, found themselves entangled between mountains, and fell into murmuring and despair. Moses told them there was no danger, the sea would open a way for their escape. They did not believe it; but Moses believed it. The sea opened and they arrived to the other shore. (He should have remembered that the Egyptians, pursuing them, were all drowned.) The people were now as safe as Moses. But Moses by his faith had the comfort of the deliverance beforehand. To apply this to the question before us. Believers and unbelievers will be equally safe and happy in the other world. All the difference is, that believers have the comfort of salvation in this world, which unbelievers have not."

I answered him; Sir, I understand your system. I will trouble you only to give me an explanation of one passage of scripture; "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "The explanation," said he, "is very easy. Christ says, *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink, &c. These, i. e. these sins, these unkind dispositions shall go away into everlasting destruction; shall cease, and be no more known.*" Very well, I replied; now as an honest interpreter of scripture, you will adhere to your own rule. The judge says to

them on his right hand, *I was hungry, and ye gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, &c.* *The righteous*, i. e. according to your interpretation, these *righteous dispositions* ; these *kind, hospitable virtues*, shall go into life eternal. You have disposed of the *vices* of the wicked, and of the *virtues* of the righteous. Now be so good as to tell me, what becomes of the *persons themselves*. He gave no direct answer, but diverted to observations foreign to the question.

Men attached to a particular scheme will bend to it every text, which can be made to yield to their violence. Texts too stubborn for their strength they will throw aside. An honest and impartial mind is necessary in our inquiries after truth. “The meek God will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way.”

In the course of my ministry I have often encouraged special meetings for devotion, and sometimes evening meetings. I have chosen to attend them myself, when I could with convenience ; and I have preached, when my ability would permit. If I have not preached, I have usually made a short address to the people, and especially to the youth, on some religious subject, suggested either by a recent providence, or by what has been read. I have seen some good effects of these meetings, and have experienced benefit from them myself. But, when I could not attend them, I have desired, that they might be under the direction of some discreet elderly christians. I have endeavored to guard my people against an error too common, where religious conferences are much attended ; I mean, substituting *these* in the place of divine institutions, and making them a kind of *thermometer*, by which to prove the degree of heat and cold in religious zeal. When we hear of a *revival* of religion in any place, the unusual frequency and the general attendance of lectures and conferences by day and by night are adduced as decisive evidences of it. When these meetings become less frequent, or less full, it is said, “Religion appears

to be on the decline." We ought always to place religion where the scripture has placed it, in holiness of heart and life ; and to regard devotional duties as instrumental to this end. We are never to place the essence of religion in things which are but the means of it.

A serious man from a neighboring parish, being one evening at my house on secular business, took occasion to inform me, that there was a great revival of religion in his vicinity. I expressed my satisfaction in the intelligence ; but asked him, wherein the happy revival discovered itself : Whether the people appeared to be more humble, more condescending, more meek and peaceable, more kind and charitable, better united in their social relations, more virtuous in their manners, &c. He could not answer particularly with respect to these things ; but said, " People were much engaged in attending religious meetings ; they had private lectures as often as any transient preacher could be obtained ; and they had conferences very frequently—almost every evening." I observed to him, that an attendance on the word preached was highly important, and a hopeful indication ; but asked him, how it was on the *Lord's day* ; whether they attended on the instituted worship of *that day* better than they used to do : (for I knew they had been shamefully negligent of that duty.) " Why—no—" said he, " we don't go to meeting on the sabbath." What, I inquired, do you neglect God's institutions to observe your own ? The prophet marks this as a token of the *decay* of religion among the Jews. He answered, " We do not like our parish minister very well." I observed to him, that if they had a minister, who did not preach the gospel, this was a reason why *he* should leave the *pulpit* ; not why *they* should leave the *meeting-house* ; and they ought to take regular measures for his removal, and the introduction of a better man. " O," said he, " I don't pretend, but that *he* preaches the *gospel* ; but there are some subjects, on which he

does not preach." Perhaps he preaches on them, when you are absent. He continued, "I don't like his *manner* of preaching. He is not so fervent, so engaged, as I wish; he uses his notes too much," &c. Friend, said I, you well remember, that Paul, Apollos and Cephas all preached in Corinth. They preached the same gospel; but had different voices, and different modes of speaking. And among their hearers, one said, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; and a third, I am of Cephas. Now on this occasion, Paul told them, they were *carnal*. Apply this to yourself. On the authority of Paul, I tell you, that you are carnal. He answered, "I do not see, but that it is so." He had the honesty to confess his fault; whether he had the virtue to reform, I do not know.

Occasional meetings and private conferences may be very useful, if properly conducted; but they are matters of christian discretion, not of divine institution. I know of no apostolic precept or example, which elevates these to a place among the institutions of God. When Paul came to Troas, where was a christian church, and doubtless some stated place for publick worship, he waited seven days for the return of the first day of the week, on which day the disciples were wont to come together for social worship. Then he spake to them, and continued his speech to an unusual length.

When he preached in Ephesus, where a church was *not* formed, "he taught publicly and *from house to house*." As the christians had no stated place in which they could claim the privilege of assembling, they convened where they could. Paul first taught in the Jewish synagogue; meeting with opposition there, he removed to the school of Tyrannus, and here he continued for a length of time, teaching *daily*.

His teaching, though from house to house, from the synagogue to the school, where he could obtain leave, was publick; not pri-

vate. His teaching *daily* in the school was incompatible with his spending much time in private houses. He always chose the most open manner of teaching. He never imitated those seducers who creep into private houses.

July, 1782. I was an instrument of rescuing two children from the jaws of death.

Riding out in the early part of the day, I turned to the river to water my horse. In the river and contiguous to the shore, I saw, at some distance, a raft of boards, on which a young girl, with an infant child in her arms, was diverting herself. Apprehensive that she might be in danger, I determined, that, when my horse had drank, I would ride to her, and warn her to depart. Scarcely had the purpose taken place, before I heard a shriek, and saw her fall from the upper side of the raft into the river. I hastened to the place, at the same time calling for help. At the place where she fell I could make no discovery. Instantly passing to the down stream side, I saw her fingers holding by the last and undermost board. I threw myself down, seized her arm, raised her head above water when I joyfully saw the infant under her other arm. Lest she should lose it, I took it from her, and reached it to a woman, who by this time had come upon the raft. I then drew out the girl, who was able to stand, and soon able to speak. They belonged to a family who lived near the river. In the evening I visited the family, and endeavored to lead them, and especially the girl, to a proper improvement of the danger and deliverance.

April 23, 1784, died Rev. R. Breck, of Springfield, aged 71. He had been a patron and father to me, and his friendship continued to his death. He endured a long and grievous sickness with patience, and met death with resignation and hope. Agreeably to his desire, expressed to me a few weeks before his death. I delivered a discourse at his funeral, which was published at the request of his affectionate people.

After the war with Britain had ceased, and a stable medium was restored, I advised my people to make a settlement of the arrears due to me, which probably might be done in my life time, more easily than after my decease. A considerable sum found in arrear, I remitted with only this precaution, that in future my salary should be kept good in substance, as well as in name. Where a remission is made on condition only of future justice, it may be considered as an absolute gratuity. The parish voted their thanks. I knew how delicate a matter it was to call up old arrears. I was sensible, that in most societies, there were some, who could not see, and some who would not effectually feel the obligations of justice in social transactions. I considered that my own, and my wife's patrimony, not yet wholly expended, though somewhat reduced, afforded a prospect of a comfortable subsistence without the arrears due from the parish; and I felt a disposition rather to make a sacrifice of private property, than of social tranquillity. I would not *purchase* a parish; but when I had one, I would make some sacrifice to preserve it from ruin. Some of my people told me I relinquished too much. It might naturally be believed, that these would not appropriate any benefit from the relinquishment. What sacrifice a minister ought to make in the cause of the gospel, can be determined by no fixed rule. It is a matter of discretion. He is not bound to do more, than every other man, of the same worldly ability, *ought* to do; but he is bound to do more than almost any other man *will* do. They who urge the necessity of disinterestedness in ministers, when they themselves act with unvarying selfishness, are guilty of palpable hypocrisy. True religion must be the same in all.

April 27, 1787, died my eldest son, Solomon, as he had just entered his 28th year. The strict virtue of his life, his exemplary patience through a long and tedious sickness, his calm resignation and humble hope in the view of approaching death, gave sweet

consolation to his parents and friends under an affliction which was deeply felt.

April 27, 1789, the family had an evening no less distressing, than that in which my son, just two years before, closed this mortal scene.

Mrs. Lathrop, for some time, had been afflicted with rheumatic complaints, which concentrated in her breast, and were attended with excruciating pains, and violent, but fruitless efforts to vomit. In one of those efforts, on the morning of this day, she vomited nearly a pint of blood. She was weakened by the discharge, but still able to walk her room. In the evening, as she lay on her bed, the physicians and some other company being with the family in her room, she gave notice, that she felt the blood flowing in her stomach, and should soon vomit. Immediately a copious hemorrhage ensued. The blood issued in as full a current, as could be discharged from her mouth, until the fountain seemed to be exhausted. She fainted—she ceased to breathe—her eyes were closed—her limbs were motionless. I viewed her as gone—gone to return no more. But God had mercy in reserve for us. In a short time she breathed—she moved a hand—she opened her eyes—she spake. How refreshing was the voice! Still for many days her case appeared desperate—more than once we thought her dead. We experienced great attention from our neighbors, who felt with me, and mourned the anticipated loss of one whom they esteemed and loved. She enjoyed the comforts of religion, and seemed to choose a present removal to a better world, rather than a return to this. In a few months she was able to bear the motion of a carriage; in about four years she regained a considerable degree of strength.

In 1791, I was honored with the degree of doctor in divinity from the university, in which I received my education. This I

valued as a token of respect from my literary friends; but it added nothing to the merit of the recipient.

In 1792, I was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In 1793, I was elected a professor of divinity in the university in which I was educated.

Here was an important question to be decided. If I should accept the appointment, I became entitled to a salary double in value to that which I received from my parish; could expect an honorable maintenance, and perhaps a surplus for the benefit of my family; my labours would be lightened, as for nearly three months in the year I should be excused from service; I might be under the best advantages for mental improvement; could have daily access to learned company; and should be placed in a sphere of extensive usefulness and high respectability. On the other hand; I had now passed the age of sixty; it would be a new sphere of action, to which, at that time of life, it might be difficult to accommodate myself; I must break connections, which time had rendered strong and agreeable; my parish was in a critical state, being under the necessity of erecting a meeting-house soon, and not agreed in the location; and a vacancy at such a time might be fatal to their peace. There was no disaffection to me among the people. As many as I conversed with strongly remonstrated against my removal. And in addition to other considerations, I much doubted, whether my talents were adapted to such a sphere. The latter arguments prevailed; and I gave a negative answer.

I was advised even within my own parish, to improve the advantage now in my hands for obtaining an augmentation of my salary. But I feared, that to have stated such a condition of continuance with my people, when, even without it, duty seemed to require my continuance with them, would be too near an approach

to duplicity. Besides, I have always valued those favours highest, which proceed from liberal, or, at least, from grateful sentiments.

In 1795, my parish, in consideration of the depreciated state of my salary, erected and finished for me a good barn, my old one being decayed beyond repair. It was worth two hundred dollars. Many other gratuities I have received from particular persons, under the former and the present paper depreciation. In my long sickness my physician made no charge for his advice and attendance. I believe he usually treated me with the same liberality.

A few families in the south parish were, on their petition, annexed to my parish in 1793. Among these, two respectable householders, who were baptists in sentiment, as were their fathers before them, expressed to me a desire to be baptized, and received to our communion. They said, they were in charity with us; for though they esteemed baptism by immersion, and at adult age, to be most agreeable to divine institution, yet as the water had been applied to us in the name of the Trinity, and we, at mature age, had professed our faith, and, they believed, had acted conscientiously, they were free to have fellowship with us. All that they requested was, that we would exercise the same candour toward them. They had never been baptized in any form. They should be better satisfied with immersion, than affusion; they were willing to receive the ordinance from my hands.

I consented to baptize them by immersion; mentioned to the church their desire and my consent, appointed a time and place for the administration, and no objection was made. On Lord's day, July 19, 1795, they made a profession of their faith, after the morning exercise; the assembly then proceeded to the river; there the solemnity was performed; in the afternoon they were admitted into the church. They are exemplary and peaceable members.

August 25, 1796, completed the fortieth year of my ministry, and the year completed a century from the incorporation of the parish. I invited the attendance of my people in the house of God, and delivered to them a discourse on *steadfastness in religion*. From the subject and the time, I took occasion to give them such a summary, as I could collect, of the most interesting occurrences relative to the town and parish, during the century, and especially during my ministry.

Seasons and circumstances will often give an impression to truths, which, at ordinary times, will be heard with indifference. The preacher ought to improve such advantages, whenever they are put into his hands.

Finding, on this occasion, the want of documents to make the early part of my narrative, as full as I wished, I could not but chide myself, that I had, in the beginning of my ministry, omitted to collect from the aged people a particular account of some occurrences, which would have interested their successors, but which are now irrecoverably lost.

The sermon, which I then preached, was printed, and has since been re-printed.

The prevalence of infidelity, and the circulation of deistical writings, some of which had appeared among my own people, induced me, in a discourse, at the fast, in May, 1797, to state, in a summary manner, the evidences of christianity, and to expose the futility of the cavils and objections made against it by deists. One main design of the discourse was to shew, that the infidel, as a rational being, is as much bound to give a reason for his *unbelief*, as the christian is to give a reason for his *faith*. It was immediately published at the desire and expense of some of my people; and it went abroad under the title of "God's challenge to infidels to defend their cause." It has passed through three editions.

Soon after this publication I had an opportunity to read Professor Robison's "Proofs of a conspiracy against religion and government." I perused it with a degree of astonishment; but was constrained, on the whole, to give it credence. The moral, political and religious state of a considerable part of Europe had for many years been such, as rendered it possible, and in some degree probable, that a conspiracy of this kind might exist. The insidious arts and incessant industry, with which infidels had long laboured to undermine the gospel, appeared consonant to the measures said to be adopted by these conspirators. The professor was a man of such high and extensive celebrity in the literary world, that, possessed of common discretion, he would not risk his reputation on the credit of a forgery, which could at once be detected. He referred to documents, the truth or falsity of which could easily be ascertained by such as would take the pains to examine them. In the horrid scene of wickedness which he described, men of publick character and literary talents were deeply implicated. These men, then living, were called by name. It was in their power, and for their interest, to confute the charge against them, if it was a calumny. The book had passed through two or three editions, and no answer, so far as I had heard, had been made to it. The appearance of it excited a considerable irritation in America among a particular class of men. Virulent attacks were made on the *private* character of the author; but nothing written that had the least tendency to invalidate his proofs; the credit of which depended on the documents; not on his personal character. I was therefore induced to give credit to the narrative. And finding that many of the nefarious sentiments imputed by Robison to the societies of Illuminists in Europe, were actually circulating in America, in books and periodical papers, I judged it my duty to guard my own people against them, and to warn them of the dangers, which threatened them and their coun-

try. I therefore, in September, 1798, preached in my own pulpit, and soon after in Springfield, the sermon, which has appeared under the title of "The dangers of the times from infidelity and immorality, and especially from a lately discovered conspiracy against religion and government." The publication was encouraged by the people in Springfield and West-Springfield.

My parish for many years had felt the importance of erecting a new meeting-house. A number of unsuccessful attempts had been made to agree on a location. In 1799, the controversy was happily terminated. Mr. John Ashley, a respectable inhabitant, offered the parish the sum of thirteen hundred pounds, as a fund for the support of the ministry, on condition, that within a time prescribed, an elegant and capacious house of worship should be erected and finished on ground, which he marked out, about half a mile north of the ground on which the then present house stood.

This proposal at once brought the long dispute to a crisis. By the acceptance or rejection of it, the question would probably be decided, whether the parish should any longer exist as *one* religious society. Some in the neighborhood of the ancient house would feel an attachment to that ground. Those who had long contended for the new ground, would feel their attachment strengthened by Mr. Ashley's proposal, and would think all dissentients utterly unreasonable. If an opposition to the proposal should ultimately prevail, the parish would necessarily be divided, and perhaps dissolved. I interested myself in the business, and both publicly and privately gave my opinion in favour of accepting the proposal, and supported it by arguments, which I thought to be weighty. I observed to my people, that I knew the subject to be delicate, but as the proposed location would discommode my own and my sons' families, as much as any families in the parish, I could not be suspected of being under an unworthy influence. The proposal was accepted almost unanimously. The few who

hesitated, honorably acceded to the general sentiment. The work was promptly undertaken, cheerfully prosecuted, and happily accomplished.

On June 20, 1802, I preached to a serious and affected audience a valedictory sermon in the old meeting-house; and on the 24th day of the same month, which day completed a century from the erection of that house, I preached a dedicatory sermon in the new house. Both were printed.

In August, 1802, I preached a sermon at Northampton before the Missionary Society. Soon after, at the request of the committee of said society, I prepared two sermons, *on the christian sabbath*, for distribution in the new settlements. These were all published at the expense of the society.

On the public fast in April, 1802, I preached to my own people, and the next year to the people in Springfield, a sermon *on the uniformity and constancy of the divine government*. In this, after illustrating the leading sentiment, I endeavored to shew, that human governments ought to be, like the divine, steady and uniform, as far as the imperfection of men will permit; that there can be no free government without the influence of religious principles; that, as religion and government are connected, it must be the duty of ministers to preach on political subjects in this connection, and that the clamour against them on this ground has, in all ages, resulted from atheistical principles. This sermon was published at the request of the people in Springfield.

February, 1803. Riding alone in my cutter, I passed a man on foot, who belonged to my parish. He was nearly fifty years old—not a man of the most blameless character. I invited him to ride with me. A particular incident introduced religious conversation, to which he seemed not averse. I had before conversed with him. He would always receive advice and reproof without

offence, and never would deny the faults of which he was openly guilty. Our conversation was as follows:—

Mr. — why do you not attend publick worship?

“Because, I think, it will do no good. I mean to be an honest man—to injure no man.”

So far is well. No man can be a real christian without honesty. But this alone will not make a christian. There must be a holy heart; a heart to love God; to believe in Christ the only Saviour of lost sinners. There must be a conviction of sin, a godly sorrow for it, a hatred of it, a resolution and watchfulness against it in all its forms, and especially against the sins which most easily beset you; there must be a respect for all God’s commandments, and a humble reliance on the grace and mercy of God through the divine Redeemer.

“I know all this; and I know I am a sinner; and I would give all I have in the world, that I was a good man. I desire this above all things.”

Why then are you not a good man?

“I wish I was; but I can’t be. I can’t change my own heart. If it is ever changed, it must be done by the power of God’s spirit.”

It is true, that for a change of heart you are dependent on the grace of God. But there are some things, which you *can* do; and which you *will* do, if you really desire to be a good man. You can go to God’s house on his appointed day. That is the place where, and the time when you are to hope for God’s spirit. He begets men by the word of truth. Therefore be swift to hear. There were many in the apostles’ days, who received the spirit in the hearing of the word of faith. You can withdraw your foot from the place of temptation—you can lay apart the superfluity of naughtiness, and the gross forms of wickedness, which oppose the spirit.

“Yes; I can do all this; but it will do no good. My withdrawing from the tavern, and going to the place of worship will make no difference in my case. If God is pleased to send his holy spirit into my heart, and to renew it by his immediate power, I shall then be renewed. If not, I must remain as I am, and take my destiny. Nothing that I can do, will make my case better or worse—more or less hopeful. I hope God will do something for me. When *he* does it, then it *will* be done.”

But, my friend, you certainly deceive yourself. You say, you would give all you have in the world that you was a good man. But you won't give your bottle. They who are sensual, have not the spirit. And if you will not renounce sensuality, how will *you* have the spirit. If ever you become a good man, you will become a temperate man. If you desire to be a good man, be a temperate man now. This you can be. If you would give all you have, that you were a good man, you will give so much labor as to go to God's house and seek him there. If ever you become a good man, you will do this. Why will you not do it now? It is manifest, you do not wish to be a good man. You will not relinquish so small a thing as your bottle—nor take so small a walk as from your house to the meeting-house; though you know that so long as you retain the former, and neglect the latter, you cannot be the man, whom, you say, you wish to be. You are like those of whom God complains, that they will not frame their *doings* to turn to him. And how will he pardon you for this?

By this time we came to the place where it was convenient for him to leave me, and the conversation ended. I do not know that it had any effect. He seemed to be sensible that he was a sinner; and to think that it was no fault of his, if he continued such; because he was dependent on the grace of God, and his eternal destiny was fixed by God's sovereignty, and fixed unconditionally. In his last sickness, which was not many years after.

he was, to appearance, in a serious and thoughtful state of mind—was desirous of prayers from others. And he said, he employed himself in prayer all his time. He condemned his past manner of life, and seemed to have some reliance on divine mercy.

This person had lived in different parts of the country. Where he imbibed his fatalistical sentiments, I never knew. But his talk impressed on my mind the danger of such sentiments, and the duty of ministers to guard their people against them. The great doctrines of grace, such as renovation by the spirit of God, and justification by the righteousness of Christ, ought to be held up to view. But the gospel states them, and ministers ought to treat them in such a manner, as to encourage sinners in the use of the means of grace; not so as to embolden them in the neglect of these means. I have supposed, there is an analogy between the scheme of providence and the scheme of grace. In both we are dependent on God; and in both there are means to be used by us. And as by the common influence of providence weak man can do some things in order to the support of his body; so by that common influence of grace, which accompanies the gospel, fallen man can do some things in order to the conversion and salvation of his soul. And though there is no *natural*, or *promised* connection between the volitions or doings of a sinner, while he is a sinner, and the renovation of his corrupt nature; yet there may be a *hopeful* connection; because it is in the use of means, that this gracious change more commonly takes place. The apostle says, “God of his own will begets us by the word of truth. Therefore let every man be swift to hear.”

There is no certain connection between any man's *labor* and his *success* in his worldly calling. If he has success, this comes from God. It is a gift of his goodness; and his goodness is sovereign. It is not guided by human merit, but by his own perfect wisdom. Still we may act on the general principle, that the dili-

gent hand maketh rich. Prudent men pursue their worldly calling with as much industry, and as much cheerfulness, as if the connection between the means in use and the object in view, were ever so certain. Men love the world, and in regard to their worldly interest they generally reason properly and act prudently. They naturally have not a love to religion; and would excuse themselves from its obligations; hence in their reasonings on this subject they run into the grossest absurdities. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

In June, 1803, a youth, in his fifteenth year, by a sudden casualty suffered an internal injury under which he languished in extreme distress for a number of days, and then expired. He was a youth of a serious mind and amiable manners. In his illness he exhibited a pattern of patience and resignation, and expressed a calm hope of a blessed immortality.

On the Lord's day next preceding his death, a number of young people, returning from public worship, called at the house to see him. He received them with attention, and addressed them in the following manner:—

"You see, my friends, the situation that I am in. A few days ago, I was in health like you. By a sudden accident I am confined to my bed, and probably shall soon be laid in my grave. None of you know, how soon you may be in a condition like mine. You see in me the necessity of being early prepared for death. I advise you to think of the uncertainty of life, and to prepare for death immediately. Delay not such a work any longer; no, not for a single hour. I particularly advise you to reverence the sabbath, and the house of God. There are some young people, who are too vain in their talk on the sabbath, and too light and inattentive in their appearance in the time of worship. Avoid these evils. They will cause you to mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed, and to say, how have we hated in-

struction and our hearts despised reproof. Never use profane language. This is a sin, which young people too often practise. I have sometimes heard it with grief. Remember, that for every sinful word you speak, you must give an account. Obey and honour your parents, and treat all elderly people with respect. Ask counsel and instruction from them, that you may grow in wisdom and in favour with God and men. Read the scriptures, that you may learn the way of salvation, and turn your hearts and your feet into that way. You are dependent on God's grace. But you must seek it, if you hope to obtain it. Seek unto God betimes. Seek him while he may be found. I cannot say much. But I beg you to remember the little that I can say. I see you now in tears, and you think, you will follow my advice. But I fear, you will soon forget it. You will not always feel as you do now, while you are looking on my dying body, and hearing my feeble voice. But that you may bring my advice to mind, go sometimes to the place where my body will soon be laid. Perhaps a sight of the cloths which cover it, will remind you of my advice, and awaken your resolution to follow it. You know not how soon you may be laid near me. You think religion is important to me, because I am soon to die. It is as important to you, as it is to me; for you are as mortal as I am, though perhaps you are not to die quite as soon. Whenever you die, you will need its comforts, as much as I do now. I beg you to secure these comforts in season. And this is the season."

This was the substance of the young man's advice to his fellow youths, as related to me by his father, the next day, when I visited the family.

The father is a respectable man, and has ever appeared friendly to religion; but, on professed scruples, had delayed to attend the communion. I thought I might profit by the present occasion in renewing former advice. I spake to him in the following manner.

“I am exceedingly pleased with your son’s counsel to the young, and there is one part of it which strikes me with peculiar force. He advised them, now and then, to visit his grave, that they might better remember, and more deeply feel, his dying exhortation. This is so similar to the dying command of Christ, that I cannot forbear to remark to you the similitude.

“The Saviour, when he was on earth, spent the greater part of his ministry in giving good instructions to those who would hear him. When the time of his death drew near, his instructions were more frequent and affectionate; and he urged them by the solemn circumstances of his approaching death. He well knew that good counsels were easily forgotten; he therefore recommended the frequent remembrance of his death, as a mean to impress his words more deeply and more indelibly on the heart. The place of his burial could not be visited by his disciples in all ages, and in all parts of the world; and if it could, yet his body would not be there, for it was soon to rise. He therefore instituted a particular ordinance, as a representation and memorial of his death; and commanded, that this should be frequently observed in remembrance of him, to shew forth his death, till his second coming. The end for which he appointed this ordinance was, that we might remember him, and the words which he spake—remember his death and the benefits which it procured.

“Now, sir, you certainly think that your son gave his companions good advice, when he recommended their visiting his tomb, that they might revive a remembrance of his instructions; and you wish they would comply with it. And ought not we much rather to regard the dying command of the Saviour, who has required you and me and all to come to the place, where he is set forth as crucified for us; and there to awaken the recollection of his instructions and our resolution to obey them? Their

attention to your son's counsel is expedient; our obedience to the Saviour's command is indispensable."

At the next communion he was present as an affectionate spectator; and at the next following he was present as a devout communicant.

On the sabbath that followed the young man's death, I applied to the youth in general, the counsel which he had given to some of them; and urged their attendance at the communion, by the argument, which I had pressed on the father. This sermon is inserted in my fifth volume.

A sermon on the *infirmities and comforts of old age*, first preached to my own people, January, 1805, was soon after preached to the people in Springfield, at whose motion it was printed.

Two unhappy instances of *suicide* in Suffield, the latter in February, 1805, gave occasion to my sermons on that subject. They were first printed in Suffield; and afterwards revised and printed in Springfield.

A severe drought in the summer of 1805, suggested the duty of *seeking to God for rain*. I invited my people to assemble for that purpose, and delivered to them a sermon on the subject. The sermon was printed.

In October, 1805, the great bridge between Springfield and West-Springfield, which is nearly seventy rods long, and cost about thirty-seven thousand dollars, was completed, and the 30th day of that month appointed for opening it. Mr. Howard, the minister of Springfield, being infirm, application was made to me to deliver a discourse on that day. It was urged, that the concourse of people on so singular an occasion, would probably be great, and an apposite discourse might not only prevent irregularity and disorder among the people, but contribute to improve their sentiments and morals. I complied with the request. The day was fine;

the assembly numerous and profoundly attentive. The day passed with perfectly good order. A copy of the sermon was given to the proprietors, at their request, and published at their expense.

In December following, a foreigner, who had resided in my parish, but then lived in Springfield, was occasionally on the west side of Connecticut river, and very late in a dark evening, went from a house about half a mile north from the bridge with an intention to cross over to Springfield; but he was no more heard of.* The more probable and prevailing opinion was, that, the night being extremely dark, he passed beyond the path which turned to the bridge, and went forward, until he came to Agawam river, which empties into the Connecticut; and, the bank being steep and the water high, he plunged down the bank, and was carried off in the current. But as there had lately been a most daring robbery and murder on the publick road, a few miles east from Springfield, the minds of people were alive to the suspicion of murder; and a man was sent to *Albany* to learn from a pretended revealer of secrets, what was the fate of the man, who had so suddenly disappeared. This expedition, which was encouraged by some of my own people, as well as by others, was the occasion of my discourse, entitled, "Illustrations and reflections on Saul's consulting the witch of Endor." It was preached and published at the request of some of my people.

The workings of imagination in some people's minds on the event of this man's disappearance, brought to my recollection an incident in my neighborhood some years before.

A poor man, and not of the best character, came to my house in great agitation, and said to me: "You requested me to work for you to-day, and I told you, I would; but there has something

* His remains were found in, or near the river in East-Windsor, in April following.

happened in my house which distresses me to such a degree, that I have no heart to work. My wife, as she was tying her child's shoe, perceived a drop of fresh blood on her own finger; and we can find no cause from which it proceeded. We think it must be supernatural. My wife thinks, it is a sign that one of the family will soon die, and she singles out me as the victim." It seems, she was willing rather to part with her husband, than go herself. Had the blood fallen on *his* finger, I imagine, *she* would not have so readily appropriated the warning, as she now applied it to *him*. The man asked me, what I thought of the matter.

I answered him to this purpose: "Whether the blood be from a natural, or supernatural cause, we need not inquire. Be it which it may, it is no proof that you will die. Of this you need no proof. You know you must die, and may die soon. If you have not thought of, and prepared for such a certain and solemn event, it is high time you had. If this blood, falling in such a manner on your wife's finger, should prove the occasion of awakening you to repentance of sin, and newness of life, it will do you no harm, but infinite benefit. Make this improvement of it, and all will be well. You have nothing to fear from the blood; your only danger is from yourself." The terror in a few days subsided; no calamitous event soon followed; the man still appeared the same as he had been before. Sudden frights seldom produce lasting reformations.

The solar eclipse on the 16th June, 1806, was so singular and remarkable, that I thought it worthy of a moral and religious improvement. This was attempted on the following sabbath, in a sermon which has been offered to the public from the press.

In a sermon preached at the conclusion of the fiftieth year of my ministry, I continued the narrative of parochial occurrences, which, in a sermon preached and printed ten years before, had

been brought down to that time. This sermon has also been printed.

Besides the sermons already mentioned, I have published several, preached at funerals, ordinations, &c. the occasions of which appear from the sermons themselves.

The sermons, which I have published in pamphlets, are forty-six. I have published five volumes containing one hundred and sixty-four sermons, three of which sermons had been before published singly. The whole number is two hundred and seven.

Dissertations and essays of mine, on various subjects, have been inserted in news-papers, and other periodical works. These generally have been *theological, moral, devotional, or literary*. Some *poetical*. But I write not with ease in poetry. I am not one of those, *qui poeetæ nascuntur*. Rarely have I published any thing *political*, except so far as politicks are interwoven with religion.

If any should ask me, why I have published so much, I would tell them, I have often asked myself the same question, and have answered myself in this manner. *Gain* could not be the governing motive; for the compensation for my volumes has been small; for my other works I have demanded nothing, except a few copies to give to my friends. *Reputation* as a writer, could not have much influence; for in my periodical publications I have sought to be unknown; and in those, to which my name has been affixed, I am sure there was not a merit, which could give distinguished celebrity to the author. I have therefore flattered myself, that I had a view to the benefit of my fellow men. I am conscious that I never have published any thing, but what, I thought, had a useful tendency. But it will be asked, are you more capable of doing good, than other men?—No; nor so capable as many. But with moderate talents it is lawful to do good. Let those who possess larger talents remember, that to whom much is given, of them much is required.

I have assisted about twenty young gentlemen in their studies for the ministry.* A number of them are settled, and are respectable in their profession. Some, who are unsettled, are of promising dispositions and acquirements. If providence should open a door for their stated employment, I trust they will be blessings to the churches. Students in divinity I have ever been disposed to encourage, but never chosen to flatter. I advise them to see, that a love of religion and a sense of its importance possess their minds—that their governing motives be superior to the interests of the world. I warn them, that if the latter be their predominant motives, they will be disappointed; and it will be prudent to turn their attention to some other profession.

I usually invite them to take their turns with me in family devotions. I often hear them read, that uncouth habits, if they have contracted any, may be corrected.

I give them a systematical list of questions, on each of which they write. I hear their compositions, and make such remarks, as I think proper to be made, on the sentiment, grammar, style, argument, and manner of reading. If there be a number of students together, they first make remarks on each other's dissertations, and I close with mine.

They read some systems of divinity; but are advised not to attach themselves to human systems; but to search after truth with unbiassed minds, and make the word of inspiration their *dernier* resort. They also read church history. After some previous studies, they read sermons. In the choice of these, regard is had to style and manner, as well as to sentiment. I am often entertained and profited by their remarks on the books which they read.

* Among these was the late DR. APPLETON, President of Bowdoin College.

When they begin to write sermons, they are advised to select important subjects, and write upon them in a practical and useful manner, with a natural arrangement, and just connection of their thoughts, and with a perspicuity of diction; never leaving an ambiguous sentence uncorrected; for perspicuity is the chief grace in style. If they attain this, other graces will follow, at least so far, that the style will pass for good. They are advised not to affect floridity. If flowers come in their way, they may gather them; but they must never go out of their way to seek them. A style stuffed with far-fetched ornaments is too puerile and gay for the pulpit. Every thing brought thither should be grave and solid. Their language should be pure English, without the intermixture of hard words and foreign idioms and phrases. An affectation of learning breeds contempt.

In speaking, they are advised to stand in an easy attitude, and consider themselves as addressing their fellow-mortals on matters of common and infinite concern; and to speak with such a modulation of voice, as would unavoidably take place, if they were freely and feelingly conversing on the same solemn subjects in a social circle. Thus their delivery will be engaging and commanding, and they may expect the attention of their hearers.

June, 1806. Received a letter dated March 4, 1806, from Rev. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, near London. This letter opened a correspondence between us, which has been very agreeable and useful to me. We have made an exchange of our respective works. He appears to be a divine of great eminence and piety.

August, 1809. My first volume of sermons was re-published with the addition of six sermons never before published. The work was done at Springfield, for Isaiah Thomas Jun. who claimed the copy-right, and who requested of me the additional sermons.

Soon followed the re-printing of the second volume, at the same place and for the same person, with the addition of four sermons.

The third volume was re-printed at Worcester, 1810.

July 23, 1809. Preached two sermons at Southwick, on occasion of the drowning of four young women. Inserted in second edition of volume first.

May, 1810. Preached a sermon to the Charitable Female Association in my parish. The sermon was printed.

1811. My discourses on false teachers and on christian baptism, were re-published in Boston, by Mr. Thomas, with considerable additions and some corrections, which I made at his request.

April 11, 1811. Preached two sermons on the prophecy of Daniel relating to *the time of the end*. This prophecy is supposed to be now fulfilling. And an attempt was made to explain, apply and improve it. These sermons were published.

May 22, 1811. Attended the ordination of Mr. Jesse Fisher, at Scotland, the second parish in Windham, Conn. and preached from I. Cor. ix. 19. In the sermon were considered Paul's *independent* spirit—his *meek* and *accommodating* temper and manners—and the great object which he kept in view. The sermon was published. This journey of sixty miles, in my 80th year, was performed with much facility and comfort. I there met with many agreeable friends, and returned in good health, reflecting with gratitude on the goodness of Providence.

May, 1811. Had an interview with an open, professed infidel; a man who sustained an important and lucrative appointment under the general government. He resided in a neighboring town. He requested me to attend and make a prayer at his house on the morrow, on occasion of the funeral of a sister, who was one of his family and died in his house. The reason assigned for his applying to me was, that his minister had lately affronted him by

omitting to pray for *him particularly* and *distinctly* at the funeral of a son, who died and was buried in his, (the father's) absence. He said, he did not suppose that prayers did any good or hurt. God's plan is fixed; and as he is a good being, so his plan is good, and men's prayers will not alter it. But as it is customary to have a prayer at a funeral, and to make mention of the principal mourners, the omission of his case was an affront, and he would not ask his own minister to pray on the present occasion.

I answered him to this purpose. If your minister were absent, I should not hesitate to comply with your request; for doubtless there will be many present at the funeral, who regard prayers, though *you* despise them. But I shall not interfere in a dispute between you and your minister, nor take a side against a brother in a matter which I do not understand. I have no reason to conclude, that his conduct has been reprehensible. Be this as it may; your proposal would be a very improper method either for me to manifest my disapprobation of, or for you to signify your displeasure against your minister. Ministers are to take heed to the flock of which they are made overseers; and they have a right to forbid the intrusion of those whom they think to be evil men and seducers. I have no right to perform any official act of the ministry in another man's flock without his request, if he be at home. If I should comply with your request without your minister's approbation, I should not only offend him and his people, but be guilty of a disorderly intrusion.

He acknowledged the propriety of my observations—said he would desire his minister to apply to me—and asked whether I would attend in case *he* should apply. I told him, I could not at present make any engagement; but must leave the matter in the same situation, as if he had not spoken to me upon it.

I had been previously desired to attend a lecture and preach in that place on the day of the funeral. After lecture I went with

the minister to the house of mourning—when notice was given that the people were ready for prayer, the minister openly requested me to perform that office; and I complied with his request.

In the conversation at my house, the gentleman rejected as absurd, the idea of the divine authority of the scriptures. He said God had given us reason, and *this* was sufficient; an additional revelation was unnecessary, and therefore could not be supposed. It was natural here to refer him to Paul's argument on the subject. "The things of a man knoweth no man, but the spirit of the man within him; so the things of God knoweth none, but the spirit of God." If I cannot know *your* mind, unless you will reveal it to me, how shall we know the mind and will of God without a revelation from him? If we cannot by our reason know the less, how shall we know the greater?

Our conversation was desultory. He said, there was no essential difference between virtue and vice; both had their uses, and whatever answered a good end, was good. I observed to him, that as God, according to his own concession, had made us rational creatures, so we might exist in another world. But what are your prospects? Your condition is fixed—your virtue or vice will not alter your fate. You may be doomed to misery, and your piety or your prayers will not reverse your doom. God is good—but this is no security to you. He may be good, and yet make you miserable, however virtuous you are. Say not, this would be unjust. There is, in your opinion, no difference between virtue and vice, justice and injustice, any further than the one or the other answers a good end. If it will answer a good end to make the pious man miserable, there is no wrong; for the good end will make it right. You are in an awful predicament—on your principles you can have no hope. The christian has hope in the gospel which reveals the mercy of God to pardon repenting sinners through a Saviour. You have no hope

here, for you discard this revelation—and you discard divine mercy too ; for you say, there is no difference between moral good and evil, and consequently none between mercy and cruelty. Even natural religion, though your heart and ways were perfect, would afford you no security.

He told me, that by my profession, as a minister, I must *pretend* to believe the gospel. My living depended on my ostensible faith ; but were I free from that bias, I should be an infidel.—If I had been disposed to resent his unpoliteness, and to retaliate his insult, I might perhaps have said, your own reason would persuade you to be a christian, were it not, that an avowal of infidelity seemed most favorable to your obtaining your present lucrative office. So far as money is in the case, your temptation is much stronger than mine.

He said, he believed christianity was a good thing, and was useful to society. I replied, you have said God is a good being. Does he not approve and love this good thing—If he approves it, is it not *true*? Does this good being love and approve falsehood. You say christianity is useful to society. As a member of society you are bound to encourage and promote it. I advise you no more to infuse into others your pernicious sentiments, for by your own concession they are pernicious to society. No more spend your time in talking against religion in taverns and post-offices and all companies in which you mingle. Be consistent with yourself, and encourage that good thing which is so useful to society.

He said his deceased sister lived and died in the faith of the gospel, and it was her comfort in the prospect of death. I told him, I hoped the time would come, when he would live in the same faith. No ; said he, never so long as I have my reason. I answered him, I cannot but think there are some christians who have their reason.

I thought he appeared a little embarrassed with the gross unpoliteness of his expression. But it was gone. He could not easily recall it. It is the pride of infidelity to arrogate all reason to itself, and to stigmatize faith as madness, or hypocrisy. Professing itself to be wisdom, it shows itself to be folly.

August, 1811. I was honored by the University of Cambridge, Mass. with the degree of doctor in divinity.

October 31, 1811. This was a solemn day. It was my birthday. I then completed my 80th year. I desired the attendance of my people. Though the day was stormy, there was a decent attendance, even beyond my expectation. I spake to an attentive audience from the words of Barzillai; *I am this day fourscore years old*. I addressed the aged, the heads of families, and the youth—and gave such advice as seemed to me to be important to them on the near event of their minister's death, or previous disability, and the vacancy which consequently would take place in the society. The day and discourse were impressive to the speaker, and I hope they were so to the hearers. May God prepare him for his departure, forgive his many failings and accept his desires to promote religion among his people; and may he watch over them to preserve them in peace; and may he and they be gathered together in the presence of Christ at his coming.

April 21, 1812. I preached a sermon in Springfield, at the institution of a society for the encouragement of foreign missions. It was printed, at the request of the society, with this title, "The angel preaching the everlasting gospel." Revelation xiv. 6, 7.

I was called to attend an ecclesiastical council at Dorchester, on May 12, 1812. On the preceding Lord's day I preached in the second church in Boston. The discourse in the morning was from Mark ix. 38, 39, 40, containing Christ's rebuke to his disci-

ples for their irregular zeal in his cause. This discourse was printed at the request of the hearers.

I experienced the kind care of Providence in giving me a pleasant interview with many agreeable friends, in preserving me through the journey, and bringing me safely to my family.

August 25, 1816. This day concluded the 60th year of my ministry. It was Lord's day. I requested the attendance of my people, and preached to a large audience from Prov. ii. 38. Application was made for a copy, which was granted.

September 1. An unusual attention to religion in the parish within the year past, is matter of joy—fifty-five have been added to the communion since the preceding September, and the attention still continues.

Concluded by another hand.

From the last mentioned period, the publick stated ministrations of Doctor Lathrop were continued without interruption until the last sabbath in March, 1818, the day which completed the sixty-second year from the commencement of his labours as a candidate. In consequence of the increasing infirmities of age, and especially, of the great imperfection of his sight, he, at that time, notified his society of his determination to decline the public services of the sabbath, and requested them to provide for him an assistant, or colleague. On this occasion, he addressed them in a kind of valedictory discourse, giving them seasonable counsels and cautions, and affectionately commending them to the benediction of Heaven. Though the defect of his sight was so great as to prevent him from reading even the productions of his own pen, he continued, for some time, as a pleasant intellectual exercise, to write about one sermon a week, which was read by another person as a part of the publick exercises of the sabbath. He also occasionally delivered an extemporaneous discourse, both

in the church on the sabbath, and in remote parts of his congregation during the week. Though he had never been much in the habit of public extemporaneous speaking, these discourses were uniformly heard with the deepest interest, particularly as they were regarded by his people as the last efforts of one to do them good, whose long and useful services had created so powerful a claim upon their gratitude and affection.

On the 25th of August, 1819, the sixty third anniversary of his ordination, he attended the ordination of his colleague, and took part in the publick solemnities. His venerable appearance, and the devout and pertinent address which he offered at the throne of grace, made an impression upon the audience which will not soon be forgotten. It seemed as if he had come before his God, to give back his commission, while he was on the eve of going to give an account of his stewardship.

On the following week, he was attacked by a disease,* to which he had before been occasionally subject, and which now threatened to terminate his life. While his friends were anxiously waiting the event of his illness, and expecting that the profound sleep into which he had fallen, would terminate in the lethargy of death, he unexpectedly revived, and after a few days, was restored to his usual health. He spake of his recovery in a manner which indicated the most unqualified resignation to the Divine will, as well as the most grateful sense of the Divine goodness.

From this period, the recurrence of his disorder was more frequent, and seemed at times to abate, in a considerable degree, his intellectual vigour. His friends who were in the habit of conversing with him daily, have often been pained to find a train of animated and interesting remarks suddenly interrupted by the failure of his recollection. But notwithstanding the inroads which

* A comatose affection.

his disease was evidently making, both upon his constitution and intellect, he was an almost constant attendant on publick worship, and occasionally took part in the service, until about two months before his death. The last publick exercise which he ever performed, was a funeral service in a case of uncommon affliction. It was remarked that his manner on this occasion was unusually paternal and affectionate. The prayer which he offered was replete with impressive sentiment, and seemed like the breath of a soul that was panting for heaven, while the trembling limbs and the quivering voice seemed to proclaim that it would soon be there.

On the sabbath next succeeding the 25th of August, (the sixty-fourth anniversary of his ministry,) he attended publick worship and heard a discourse on the responsibility of a christian minister. The subject made a deep impression upon his mind, and as he afterwards remarked, led him to another review of his own ministry. To a friend with whom he returned from church, he made, in substance, the following remarks: "I have been a steward for a long time, and shall have a large account to render. I often think of it. When I look back upon my ministry, I find great cause for humility. I have been an unprofitable servant, and my only hope is in the glorious Redeemer. If I do not come short at last, it will be not on account of any worthiness in me, but on account of the all-sufficiency of Christ. I think I can say with another, that if I ever arrive in that blessed world, I shall have had so much forgiven me, that I will sing the praises of Redeeming love in as loud strains as any saint or angel there."

The last day of October following completed his eighty-ninth year. He observed it as a day of solemn recollection and self-examination. In the course of the day, he paid a visit to one of his neighbours, apparently with a view to give him an opportunity of rejoicing with him in the divine goodness. In conversation

with a friend, he remarked that he had been reviewing his life, and he found that it had been crowded with blessings. He then said with a profusion of tears, that it overwhelmed him. "I have endeavoured," he added, "to exercise some degree of gratitude, particularly for the blessings of the past year, but I have not yet asked God to add to my life another year, and I have not determined that it is my duty to make such a request.

In the early part of December, his health began more sensibly to decline, though there were still occasional intervals, when he conversed with great freedom and vivacity, and manifested no small degree of his native energy of mind. But it was evident to himself and his friends that his earthly house of this tabernacle was soon to be dissolved; and he spake of it with as little agitation as if he had been only laying by his garments for the repose of the night. He often remarked, that he had not the *assurance* of hope, but that his confidence in the Redeemer was so strong that he was not afraid to die. A few days before his death, one of his friends remarked to him, that it must be a source of great satisfaction to reflect that his life had been distinguished by such eminent usefulness. "Oh no," said he, "I find little consolation from any thing which *I* have done. I believe I have endeavoured to be diligent in my profession, but every step of my course has been marked by imperfections. I have consolation, I trust, in the prospect of death, but it is all derived from the hope which I have built on the atonement of my Redeemer." His humility and resignation, which had long been prominent features in his character, became still more conspicuous, the nearer he approached the grave. It was impossible to be in his presence without an impression that he *certainly* possessed the genuine graces of the christian—that his religion was not assumed merely to quiet a corroding conscience, or to disguise the terrors of death; for instead of manifesting any of that gloomy restraint, which the pros-

pect of death usually imposes upon those who are not prepared to meet it, his conversation was cheerful, occasionally brilliant and innocently humorous, and always like himself. Every one perceived that religion had taken firm hold of his affections, and that there was no effort to bring into operation a principle which had never been implanted. To the last, he united with the submission of the humble christian, the dignity and courtesy of a gentleman, and the affectionate tenderness of a friend. On the day preceding his death, a neighbouring minister who had called to take his final leave of him, expressed to him the hope that he enjoyed consolation in the prospect of death; to which he replied with animation and emphasis, "Yes, I do." Soon after this, his speech entirely failed, and he sunk into a state of apparent insensibility, and afterwards gave no indications of reason, except by fixing himself in the attitude of devotion for a few moments, during a prayer which was offered by his bed-side. On Sabbath morning, the 31st of December, 1820, having lived eighty-nine years and two months, he exchanged a world of pains and tears, for a world of happiness and glory.

The following account of Doctor L's character, is extracted from the discourse delivered at his funeral.

The character of Doctor Lathrop, as a MAN, was made up of a rare assemblage of interesting qualities. Perhaps it is not too much to say that he possessed an *intellect* of the first order. If the cast of his mind was less bold than that of some other great men, there are few whose intellectual operations are equally rapid, distinct, and original. His discernment of character seemed almost intuitive. In the investigation of truth, his mind was accustomed to range through the whole field of evidence, and finally arrive at its conclusion by a path so luminous, that few could trace it without perfect conviction. Multitudes can testify, with what delight they have listened to his conversation, when his mind has

seemed to dart like lightning through a difficult subject, and by a single effort, to relieve it from all its obscurity.

One of the features, by which his intellectual character was strongly marked, was an *uncommon power of invention*. Some of his ideas, on almost every subject, were peculiarly his own; and even those which were comparatively trite, could not pass through his mind without receiving a tinge of originality. His imagination, though originally prolific, was disciplined with the strictest care, and oftener delighted by its gentle and delicate touches, than overpowered by its awful sublimity and magnificence. It was his to wander in the calm sunshine of heaven, and amidst the softer and more beautiful scenes of creation, rather than to move in the whirlwind, or mount in the storm. A vein of brilliant but chastened humour frequently appeared in his conversation, which, while it always gave a charm to his intercourse with his friends, never left an impression unfavourable to the strict delicacy of his feelings, or the dignity of his character.

The *qualities of his heart* also, all who knew him will acknowledge, were peculiarly excellent. Benevolence marked his whole deportment. The more private and endearing relations of life, he sustained with the utmost dignity and affection; and never seemed more in the sphere for which Providence designed him, than when mingling in the social enjoyments of his own fireside. In his common intercourse, he was unusually affable and communicative, and accommodated himself, with peculiar felicity, to the characters of those with whom he conversed. To all his other amiable and social qualities were added an unusual serenity and cheerfulness of temper, which gave to his old age a charm, as rare as it was delightful.

His *manners* were the simple effusion of his amiable and excellent feelings. Without any of that severity or ostentation which are so often mistaken for the concomitants of greatness, he was

uniformly mild and unobtrusive. Though it was impossible to be long in his presence without an impression of his superiority, that impression was never assisted by any thing like personal display. His politeness was of the highest kind: It was nature speaking in all her simplicity and loveliness through his whole deportment.

As a CHRISTIAN, Doctor Lathrop was also in no small degree distinguished. If we were to attempt to describe his religious character in a single word, we should say that it was eminently *consistent*. He was equally remote from the intemperate heat of enthusiasm on the one hand, and that miserable, lifeless system, which excludes all exercise of the affections on the other. It was his favourite maxim, that the evidence of a christian temper is not so much to be sought in occasional fervours, as in a consistent, pious, and exemplary deportment. Those who knew him best are most ready to testify in what rich abundance he brought forth the fruits of the Spirit; how frequent, fervent, and affectionate was his communion with his God; how exemplary were his patience and fortitude under the pressure of deep affliction, and the accumulated infirmities of age; how inoffensive, and forbearing, and charitable, he was in all his intercourse with the world; how much disposed to mourn over the deficiencies and sins of his life, and give to God all the glory of his salvation; how benign, joyful, and even rapturous was the spirit with which he sometimes spake of his approaching departure, and his entrance upon that rest which remains for the people of God.—The glorious plan of redemption was the theme which occupied his mind above every other; and while absorbed in meditation on this wonderful subject, he seemed almost to rise above these regions of mortality, and anticipate the transports of the redeemed. It was his usual practice to devote the first and last moments of every day to solemn self-examination, meditation, and prayer. In this exercise, he has been heard to say, that he found great sat-

isfaction and profit ; and there is no doubt that it contributed much to the stability and elevation of his christian character.

But the most interesting view of Doctor Lathrop's character remains yet to be exhibited : It was as a **MINISTER** of Jesus that his reputation shone with the most unclouded splendour. To his comprehensive intellect and exalted piety was added all that acquired ministerial furniture which is necessary to constitute a great *theologian*. From the straightened advantages of his early theological education, as well as from the constant pressure of parochial duties in after life, it was not to be expected that his reading should be so extensive or various, as that of many others, who are placed in more propitious circumstances. He was, however, familiar with the most distinguished theological writers, and could analyze, at pleasure, many important controversies in the christian church. The science of theology he had carefully studied in all its parts and connections. The system of truth which he found in the **BIBLE**, and to which he stedfastly adhered, was that, of which salvation by the atoning blood and life-giving spirit of Christ, is the prominent feature. Here, he often declared, he rested his hope of heaven ; and that if the great doctrine of atonement were taken away, there was, in his view, nothing left in the gospel, to meet the necessities of a sinner. At the same time, his enlarged views of christianity led him to place a due estimate upon every part of evangelical truth. The system of doctrines and precepts, revealed in the gospel, was, to his apprehension, a harmonious and beautiful whole ; every part of which, though not absolutely essential to salvation, bears the impressions of truth and Divinity.

As a *preacher*, Doctor Lathrop undoubtedly held no ordinary rank. He never conducted his hearers into the field of metaphysical and refined speculation, but was contented to preach the truth as it is in Jesus. His discourses were remarkable for a practical exhibition of gospel truth, for a strict and ingenious analysis

of his subject, for abounding with lively, impressive sentiment, and deep and critical views of human nature, and for a simplicity and perspicuity of method, sentiment, and expression, which rendered them alike intelligible to the most illiterate, and gratifying to the most refined of his hearers. It is a common observation among preachers, that the great truths of the gospel, from the peculiar constitution of the human mind, lose much of their effect, by being often repeated; but Doctor Lathrop possessed the rare talent of making the text of every discourse so prominent, that while he kept constantly in view the same cardinal truths, his hearers were perpetually gratified with novelty. Though he preached all the doctrines of the gospel affectionately and faithfully, he never introduced controversy into the desk, unless some exigency manifestly required it. As a writer of occasional sermons, it may be doubted whether he was exceeded by any preacher of his day. His peculiarly fertile and inventive genius supplied him with materials appropriate to every occasion. He composed with great rapidity, and, it would seem, with less intellectual effort than most writers of eminence. He has left behind him about five thousand manuscript sermons, a noble monument of his piety, talents, and industry.

In his *devotional exercises*, he was peculiarly fervent, appropriate, and instructive. His occasional prayers were so remarkably pertinent, that no circumstance, which could excite sympathy or interest, seemed to be overlooked. While the pious mind attended upon these exercises with delight and edification, it was impossible to resist the impression, that his heart was warmed with the true spirit of a disciple. Those of us, my hearers, who have so often been privileged, to accompany him to the throne of grace, will never forget the affectionate fervour which seemed to glow in every petition, the exalted strain of evangelical sentiment, the expressions of deep humility and unfeigned confidence in the merits of the

Redeemer, and the tender and animating benedictions which he pronounced upon his beloved people. The interests of his congregation were peculiarly near his heart, and his prayers were never more fervent, than while he was commending them in all the tenderness of a father to the blessing of his Father in heaven.

His *manner in the pulpit*, as I am informed, was natural, solemn, and impressive. Without possessing, in a high degree, the graces of elocution, there was a dignified and reverent style of address which gave importance to every sentiment that he uttered. It was the unaffected expression of a heart impressed and elevated by a sense of the presence and majesty of Jehovah.

In his *pastoral intercourse*, he was uncommonly attentive to the peculiar circumstances of his flock, and disposed to make great personal sacrifices, for the sake of preserving their union and prosperity. Above all, he was an eminent example of prudence. He was cautious, without being timid; familiar without sacrificing his dignity; condescending, without abandoning what he believed to be the principles of duty. In cases of difficulty, his people always found in him a counsellor, in whose decisions they could trust with unwavering confidence. In seasons of affliction, they found him alive to all their sorrows, and ready to commend them to the God of all grace and comfort. They only, who have known and loved him as their minister, can form an adequate idea of the tenderness and dignity, with which he sustained the pastoral relation.

As a *ruler in the church*, few men have been more eminently distinguished. His excellent judgment and consummate prudence, united with a deep discernment of character, and an extensive acquaintance with ecclesiastical government, eminently qualified him to be entrusted with the most important interests of the church. The numerous instances, in which his advice has been solicited in doubtful and perplexing cases, shew in what esti

mation his character as a counsellor has been held by the christian publick. His talent at composing differences was almost peculiar to himself. He has, more than once, when called to act as mediator, in the heat of controversy, extinguished the flame of animosity and discord, and dropped upon the conflicting parties the mantle of kindness and benignity.

It would be a grateful employment, did time permit, to dwell upon many other features of Doctor Lathrop's character, but I must leave to your own recollection, to fill up the imperfect outline which has been presented. We do not pretend that he was free from the infirmities of human nature, or hold him up to you as a model of christian perfection; but for intellectual greatness, for the most amiable and kind affections, for exemplary prudence and enlightened, consistent piety, we believe that few men have sustained a more exalted character. Multitudes, who have only heard of the splendour of his virtues, will contemplate, in his death, the extinction of one of the brightest luminaries of the church; while those, who have been blessed with his instructions and example, who have revered him as a pastor and loved him as a father, will delight to embalm his memory in the most grateful and tender recollections.

SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.

SERMON I.

THE HARMONY AND CONSISTENCY OF GOD'S WORKS.

PROVERBS XIV. 4.

*The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked
for the day of evil.*

THE first clause in the text is similar to many other passages, which we meet with in scripture. "God hath created all things for his pleasure."—"He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."—"He does whatsoever he pleases—and does it for his name's sake."

Such expressions cannot be understood as importing, that God in his works aims to increase his felicity or gloriousness; or to make himself more happy, or more excellent, than he is in his nature. As he is an infinite, eternal, independent being, and possesses all perfections, he cannot be more happy, or more glorious, than he is in himself. "With him is no variableness or shadow of turning." But, as we learn from scripture, one end which God intends in his works, is to manifest to intelligent creatures his own existence and perfectness, that they may know him, believe in him, honor and adore him; and he has made intelligent creatures, that they might behold him in his works, render due honor to his name, and be happy in his favor.

There has been some dispute in the world concerning God's *supreme* and *ultimate* end in his works. But perhaps the subject is too deep for us. "Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" If we cannot comprehend an infinite being, how shall we reach the remotest end, search the profoundest depth, and climb to the loftiest height of his designs? "They are higher than 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."

In our speculations on this subject, we can go no further than the admiring angels go, in their song of praise which St. John has recorded. "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure," for thine own will, "they were created." We can go no further than the inspired writers go. They say, "God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased. He worketh according to the counsel of his will. Manifold are his works; in wisdom he hath made them all. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out."

But though we cannot comprehend the works of God, or say they were made solely or supremely for this or that purpose, yet there are various uses to which we see them adapted, and for these uses we know they were designed. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work. The earth is full of his riches; all his works praise him." As they manifest his wisdom, power and beneficence, so it his will that we attend to the manifestations which he makes of himself in them, and exercise toward him correspondent regards. Though we cannot affirm that this or that was the sole or ultimate end of all creation, yet we know that God made rational creatures to serve him, discovers to them his character, that they may love and fear him; bestows on them his goodness, that they may imitate and trust him; calls them to himself, that they may enjoy him.

The words under consideration admit another construction, which seems to convey their proper meaning. "The Lord hath disposed and adjusted every thing to itself; or to the end for which it was designed."

Thus understood they teach us, that there is a harmony and consistency in all God's works, and one thing is adapted to another throughout the whole system of nature. Hence we conclude with certainty, that there is a God, who made and governs the universe.

When we attempt to prove God's existence from his works, the atheist will say, "The material world may have existed from eternity and without a creator to bring it into being." But how will he account for the *design* apparent in every thing which we are capable of examining?

No man who views a clock or watch, and sees how one wheel moves another, and all are moved by weights or springs, and the whole movement indigates the hours of the day, and the minutes of the hour, can imagine, that this is a casual work, the result of chance; that it came into existence without an artificer, or was formed and put in motion without design. Less can we imagine, that the infinitely greater and more complicated works of nature existed of themselves, and continue their existence without a creating and sustaining hand.

Every thing which we examine, appears to be adapted to some end, and to be made with a design to accomplish that end. It must therefore be made by an intelligent, wise and designing power.

If we look up to the heavens, we behold numerous bodies moving with order and harmony, and without confusion or interference. These, we know, must have been adjusted at first, and be still guided by an infinitely wise and powerful Being. We perceive the influence of the sun diffusing light and heat through the world in which we dwell. We enjoy the bounty of the clouds in shedding rain on our fields and pastures, to render them productive of the fruits necessary for our support. We see innumerable tribes of animals, whose wants are supplied by the spontaneous productions of the earth; and these brought into existence in such places and seasons as afford them their necessary food. If we examine a human body—the body of an animal, an insect, or a plant, we find it consisting of various parts, all connected with, and subservient to one another, and adapted to its nurture, growth and perfection. There is wisdom—there is design every where

apparent, and the existence of a Deity is every where manifest. "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead." Fools are they and without excuse, who say, there is no God, or who glorify him not as God.

The argument for the existence of a Deity, taken from the design apparent in the works of nature, is conclusive. None can reject it, unless he can believe, that works of art may exist without an artificer. "Every house is builded by some man; and he who built all things is God."

The same argument, taken from the adaptation of one thing to another, proves the divinity of the scripture revelation. If the manifest design in the works of nature demonstrates that there is a God; the design, which is equally apparent and wonderful in the gospel plan, demonstrates that this must be from God.

Let us consider what beings we are, and what the gospel scheme is; and we shall see such complete provision for all our spiritual wants, as must convince us that it was from heaven; and could not be of men.

We are intelligent creatures, and must be accountable to the Being who made us. God, as a being of wisdom, justice, holiness and goodness, must be supposed to exercise a moral government over his rational subjects. It must then be his will, that we love, fear and trust him, and that we be just, faithful and benevolent to one another in all the relations of life.

Every man must confess, that he has deviated from God's good and perfect will, and consequently deserves punishment. He who pretends that he deserves no punishment, must say, either that he is perfect, or that God is imperfect; either that he has never done, intended, or thought any thing which is morally wrong, or that God is not a moral governor, and has no right to demand obedience or punish disobedience.

This then is our state; we are under moral obligations, are accountable to our Creator, have opposed his will, and fallen under guilt and condemnation. What now are our wants? We need to know whether we shall exist after death; whether we shall exist merely as spirits, or in material bodies; whether our sins can

be forgiven ; whether on any terms, and, if on any, on what terms we can be admitted to future happiness ; how mercy can be exercised toward us without injury to the divine character and government ; whether we can hope for divine concurrence in our endeavors to mend our hearts and reform our lives ; whether we can expect defence against the temptations which attend us, and rely on divine keeping amidst the dangers which surround us.

To relieve and satisfy our minds in these perplexities, human wisdom is utterly insufficient. We cannot do it for ourselves, nor is there a friend who can do it for us. Here is an end of all human perfection. But God's law, his revelation, is exceeding broad. This teaches all that we need to know relative to those enquiries. It gives us all things which pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him, who has called us to glory and virtue.

The foundation of the gospel scheme is the mission of a divine Saviour, who has assumed our nature, dwelt on earth, taught the will of God in relation to our fallen race, exemplified in his life the virtues required of us, offered himself a sacrifice to expiate our guilt and open a way for the exercise of God's forgiving mercy ; has risen from the dead, ascended to glory, and ever lives to make intercession for us. By his gospel, life and immortality are brought to light, and the resurrection of the body is expressly declared and promised. These great doctrines are confirmed by his resurrection from the grave and visible ascension into heaven.

The terms of pardon and felicity are clearly stated ; and the fullest assurance is given, that through the sacrifice of this Redeemer, every sincere penitent will be received to favour and admitted to happiness, as freely as if he had not offended. In compassion to human weakness and impotence, the grace of the divine Spirit is offered for the renovation of the heart, and for the assistance of our feeble essays in the duties of religion ; and this grace is to be obtained by our humble resort to the throne of God.

Here then we find a scheme perfectly adapted to our necessities. Here is light to dispel our darkness, and instruction to remove our doubts and correct our errors, in the great things which it most concerns us to know and rightly to understand. Here is mercy to pardon our guilt, grace for the most unworthy and help

for the most impotent. Here are invitations to encourage our desponding hearts, and promises to confirm our wavering hopes.

Say now ; is there any thing wanting, which the gospel does not supply ? Could the sagacity of man—could the wisdom of angels have invented a scheme, so completely suited to our condition ? Could any thing like it have once entered into a creature's mind without divine suggestion ?—We have the same reason to believe the gospel scheme was framed in heaven, as we have to believe the worlds were framed by the wisdom and power of God.

Our Saviour has often affirmed, that they who believe not him, believe not the Father—that they who deny him, deny the Father—that they who will not receive his religion when it is proposed to them, reject all religion. The reason is obvious. Faith in the gospel stands on the same foundation, as faith in the existence and government of a Deity.

St. John says, “He that believeth hath the witness in himself.” He sees such an adaptation of the gospel scheme to the necessities of his own condition, as fully convinces him, that this scheme came not from man, but from the wisdom and goodness of God. If any reject the gospel, it is because there is in them an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the true God. They know not themselves, see not their guilt, feel not their impotence, and therefore, despise the provisions of divine grace.

Solomon, having asserted a general truth, which is obvious to every considerate man, that God has fitted and disposed every thing to its proper end, adds, as a natural conclusion, “that the wicked are doomed to the day of evil.” He does not say, that God has made them wicked, or that he has made them for the day of evil. The word, *made*, is not repeated in this part of the sentence, nor is it here to be understood. But the whole, in its connection, naturally conveys this sentiment ; “God hath made every thing to its proper end, and therefore the wicked are for day of evil.” It is agreeable to the constitution of God's government, which is uniform and consistent, that wicked men should suffer evil. As there is a natural connection between sin and misery, a life devoted to sin till its end, must terminate in misery.

To suppose that a man, living in wickedness and dying in impenitence, should be happy in a future world, would contradict the manifest plan of God's government, in which every thing has its proper end. It was the immutable design of the Creator, when he placed man upon earth, that his state in another world should be correspondent to his moral conduct in this—that righteousness should tend to life, and the pursuit of wickedness tend to death. The apostle says, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." The moral government of God is analogous to his natural government. As in the natural world a man reaps fruit of the same kind with the seed which he has sown; so, in the moral world, every one will receive according to the works which he has done. Misery is as really the fruit of vice reigning in the heart, as tares are the produce of tares sown in the field. A man may as rationally expect to reap barley from cockle, as reap happiness from vice. To him that soweth righteousness, shall be a sure reward; but he that soweth the wind, shall reap the whirlwind.

It is said of Judas, who fell by his own transgression, "he went to his place"—his proper place—the place for which he was fitted and disposed by his wicked life and guilty end. What place could that be? He had been a thief—a hypocrite—a traitor—a self-murderer. He had lived in wickedness; and he died by his own hands. His place, then, could be no other than a place of misery. No other could be called *his* proper place. For no other had his guilty life and death prepared and disposed him.

To the unrighteous, in the last day, the Judge will say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." The place prepared for the punishment of these revolting spirits was suited to their atrocious crimes and malignant natures. And men, who, like them, revolt from God and retain their enmity to him, are prepared for the same place.

The apostle says, "God endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath *fitted* for destruction." The destruction of impenitent sinners is an event, for which they are *fitted* by the inveterate corruption of their hearts, and obstinate wickedness of

their lives—by their fixed enmity to goodness and love of wickedness. Such beings are not capable of happiness. His own iniquity shall take the wicked himself. His sins will find him out and fall upon him. His misery will be the natural result of his vile affections and criminal indulgencies.

St. Jude, speaking of the punishment of certain ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and deny the Lord who bought them, says, "They were of old ordained to this condemnation." It is the ordination of God, that such impious men should be condemned to punishment. This ordination was of old revealed by God, and is more explicitly revealed in the gospel. As early as the days of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, the judgment of God on such sinners was denounced, and the denunciation has been repeated in all succeeding revelations. Sinners, by habituating themselves to their crimes, and by opposing the authority and contemning the goodness of God, have rendered themselves so unlike to the great original of all perfection, and have strengthened in their hearts such alienation from him, and enmity to him, that they are not only unfit for his presence, but absolutely incapable of being happy in it. They who live and die under the power of sin, would be unhappy, even though they should be admitted into heaven. The glories and entertainments of that blissful world, would be unglorious, unfelicitating to them. The society, the converse, the employments, the congratulations, the devotions of the new Jerusalem, would be so diverse from the exercises, pleasures and entertainments, to which they have accustomed themselves, and for which they have contracted an habitual relish in this world, that they could afford them no delight. By their sensual gratifications and their continued opposition to God and goodness, they have attempered themselves to a place quite the reverse of heaven. As a course of virtue and holiness is an education preparatory to blessedness, so a course of vice is an education preparatory to misery. Sin is hell began, as religion is heaven anticipated. A course of sin fits and disposes the soul for infelicity. Hell is not only the doom, but the natural consequence, of that perversion of the taste and faculties, which is implied in habitual disobedience to God. It is evident then, not only that there

is, in the future world, a place of punishment for impenitent sinners ; but also, that while they continue impenitent, they are attemping and preparing themselves for that place.

One objection, which unbelievers make against the gospel is, its denouncing punishment against the workers of iniquity. But how unreasonable is this objection ? Their exposedness to punishment arises not from the gospel ; but from the essential constitution of God's government. Misery is as much the natural fruit of their wickedness, as what they reap in their fields is the natural fruit of what they sowed. If God disposes all things to their proper ends, the wicked must be doomed to the day of evil.

How deplorable is the condition, and how odious the character of every bold and hardened transgressor—alienated from God and goodness—base in his mind and manners—an enemy to his own happiness—treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.

For whom is the infernal lake prepared and its flames kindled ? Not only for the devil and his angels, but also for all those who walk according to the course of this wicked world, and yield to the influence of those infernal spirits, who work on earth in the children of disobedience.

With what gratitude should our hearts be filled, that Jesus, the son of God, has appeared to deliver us from the wrath to come ? There is salvation in no other. We have redemption through his blood. If we despise this redemption, there is no other sacrifice for sin ; but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Wrath awaits every impenitent transgressor. But on them, who not only transgress God's law, but trample on the blood of his Son, wrath will come to the uttermost. Let us flee from this wrath by repentance, and by faith lay hold on the hope set before us.

It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Let us embrace the doctrine with all thankfulness, and beware lest we fall under the condemnation of those, who, when light has come into the world, choose darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

SERMON II.

THE MADNESS AND FATE OF IMPENITENT SINNERS.

ECCLESIASTES IX. 3.

Yea also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

IT is reason which chiefly distinguishes man from the animal tribes. In his senses and appetites he agrees with them; and he might justly be ranked among them, had not the Creator given him this single pre-eminence.

There is such a case as a man dispossessed of reason; and this we always consider as a very unhappy and affecting case. Nothing shocks the mind more, than to see one of our own species—one closely allied to us by nature—one of the same original and of the same form, wholly divested of understanding, sunk to a level with brutes, and rendered incapable of knowing God, doing good to men, or providing for himself.

But why is such a spectacle affecting, rather than a brute? It is because there is something unnatural in it. The brute was made to be what he is: man was made for a rational conduct. And that which shocks us in the madman is his unnatural degradation from the dignity of the species to which he belongs.

But affecting as this spectacle is, there is one, which, justly viewed and considered, is far more so; and that is, a man who possesses the faculty of reason, but never applies it to the great end for which the Creator gave it. Here is a contempt, not a loss of reason—here is a voluntary, not mechanical insanity—here is a corruption of heart, not a disorder of brain—here is a madness which involves guilt, not one which exempts from blame. It is more affecting to see an instance of self-murder, than of common murder; because the man who does violence to himself, acts more unnaturally, than he who does violence to another. For the same reason, he who perverts or neglects his own faculties, is a more despicable and miserable creature, than he who is providentially deprived of them. The latter is mad, because he cannot but be so: the former is mad, because he will be so.

But can we find any instances of this species of madness? Certainly we may. Every sinner is an instance. “Madness is in his heart.” Solomon speaks, as if such cases were numerous in his day. “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil.” Nor is the world so much mended, but that the observation remains just in our day.

By custom and use we become in a manner reconciled to almost any objects, however disagreeable they may be in themselves. This is one reason, why we are more affected with the sight of a madman, than with the sight of a wicked man. If the latter was as rare a sight as the former, why would it not be as shocking? The sinner is as truly a madman, as he who is deprived of reason; only his madness is of a different kind, takes a different turn, and operates in a different manner. “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

There are two things to which the text calls our attention; the first is, the *character* which is given of the sinner; and the other is, the *end* which he makes.

I. We will consider the character, which Solomon here gives of a wicked man. “Madness is in his heart.” Our Saviour, speaking of a returning prodigal, says, “He came to himself.” The phrase imports, that he had been beside himself. In the

writings of Solomon a *fool* is the common appellation of a sinner ; and it is as just, as it is common, for no man acts more inconsistently with reason. In relation to the affairs of this world he may act wisely. The children of this world, in their generation, are often wiser than the children of light. But in relation to the concerns of eternity no madman acts more wildly and unreasonably than he does.

1. The sinner is one who pays no just regard to his real interest, but is entirely occupied and pleased with trifles and vanities—things of little or no importance.

If you should see a man wholly inattentive to all the interests and concerns of life, negligent of his person, substance and friends ; employing all his time, from day to day, in the little sports and amusements of children, gathering pebbles, chasing butterflies, and riding a hobby-horse, you certainly would think him unsound in his intellect. But what is the sinner better ? Trifles alone please him : important matters are disregarded. Honors, riches, pleasures are the highest objects of his pursuit ; and disappointment in this pursuit is the evil which he principally dreads. Heaven and hell—the happiness and the misery of the eternal world, and the means of securing the former and avoiding the latter, scarcely come into consideration, and are never applied in earnest.

But are not the good things of this world worthy of our regard ? Doubtless they are. A sober, discreet attention to them, far from being a vice, is plainly a virtue. But in comparison with the vast objects which religion proposes to us, the other are but trifles. He who prefers the interests of the world to the riches of eternity, gives as evident proofs of a perverted judgment, and an unsound mind, as he who prefers pebbles to pearls ; for the real disproportion is infinitely greater.

What is that which the sinner pursues ? It is that which he is not sure of obtaining ; which, if he obtains it, he cannot enjoy—surely not the whole, if any part of it ; and which, if he enjoys it for the present, he cannot keep long ; but may lose it at any time, and certainly must lose it, or leave it soon. And what is that which he foregoes ? It is real happiness—the happiness of the rational mind—a happiness large as his capacity, and lasting as his

existence—a happiness, which accidents will not destroy, nor time impair. And say; is it not madness in the extreme to forego such an interest as this, for the sake of the former? To exchange the sublime joys of eternity, for the dull delights of a moment? The rational pleasures of the soul for the sordid indulgences of sense? The glories of heaven for the vanities of the world? The applause of angels and the approbation of God for the favor of mortals and for the laughter of fools? Surely no madman can act more wildly, or choose more absurdly.

2. The habitual sinner is pursuing his own destruction.

“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself,” says God to his sinful people.

If a man run into fire, or water, or leap from a precipice with his eyes open, or drink poison knowing it to be such, we judge him beside himself. But is there not an infatuation equal to this in the conduct of every vicious man? He runs into the way, which leads down to the chambers of death; and no cautions, warnings, or counsels restrain him. Hence he is said to love death.

Sin tends to the destruction of the natural life. It inflames the passions, impairs the health, exposes to casualties, and often takes away the power of self-preservation. This is eminently true of the vices of sensuality and intemperance.

Sin destroys the comfort and pleasure of life. It wounds the conscience with guilt and remorse; breeds irregularity and confusion in the powers of the soul, kindles up violent and painful passions, disturbs social order, interrupts family peace, embitters domestic relations, and excludes self-enjoyment.

The final issue of sin is death in a more eminent sense—a separation from all good to the greatest evil—and from all hope to eternal despair. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Now if a man pursues a course, which tends to the destruction of his body, to the vexation of his mind, and to the everlasting misery of his soul, is he not destroying himself? This is the tendency of sin. He who pursueth evil, pursueth it to his death. And can he say, he does this ignorantly? No: his own conscience remonstrates against his course, and warns him to forsake it.

Whenever he calmly considers his way, he must be convinced that danger and misery attend it. If he ever reflects on the past, and contemplates the future, he must feel some inward checks and rebukes. His own experience, if he would consult it, would evince the folly and madness of his pursuits; for he never finds the pleasure which he had promised himself; he is always disappointed in his views and expectations; if he accomplishes his designs, still he is left as empty and unsatisfied as he was before; and if he tastes immediate pleasure in his guilty indulgences, this is soon embittered by shame and remorse, discontent and confusion. God himself has warned him of his danger, and of the misery which is before him, and yet he rushes on, as if he was resolved on his own destruction. If neither reason, nor experience, nor the divine word will restrain him, surely madness is in his heart.

3. Another instance of madness in the sinner is, that he is the greatest enemy to his best friends.

It has often been observed of people in a delirium, that they fall out first with those to whom they are most obliged. This is true of every wicked man.

He is an enemy to his own conscience. This, as long as he will allow it to do its office, acts the part of a faithful friend. It warns him of his danger, upbraids his folly, restrains his excesses, points out his duty, and urges his attention to his best interest; and for this very cause he is an enemy to it. He opposes and resists it; yea, sometimes mocks and ridicules it; calls it superstition and prejudice. He often acts in direct and palpable contradiction to the sense and conviction of his mind. If he finds this difficult, he will invent some excuses and palliations of his sins—he will call evil good, and good evil—will confound the difference between right and wrong, or endeavor to persuade himself, that there is some circumstance in his case, which exempts him from the imputation of guilt, though he would not allow such a circumstance to have any weight in the case of another.

The sinner may come to such a state of obduracy and perverseness, as to hate his reprovers, and count them his enemies, because they tell him the truth. This is not indeed the character

of every sinner. Some have so much ingenuity left as to hear reproof candidly and accept it thankfully. But there are those whom nothing will provoke sooner, than the mention of their faults. Hence this caution of our Saviour, "Cast not your pearls before swine, nor give that which is holy unto dogs, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you." "Reprove the sinner," says Solomon, "and he will hate you. He that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth to himself a blot." He provokes the wicked man to seek revenge by casting reproach on his character:

The sinner is an enemy to the word of God. "He that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." If he dare not openly reject God's word, yet he retains an inward aversion to it; otherwise he would converse with it daily—would submit to its corrections and instructions, and govern himself by its rules. He hates the precepts of God, because they condemn him. He hates God's threatenings, because they shew him his danger.

The sinner is represented in scripture as an enemy to God himself—an enemy in his mind by wicked works. The sinner perhaps will say, "I am not an enemy to God—I reverence him, because his character is perfect, and I love him, because he is good and merciful." If this is really true, you belong not to the class of persons of whom we are speaking. It is worth the while, however, to examine the matter. Perhaps you have partial ideas of God's character; perhaps it is only an imaginary Deity, whom you revere and love—a Deity whose goodness is indiscriminate indulgence, and who will make you happy without your repentance of sin, and submission to his government. Remember, God is a being of immutable justice and truth, and of perfect rectitude and holiness. If you love him, you love these perfections, and you are assimilated to them in your temper, and conformed to them in your practice. If you love God, you love his precepts; and if you love them, you will observe them. If you love God, you love that way of salvation which he has proposed to you; for in that way God is glorified and man humbled. And if you love this way of salvation, you will certainly submit to it, by a deep

repentance of sin, and by faith in God's mercy through a Mediator. If then you live in opposition to God's holiness, in disobedience to his commands, and in neglect of your salvation, you are, in the scripture sense, an enemy to God.

Put the case in another form : Do you not sometimes wish that God had allowed you full liberty to sin—that he would not execute his threatenings against the workers of iniquity ? Now what is this, but to wish that he were not a hater of sin—or that he were not a holy being—or that he were not God ? Can you, with such sentiments in your heart, pretend that you love God ? You doubtless love the favors which he bestows upon you, and take pleasure in many of the benefits, which you receive from his bounty. It is said of the Jews, in their most degenerate state, “ They ate and drank and became fat, and delighted themselves in God's great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient and cast his laws behind their backs.” There are many such lovers of God, as these were. If you love him truly, you love him in his complete character ; you fear his goodness, as well as love it ; and you love his justice, as well as fear it.

4. The habitual sinner is one who deludes and imposes upon himself—fancies himself to be what he is not, and not to be what he is.

This is a turn, which natural madness often takes, and moral madness takes as often. If the madman forms airy and romantic schemes ; if he imagines himself to be a king ; if he views the world as his property, and its inhabitants as his subjects, he is not more beside himself than the sinner often is. He also says, “ I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and knows not, that he is wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked.” It is by this self-delusion, that he makes himself easy in his awful condition. He views his state to be quite different from what it really is. He thinks himself free, when he is a slave to lust. He fancies himself raised to honor, when he is sunk in infamy. He glories in that which is his greatest shame. He feels secure, when he lies down to sleep on a precipice : he hopes for heaven, when he is running in the way which leads down to

hell: he calls evil good, and good evil, and puts darkness for light, and light for darkness.

But suppose him convinced that he is a sinner; for this conviction will sometimes obtrude itself upon him; how will he do then? He has now another delusion at hand, as absurd, and perhaps as fatal, as any of the former. This is the intention of a future repentance. He sees not, or he is reluctant to see, that life and reason, the means and the day of grace are all uncertain; that there is every motive to present, that there can be to future repentance; that by delay he hardens his heart and resists the spirit of God, and thus renders his repentance more difficult and doubtful; that the causes of present delay may as well operate to his future delay; that if ever he repent at all, he must, some time or other, come to a fixed resolution that he will not offend any more, and that he may come to this resolution now as well as hereafter; that every day his guilt and danger are increasing, and that there is no security, but in a direct and immediate application to the great concerns of his salvation. These are plain, obvious truths; but such is his madness, that he will not see them; or if he sees, will not regard them.

5. The sinner is one who disbelieves the most evident truths, and yet believes absurdities, contradictions and impossibilities.

He will not be convinced that there is any pleasure or advantage in a holy and virtuous life; that there is any reward for the righteous, or any punishment for the workers of iniquity; though reason clearly evinces, and the word of God fully declares them. He may, indeed, give a cold assent to them, as he does to an hundred other things in which he has no concern; but he feels not the weight of them, and is not at all influenced by them, and therefore may be said, not to believe them. If he denies them not in words, he contradicts them in practice; and he may as well not believe them, as not regard them when he pretends to believe them. But though he is incredulous to plain truths, he is credulous to palpable falsehoods. He believes there is solid happiness in the world, though his experience has hitherto taught him the contrary. He believes there is pleasure in sin, though he has tried it often, and found it to be an evil and bit-

ter thing. He believes that if he is now a sinner, exposed to the threatnings of God, yet he shall hereafter repent and escape the wrath to come, though he has lived hitherto on this flattering prospect, and is still as far from repentance as ever. He sins with an intention that he will, and in expectation that he shall condemn himself in deep shame and sorrow for what he is doing, and yet his present determination is to do it. He commits many sins in secret, which he would not dare to commit before men, and yet he will confess that no darkness can hide him from God, and that it is a small thing to be judged of men, but a solemn thing to be judged of God, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness. He knows, that in comparison with the life to come, the present life is nothing, and yet he regards this as the only important part of his existence. He confesses that this life is short and uncertain, and yet acts as if he were never to die, and boasts of to-morrow, as if he were sure it would be as this day and much more abundant. He can, on principles of reason, demonstrate the certainty of a future existence, and yet is as little influenced by it, as if he could demonstrate the contrary. What he believes in speculation, he denies in practice. What affects him at one time, he disregards at another. What he now resolves to do, he soon refuses to do, though he pretends no just cause to change his resolution. Such are the views and feelings of a wicked man's mind at different times. And can the vagaries of a raving madman be more wild and incoherent?

6. Nothing is harder than to convince a sinner of the unreasonableness of his conduct.

The madman will sooner believe the whole world to be insane, than himself to be so. Nothing will enrage him more than to tell him he is distracted. Much so is it with the profligate sinner. He can see faults in others much easier than in himself. He will sooner censure the virtues of others as crimes, than confess his own crimes to be what they are. He will justify in himself the same things which he condemns in others, and claim a right to do that, which he will allow to no one else. When the madman becomes sensible of his disorder, there is hope of his recovery: so when the sinner sees the corruption of his heart, there is hope.

of his repentance. While he thinks highly of himself, he will use no means for his amendment and suffer none to be used with him, any sooner than an insane person, who thinks himself sound, will submit to the discipline of remedies and regimen, in order to a cure.

From these instances it appears, that Solomon justly characterized the wicked man, when he said, madness is in his heart.

SERMON III.

THE MADNESS AND FATE OF IMPENITENT SINNERS.

ECCLESIASTES ix. 3.

Yea also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

SOLOMON, in these words, represents sin as a sort of madness. It is not a natural, but a moral madness. It is not the want, but the perversion of reason. It is a disorder not in the head, but in the heart. The sinner acts as contrary to wisdom, as if he had none. He pays no just regard to his true interest—seeks his own destruction—is an enemy to his best friends—deludes and imposes on himself—is inconsistent in his views and actions—and is blind to his own condition. In these respects he symbolizes with a madman. But in other respects there is a wide difference. One is unsound in his intellect, the other is perverse in his will—the one cannot act rationally, the other will not. The latter, therefore, is involved in guilt of which the former is not capable.

These things we have considered in a former discourse.

We will now, as was proposed,

II. Consider the *end*, to which this moral madness leads. Solomon says of the sons of men; “Madness is in their heart. while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

Here are several serious thoughts suggested.

1. It is here intimated, that many persist in their mad course as long as they live.

Some, indeed, by the grace of God are happily reclaimed to a sounder mind and a wiser conduct. But of many, it may doubtless be said, "Madness is in their heart, while they live." They haughtily spurn and reject all the instructions, and warnings, which are given them—all the means, which are applied to them—and all the strivings of God's spirit with them. "Their iniquities have taken them; they are holden in the cords of their sins, and they die without instruction, as in the greatness of their folly they have gone astray." What proportion of mankind these unhappy wretches make, it is not for us to judge; but there is reason to believe their number is not small. When the old world was destroyed, but a remnant was saved. In the city of Sodom there were not ten righteous, to secure it from the vengeance of heaven. There was a time, when, in the Jewish nation, there was not a man found, who sought the truth and executed judgment. There might be many, who wept in secret places for the general corruption; but error and vice were become so strong and insolent, that none had courage openly to oppose them. In our Saviour's time, so few gave heed to his doctrine, that he applied the prophet's complaint, "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Many were called, but few were chosen. Hence, exhorting his hearers to enter in at the straight gate, he urges this solemn argument, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat: But straight is the gate and narrow the way, which leadeth to life; and few there be who find it!" There were, in the time of John's vision, but few names even in Sardis, which had not defiled their garments. Nor have we any reason to conclude, that the prevalence of sin is limited to those times and places. It has ever been the complaint of good men, that iniquity abounds. This is a full and undeniable proof, that some moral disorder has infected human nature—some seed of bitterness has taken root in the soil, and springing up, bears gall and wormwood. Why else is there not a just man on

earth, who perfectly does good, and sins not? Why else does the madness of sin so extensively prevail? Why else are the most powerful antidotes so often ineffectual?

Our own observation will furnish us with sad examples of the infatuating influence of sin. There are many, who discover no deep concern for their future interest, but are wholly immersed in the cares of the world—who are governed by no fixed principles of piety, but entirely by temporal considerations. There are some who are addicted to palpable vice, to intemperance, profaneness, slander, or injustice, and who live in the habitual neglect of the means of religion. There are those who persist in their guilty course, unreformed and unawakened by all the methods of divine grace and providence: or if they are alarmed by a sudden danger, they soon relapse into their former stupidity. And we sometimes see those who leave the world without exhibiting any proof of a better temper. Madness is in their heart while they live. Our Saviour warns us, that, at the last day, many will come and plead admission into his kingdom, whom he will reject as workers of iniquity.

Now it is probable, that among those who shall be finally rejected, few will be found, who beforehand really expected this awful event. When Jesus speaks of the sad fate of impenitent sinners, he generally represents them as wofully disappointed. If we enquire what supports their present hopes, we shall find it to be one of these two things; either a flattering opinion that they are already entitled to God's favour, or a vain presumption that they shall secure his favour by repentance, before they die. Well; you see that many, who have indulged these hopes, will finally be disappointed: look well to yourselves, lest ye be disappointed also. Fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. There are probably none present, who really believe that they shall miss of this grand object. If they realized for themselves such an event, how is it possible that they should maintain all this calmness and indifference, which they actually discover?—And yet it is probable, there are some, who, if they were to talk seriously of their moral state, would confess, that they had not made their calling

and election sure. It is then the hope of a future repentance, which composes their minds. But how precarious such a hope is, appears from this undeniable fact, that many have contented themselves with it as long as they lived. And what reason have you to conclude, that the same hope of future repentance which has flattered thousands through life, and flattered you hitherto, will not flatter you, till you die? You think it now a just ground of inward peace; and yet you know that you must, and intend that you will, by and by, view it otherwise. You resolve, that some day or other, you will give it up, and live upon it no longer. But how absurd it is to depend upon that now, which you hope you shall hereafter see to be vain and delusive? If it be a sufficient ground of comfort now, why do you not intend to trust it always? If it be no ground of comfort, why will you trust it at all?

2. The words of the text remind us, that the sinner, however unprepared, must yield to death. Though, in the madness of his heart, he lives thoughtless of death, yet he must go to the dead as well as others.

A man would think his reason affronted, if his neighbor should seriously undertake to convince him that he must die, by laying before him, in a formal manner, the proofs of human mortality. You never met with a man, who would dispute this solemn truth. The most profane sinner in the world, if he ever talks calmly on such a subject, will say, "All men are mortal—no man hath power in the day of death—there is no exemption from that warfare—and no man knows what shall be on the morrow."

It may then, be proper to ask him such questions as these: Since you believe this important truth, why are you not influenced by it? Since you know that God will bring you to death, why do you live as if you were in league with death? Since you would be ashamed to have it thought, that you disbelieved your mortality, why are you not ashamed to act as if you disbelieved it? Which is most to your dishonor, to reject a plain and important truth, or to confess it and still live in opposition to it?

Death is an event as solemn and momentous, as it is certain and evident. It will dissolve this animal frame, disunite soul and body, remove us from every earthly interest and enjoyment, and

send us to a new world, where we shall exist in a new manner, and among new inhabitants; and it will there fix us in a condition extremely miserable, or inexpressibly happy. This is a most interesting change. And it is certainly near: it may be even at the door.

Surely the careless sinner does not realize that he shall die, or does not realize what it is to die. If a sense of death, in its solemn nature, and eternal consequences, were impressed on his mind, he could not be careless—he could not spend his time and strength in pursuit of vanities, and content himself with the postponement of his everlasting concerns. Let him, then, remember, and often consider, that there is an important scene before him—that death and judgment await him—that they linger not, nor slumber, but are hastening on—that he with others, must yield to death, and that there is no work, nor device in the grave. Let these considerations be applied, as an antidote to the madness of sin.

3. The text farther intimates, that the madness of sinners is often the means of hastening their death.

They go to the dead; and go the sooner, because madness is in their hearts. This the scripture teaches, and observation confirms. The Psalmist says, “Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.” They shall perish in the flower of their age. There are, indeed, some wicked men who live and become old; some who do evil, and yet their days are prolonged; and because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, their hearts are more fully set in them to do evil. The prophet supposes, that there may be such a case, as a man’s living to be an hundred years old, and yet dying accursed at last. But then the natural tendency of wickedness is, to shorten life; and God often makes the man of vice and impiety an example of his wrath by bringing him to a sudden, violent, or premature death. To this purpose we find many observations in the writings of Solomon. “Be not overmuch wicked—why shouldst thou die before thy time?”—“The wicked is driven away in his wickedness.”—“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall die without instruction.” “He that will love life,” says St. Peter, “and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips

from speaking guile ; let him eschew evil and do good ; let him seek peace and pursue it ; for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry : but the face of the Lord is against them who do evil, to cut off their remembrance from the earth." This advice the apostle gave to christians, in a time when the profession of their religion exposed them to reproach and persecution. And the substance of his advice is, that if they would be safe in their christian profession, they must live the religion which they professed. It is as if he had said, "If you desire to live long and comfortably in these contentious and perilous times, in the first place, bridle your tongues ; never employ them in impiety, slander, or deception ; but let all your language be pure, grave, open and courteous. In your conduct avoid what your religion forbids, and strictly observe whatever it enjoins. Especially, live peaceably among yourselves, and cultivate and promote peace among all with whom you are conversant. Thus you will enjoy inward contentment, and serenity of conscience ; and God will take you under his gracious protection, and be present with you in all your dangers ; while they, who pursue a contrary course, involve themselves in innumerable perplexities and troubles, and provoke God to withdraw his care, and to leave them to the consequences of their own folly and rashness."

Many vices directly tend to bring on disease and death. Such are the vices of sensuality. "Who hath wo? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contention? Who hath wounds without cause? They that tarry long at the wine."

There are vices which waste men's substance ; reduce them to want, and involve temptations to more intolerable vices, which expose them to the stroke of civil justice.

There are vices which divest men of self-command, and deprive them of the capacity of consulting their own safety, or directing their own conduct. Many in the paroxysm of lust, or passion, have done those dreadful deeds, which have terminated in their own ruin. Many, enslaved to an intemperate appetite, have perished by sudden accidents, or by slow and silent diseases.

We look with horror on the creature who has been his own executioner. Self-violence is an act so full of guilt, and so con-

trary to nature, that we all think ourselves in little danger of it. But some who would shudder at the thought of self-execution are really guilty of it, and will be judged accordingly. If a man voluntarily destroy himself, what is the difference whether he cuts his own throat, or drinks poison? The latter is the guilt of the intemperate man. He will say, he has no intention to destroy life. Why then does he pursue a course, which leads to this effect? If he wilfully neglect to preserve his life, he is as really criminal, as if he aimed to destroy it. Will it exonerate him from guilt to say, he had no intention to injure himself, when he knows that injury will naturally ensue? It is every man's duty to consult his own preservation. If he put it out of his power to do this, then he voluntarily exposes his life. Now every man, who suffers himself to be intoxicated, either by passion, or by drink, puts it out of his power to take care of himself. Does he not then trifle with his life? And is he not answerable for the consequences which follow?

4. The text suggests to us, that death often overtakes sinners suddenly and unexpectedly.

“Madness is in their heart while they live.” Stupidity possesses them as long as life continues. “After that they go to the dead.” Many are driven away in their wickedness, and by a storm hurled out of their place. God now gives them a space to repent. If they improve it, they will be safe. But their time is at God's disposal. He may cut them off, how and when he pleases. They live every hour on his forbearance. When they abuse, they forfeit their day of grace; and the continuance of it they cannot claim, on the foot either of justice or of promise. God commands them, while it is called to-day, to hear his voice, and not harden their hearts. He has given them warnings. What assurance have they, that he will give them any more? He may, perhaps, cut them off with pining sickness. But if he should, it is far from being certain, what use they will make of it. Pain of body, weakness of reason, stupidity of mind, or distraction of thought may prevent their improving to repentance the space allowed them. While they expect a recovery, they will perhaps flatter themselves as they do now. When they despair of recov-

ery, it may be, they will despair of mercy too. But it is by no means certain that they will have such a warning. Death may come by surprize. And should they have ever so much warning, still if they remain of the same dilatory and self-flattering spirit, death will come by surprize, because they do not expect it. The suddenness of death is owing, not so much to the manner in which it comes, as to the temper of the person on whom it comes. "He that being *often* reprov'd, hardens his heart, will *suddenly* be destroyed," let destruction come how it may. The only way to prevent a sudden death, is to live in expectation of death and in readiness for it. If a servant say in his heart, my Lord delays his coming, and thus encourage himself to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken, the Lord of that servant will come at a time when he looks not for him, and at an hour, when he is not aware, and will appoint his portion with unbelievers. But blessed are the servants, whom the Lord, when he comes, shall find watching and doing the work appointed them. And whether he come in the second or third watch and find them so, blessed are those servants.

5. Our text intimates that when death comes, the sinner will have different apprehensions of things from what he had before. "Madness is in his heart, while he lives"—no longer. Death will awaken him from his dreams and bring him to his senses, open his eyes and restore him to his sight.

When he comes to the verge of life, stands on the brink of eternity, and sees death behind ready to push him headlong into the gulf of wo, if he then have his reason, he will be convinced, that madness was in his heart while he lived. He will have different views of sin—of the world—of his vain pleasures and amusements—of the value of time—of the worth of his soul, and the importance of religion; and will be amazed that he had not such views before. And yet his new views, instead of leading him to repentance, may urge him to despair. Who can conceive the distressed condition of an awakened, but hopeless sinner, lying on a death-bed, and looking into eternity? "Now he thinks of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, and receive the just rewards of his wickedness. He sees the Judge

already clothed with wrath, and forms in his tormented breast the whole process of the last judgment. If he sleep, he dreams of judgment and condemnation; and when he wakes, he believes his dreams forebode his fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of comfort and hope, without faith to receive pardon, or confidence to ask it, does the wretched sinner sometimes expire, and see his hope expire before him."

But whatever may be the sinner's apprehension on a death-bed, it is certain that when he is gone to the dead—when he finds himself in the world of punishment, he will be sensible, that sin was madness—that time was precious—that repentance was wisdom, and delay was presumption—that the world was vain, and his soul of infinite value. How anxious was the rich man in torments for the salvation of his brethren, though, while he lived, he had no concern for his own. How earnestly will some plead for admission into heaven, after the door is shut, though they took no thought for an entrance, while the door was open. Esau, for one morsel of meat, sold his birth-right, and alienated the blessing which accompanied it; but afterward, when the blessing was gone, he sought it with tears. This example the apostle improves as a warning to us, that we despise not our privileges and opportunities, but look diligently lest we fail of the grace of God.

We have illustrated the serious thoughts suggested in the text, and will now subjoin some reflections, and conclude.

1. It is very obvious, that the recovery of a sinner to a virtuous and holy temper and life cannot lie merely with himself, but must be a work of divine grace. Madness does not, in its own nature, tend to reason, nor does vice tend to virtue. And if the hearts of the sons men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts, they will not come to themselves without a divine motion, nor fill their own hearts with good, without a heavenly influence. As a man who is mad will not argue himself into a sound mind, so neither will a man whose heart is full of evil, originate in himself an effectual opposition to this evil. If he has in him a prevailing inclination to sin, he has not at the same time a prevailing inclination to holiness and virtue. So that the recovery of every habitual sinner must depend on some influence foreign to himself.

He needs doctrinal instructions, providential warnings, and internal excitements, to put him on the use of any means for obtaining a better disposition of mind; and he needs the grace of God to give efficacy to the means and to form in him the good disposition. The apostle speaks of the new creature as God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works.

2. It is matter of great thankfulness, that God has placed sinners under a possibility and hope of being recovered from their dangerous malady. He has given them his holy word—has appointed the stated preaching of this word—sends them the private admonitions of friends—warns them by solemn events in his providence, and strives with them by the motions of his Spirit. And however incapable they are of themselves to effect their own recovery; yet under these advantages they may do something—they may apply the means in their hands; and in the diligent application of these means they may hope for those energies of divine grace, which will renew them to a sound mind.

3. As the madness of sinners is of the moral kind; as it consists not in the want, but in the perversion of reason, so they are subjects of reproofs, counsels and instructions. It is therefore our duty to address ourselves to them in these ways, that we may bring them to a right use of their reason. It is the direction of the apostle, 'Exhort one another daily, while it is called to day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' If we would be faithful to warn and rebuke the ungodly, we doubtless might reclaim some. And 'he that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.' If a neighbor should lose his reason, we should look upon him with pity, and should spare no means in our power which had a hopeful tendency to his recovery, even though the success might be doubtful. But are there not some, who are under a more dangerous insanity? Let us not forget these. Of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.

4. What reason have many to be thankful for affliction—for sickness—for poverty—for worldly disappointment. How often are these the means of bringing mad sinners to their reason. The

prodigal who went away from his father, and spent his substance in riotous living, was brought to himself by means of a mighty famine, which reduced him to want and distress. When sinners are holden in cords of affliction, God opens their ears to instruction. It is of great importance that they attend to the admonitions of Providence and the excitements of the Spirit. If hereby they are brought to any sober and rational sentiments, there is hope that they may recover themselves from their dangerous malady. Let them seek an acquaintance with themselves; know the plague of their hearts; reflect on the madness of their past life; contemplate the fatal consequence of continuing in it; cultivate the hopeful beginnings which appear; avoid whatever might plunge them again into their distracted state, and commend themselves to the grace of God which is able to heal their souls and give them perfect soundness. If after they have begun to emerge from a state of folly and madness, through the knowledge of the truth, they should relapse into it, the latter end will be worse with them than the beginning.

SERMON IV.

UNREASONABLE DEMANDS IN RELIGION EXPOSED AND CONDEMNED.

MATTHEW XXVII. 41, 42.

Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him with the scribes and elders, said, he saved others ; himself he cannot save : If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross ; and we will believe him.

THE manner of our Saviour's death was the most painful that can be imagined ; and his sufferings, great in their nature, were heightened by some peculiar circumstances.

In the day of affliction it is no small consolation to have our friends around us, and to observe their tender sympathy with us. Of this consolation our Lord was deprived. When his enemies had seized him, his disciples all forsook him. One had before betrayed him ; another now denied him ; and the rest stood at a distance. The heart of an enemy will sometimes melt at the sight of the misery which he inflicts ; but the enemies of Jesus, far from being softened into compassion by his sufferings, took from thence occasion to inflict and mock him more. " They who passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying ; ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days ; save thyself, and come down from the cross." And the chief priests with the scribes and elders, imagining that his pretensions to the mes-

siahship were fully confuted, ridiculed him on the subject, in the language of our text. "He saved others;" or pretended to do so; "himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him."

My design from these words is, to shew the unreasonableness of this demand of the Jewish rulers, as the condition of their faith; and then to improve this instance of perverseness for the conviction of those who demand better advantages, or higher evidences in order to their compliance with the gospel.

I. We will show the unreasonableness of the demand made by the Jewish rulers, as the condition of their faith in Christ. "Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him."

Jesus declared, that he came to save those who were lost. To support this declaration, it was necessary, that he should give some proof his *power* to save. Of this he gave sufficient proof in the miraculous works which he performed. This proof, the prejudice of the Jews rejected. Sometimes they demanded greater works than they had seen him do; and when he did his greatest works, these they ascribed to the power of the devil. It was their constant study to evade the force of evidence, and defeat the means of conviction. But when they saw him on the cross, then they triumphed in their unbelief. "Surely," said they, "if he possessed a supernatural power, he would employ it in his own case: if he could save himself, he would not hang there a miserable spectacle. Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe."

However plausible this demand might appear to *them*, we see it to be perfectly absurd: for,

1. It was a demand which could not be complied with, and which, if they had understood their own scriptures, they must have *known* could not be complied with.

It had been abundantly foretold in prophecy, that the Messiah, when he came, would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief—that he would be cut off out of the land of the living—that he would make his soul an offering for sin: yea, that he would suffer the same kind of death, which he was now suffer-

ing—would be taken from prison and judgment—would be scourged and spitted on—pierced in his hands and feet—and mocked and insulted in his anguish. He himself had declared, that he must go up to Jerusalem; suffer many things of the priests and elders; be put to death on the cross and made a sacrifice for the sins of men. Had he now rescued himself from the hands of his enemies, and effected an escape from the death of the cross, he would have shown that he was not the Saviour whom the prophets foretold, and whom he professed to be. The salvation which men needed was deliverance from the guilt of sin and from the curse of the law. That he might redeem them from the curse of the law, he must be made a curse for them—that they might be made the righteousness of God in him, he must be made a sin-offering for them. To have saved himself, therefore, from the cross, would have been to contradict all that the prophets had spoken concerning him, and his own professed design in coming into the world.

It appears, then, that the evidence which the rulers demanded of Christ's power to save, was of such a nature, that had it been granted, it must have proved the contrary.

2. This evidence, had it been given, would have been no more likely to convince them, than was that which had been given already.

They said, "Let him now come down from the cross and save himself, and we will believe" that he can save others. Why, then, did they not believe, when they had seen him perform acts of power as great and wonderful as this would have been? He had by his word healed the most inveterate diseases—restored sight to the blind, and to one born blind—cast out devils from their ancient possessions—recovered to reason the lunatic and distracted—raised to life them who were dead, and one who had been four days dead—turned water into wine—multiplied a few loaves of bread to a quantity sufficient to feed many thousands—escaped the hands of his enemies when they attempted to take him—struck the soldiers to the ground when they came to seize him. What room was there now to doubt, whether he was able to save himself and others? Had he broken the nails which fastened him

to the cross, come down and fled from his persecutors, this would not have been so wonderful a demonstration of his power, as the works which he had done already. And since they did not believe him for the works he had done, it is by no means probable, they would have believed, if he had done what they demanded.

3. He afterward actually gave them the evidence which they required, and still they were faithless.

He did not, indeed, come down from the cross; but he did more; he came up from the dead. Was not this proof sufficient that he was able to save? Why did they not believe now? He expressly foretold, that he should be put to death, and that on the third day he would rise again. This prediction was well known. Hence the priests and rulers procured a guard to be stationed at his grave, lest his disciples should steal him away by night, and give out that he was risen. But notwithstanding this precaution, he rose according to his prediction, and shewed himself alive by many infallible proofs. This was a clearer demonstration of his power, than a descent from the cross would have been. Yet they would not believe. And lest such a wonderful and decisive proof should work conviction in others, they bribed the guard to report the foolish story, that while they were asleep, his disciples came and stole him away. If Christ had come down from the cross, they would have contrived some evasion or other, and still remained unbelieving.

4. Their perverseness was itself an evidence, that Jesus was the Messiah foretold.

The Psalmist, speaking in the person of the Messiah, says, "The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. All that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, he trusted in the Lord, that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." This very prediction, Christ's enemies exactly fulfilled. They wounded him in the same manner, mocked him in the same language, and insulted him with the same airs and motions, which this prophecy describes; and thus by their infidelity and perverseness proved the very thing which they denied, that this was the Redeemer who should come into the world.

I would observe once more,

5. Some circumstances attending Christ's crucifixion, gave more evident displays of his divine power and dignity, than a descent from the cross would have done.

While he hung on the tree, the sun withdrew its light, and for several hours concealed itself in preternatural darkness. When he yielded up the ghost, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, the earth trembled, the rocks started from their seats, and the monuments of the dead were laid open. Such convulsions in nature, at this solemn hour, were sufficient not only to raise astonishment, but to work conviction in many. "The centurion, and they who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw these things, feared greatly, and said, truly this was a righteous man—this was the Son of God. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding what was done, smote their breasts and returned."

On the whole, the evidence which was given of Christ's divine power, was much superior to that which the rulers demanded; and as they did not believe for all this, it cannot be supposed, they would have believed, if their demand had been complied with.

We may here reflect, with admiration, on the unexampled love of Christ. The Jews say, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." That any man would submit to such misery, if he could save himself—that he would die voluntarily to save others, seemed incredible. Men will commonly do more to save themselves, than to save their neighbors. And hence they concluded, that he continued on the cross, only because it was not in his power to escape from it.

But his thoughts were not as theirs, and are not as ours. His love passeth knowledge. He was ready, on all occasions, to relieve the distressed. But that power, which had often been employed in relieving others—in healing the sick, halt and blind—in feeding the hungry and raising the dead, he suspended in his own case, even though his anguish was extreme, and he was upbraided with his impotence. He felt for unhappy mortals, more than for himself. When the daughters of Jerusalem bewailed

his hard lot, he said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." When one of his enemies was wounded in the attempt to seize him, though he wrought no miracle to effect his own escape, yet he performed one to heal this wounded enemy. "Suffer ye thus far," says he, i. e. give me the liberty of my hand for a moment; for they now held him; "and he touched the man and healed him."

As he came to save sinners, so he declined no sufferings which were necessary to this end. That he had power to come down from the cross, was manifest from his former, and from his present works, and more manifest afterward by his resurrection from the grave. His death was therefore voluntary. "He laid down his life of himself. No man could take it from him" without his consent. "He had power to lay it down, and power to take it again." The greatest expression of love among men is, that one lay down his life for his friend. But he commended his love toward us, in that, while we were enemies, he died for us.

Again. We see the unreasonableness of wicked men in demanding other means, when they reject those which they have. The Jews were a perverse generation. They would not believe Christ's saving power on such proofs as were given; but required new ones; and they excused their unbelief, because their humour was not gratified.

God is not bound to give men the best possible means. If he gives them such as, by a proper improvement, may lead to the knowledge of the truth, there is no ground of complaint, but abundant cause of thankfulness. God is sovereign in the distribution of his favours. All the means of knowledge, faith and salvation which he puts into our hands, are his free gifts. It belongs not to us, but to his wisdom and goodness, to determine what advantages we shall be placed under. He divides to men severally as he will. To some he gives five talents; to some two; to others but one. It concerns every man to improve the talents he has; and not to throw by his one, or two talents, because he has not five, or because he imagines, that with more he could do better.

If Christ had given the Jews sufficient evidence of his divinity, their unbelief was inexcusable, even though higher evidence might

have been given. If they would not be convinced by the miracles which he had wrought, he was not bound to come down from the cross for their conviction. And if he had, the same perverseness would still have held them in unbelief.

Besides : We are not always competent judges, what would be the best means. The Jews imagined, that Christ's descent from the cross would have been a more convincing proof of his saving power, than any thing they had seen. But really it would have been quite the contrary. He took our flesh, that by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, and open a way for the salvation of sinful men. Had he saved himself from death, he could not have saved us. The method they proposed would have defeated its own end. The like folly there may be in other human schemes. We may imagine, that if God would place men under certain circumstances, or take certain measures with them, they would embrace religion and obtain salvation. But who are we, that we should prescribe to infinite wisdom ? When we attempt to mend what God has done, we mar his work and frustrate our own purpose. Let us improve the means we have ; and then, if more be necessary, more will be given. If we neglect those already given, it is very improbable that we should make a better use of any other. "He that is faithful in the least is faithful also in much ; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much."

Absurd are all our complaints for want of better means, until we make a good improvement of those which we have. The same disposition of heart, which objects against these, would cavil at any other. This we see in the Jews. When Christ wrought wonders on earth, they said, "We would see a sign from heaven." There came a voice from heaven ; and the people who heard it, said, "It thundered." They would not believe him for all his mighty works : but they said, if he would come down from the cross, then they would believe. He came up from the dead, and still they were as far from believing as before ; for they said, his disciples stole him away.

We see and condemn their perverseness. There may be the same perverseness in many, still.

Let us therefore,

II. Improve this example for the reproof and conviction of those, who are governed by the same spirit, and who, instead of improving the means which they have, only complain for want of better.

1. Some perhaps imagine, that they should have been under much better advantages with respect to their salvation, if they had lived in our Saviour's day.

Admitting that you would: yet you did not live in that; you live in the present day; and you must use the means which you have.

But what would have been your superior advantages then? Christ dwelt in Judea. It was but a small part of the human race that could have personal access to him. And your lot might have cast you at a distance. . . But what if you had then lived in Judea? Some, we find, were unbelievers there: How do you know but you might have been of that class? You think, that if you had seen his miracles you should have believed. And so you would, if your heart were not perverse. And if it is not perverse, you will believe now. You have credible testimony of the miracles which he wrought; and if you believe that they were wrought, then, to you, they are as good evidence of the truth of his religion, as if you had seen them. You have now some evidences of this, which you could not then have had; such as the fulfilment of several important prophecies—the wonderful propagation of his gospel, and its glorious success in the world. You think, that if you could see Christ in the flesh, you should be highly benefitted by his instructions. But you have these instructions now. Why are they not as important as they were when he uttered them? If you had lived in that day, you could only have heard his doctrines transiently, and must have trusted to your memory to retain them. Now you have them by you, and may review them as often as you please. Never man spake like him: but his speaking was ineffectual to some—perhaps it would have been so to you. The perverse rejected the doctrines of his mouth; the humble will receive the doctrines of his word.

Some things in the gospel, you will say, are hard to be understood; and if the Saviour were present, you could have them explained. But there were those who complained of hard sayings, when they heard Jesus himself speak: and the reason was, they were slow of heart to understand. Ask yourselves, whether you love and practise all that you do understand. If you do not, it is probable, that knowing more would not make you better; and if you do, a few obscure passages will never hurt you. If Christ were with you, you think you could pray to him in such a manner as to be heard. And why may you not pray as fervently and successfully now? He is in heaven: but he hears on earth. If you will not repair to him now, neither would you, though he still was manifest in the flesh.

2. Some will say, if the word of God were dispensed in a more engaging *manner*—if it were preached oftener, and with more affection and address, it would have a better effect upon us.

But what is it that is to have effect? Is it mere sound? Or is it truth? If you hear the truth, and regard what you hear, it probably will have some effect now. The preacher, indeed, ought to choose out acceptable words, as well as upright words, even words of truth. His manner of speaking should be suited to command the attention, awaken the conscience and move the heart. But then you must not imagine, that all the success depends on the speaker. Christ spake as never man spake; yet few believed his report. The apostles spake with demonstration of the Spirit and with power, yet many contradicted and blasphemed.

Enquire, then, whether you make a good use of such means as you have. The word of God is in your hands. Do you daily converse with it; seek a clearer knowledge of it; and govern yourselves by it? It is preached near to you. Do you embrace every opportunity to hear it? Do you hear it with attention, humility and teachableness, and with an honest application of what belongs to you? And are you doers as well as hearers of the word? If you hear it in this manner, and with this temper, it will be profitable to you; for the word does good to the upright in heart, however plainly it may be spoken. But if you have no reverence for, or love to the word of truth, it is not very probable

it would essentially benefit you, even though it were delivered with the tongue of angels, and uttered in a flame of zeal and eloquence. You might hear the preacher ; but you would hear as the people heard Ezekiel ; charmed, indeed, with the eloquence of the speaker, but unaffected with the importance of truth. ‘ They came to him as God’s people, and heard his word, but did it not. They with their mouths shewed much love, but their hearts went after their covetousness. He was unto them as a very lovely song of one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument ; for they heard his words but would not do them.’

3. Some complain, that their circumstances are too strait, and their occupations too pressing to allow them much leisure for religion. If their condition in life were more free and easy, they could do much better.

But when you complain of the want of leisure for religion, what do you intend by religion ? Do you mean that you have not time to be just and honest to your neighbours—charitable to the needy—temperate in your enjoyments—frugal in your expenses—that you have not time to love and fear your Maker—to restrain your passions—to shun temptations—to govern your tongue and banish criminal thoughts ? These things, you know, belong to religion. No : But you will say, you have not leisure for devotional exercises—for prayer, self examination, pious reading, and other instrumental duties of religion.

Well then ; ask yourselves how you improved this advantage when you did enjoy it. Once you were young and tolerably free from the cares and perplexities of the world. Did you employ your youth in furnishing your minds with knowledge, and in laying a foundation for a religious life ? If you trifled away the time of youth, how do you know but you should trifle as you did then, though you were now as free from worldly cares as you were then ?

Again : How do you improve the leisure which you have now ? How do you spend your sabbaths, your evenings, your hours of recess ? For you are not, all your time, at work. Do you apply the little leisure which you have to the purposes of religion ? If your sabbaths are lost in indolence, and your evenings and vacant

hours consumed in company and amusement, in vain do you plead, that you have not time for religious exercises ; for if you had more time to spare, you would not apply it to these exercises. It is not the want of time, but the want of heart, that makes you so unfrequent in the duties, and so deficient in the knowledge of religion. If the little recess which you find from the cares of the world is wholly applied to vanity and pleasure, it is a mercy that you find no more ; for if you had more, it would be spent worse.

Farther : Do you never run into needless expense, and consume your property, as well as time, in vanity and folly ? You can then very poorly plead the urgency of secular business in excuse for the neglect of religious exercises ; for your mis-spent substance, wisely applied, would have furnished you with the leisure, of the want of which you complain.

Once more enquire. Do you employ your minds in the best manner you can, when your hands are necessarily occupied in the business of your calling ? Are your thoughts as much exercised about the things of religion and another world, as a prudent attention to this world will allow ?

When you have answered these enquiries, then see if you have not more leisure than you improve, and whether it is not the want of will, more than the want of time, that hinders your attention to the one thing needful.

4. Some may imagine, that if God, in some special and extraordinary way, should give them sensible evidence of the reality and importance of future and eternal things, they should be more deeply affected, and more powerfully influenced by them.

But if you believe not the gospel, attended with all the evidence which God has given in its favour, neither would you believe to any saving purpose, though one came to you from the dead, or though the word was spoken to you by angels, or though the veil was withdrawn from the invisible world.

Have you not sufficient evidence, that there is a God—a holy, just, powerful, wise and good Being ? Are not the invisible things of God clearly seen in the things which are made ?—Have you not conclusive proof, that the gospel is a revelation from this Being ? Are not the doctrines and precepts of it agreeable to his

character, and such as you should expect to find in a revelation from him? Has not this gospel been confirmed by miracles clearly divine? Have you not as much reason to believe the testimony given of those miracles, as you have to believe any testimony whatever? If you reject the gospel which is confirmed by the concurrent testimony of human records from its beginning, must you not reject all ancient records, and believe only what you see with your eyes?—If you can disbelieve a future state of retribution, which is declared by the voice of reason and revelation, you might as well disbelieve it, whatever other evidence was given. Were the invisible world opened to your view, as well might you impute the discovery to the workings of imagination, as suppose the evidence which you now have to be a mere delusion. The things contained in the gospel are infinitely important; and if you are not influenced by them in this manner of communication, you would be no more influenced, though they were communicated in any other supposable way. Such is their importance, that every man of a prudent head and an honest heart would be governed by them, though he had only probable evidence of their truth. The reason why so many disregard them, is not the want of evidence to believe, but the want of a heart to love them. It is the evil heart of unbelief which hinders the influence of the gospel.

If God should open to you the invisible world, the view might overpower and confound you; but it would have no more tendency to make you really religious, than the more calm and familiar instructions of the gospel. Religion must be matter of sober and rational choice. A method of discovery which should disturb the exercise of reason, would not be the best adapted to promote real religion.

It is sometimes asked; if God would have men believe another world, and act with reference to it, why does he not convince and persuade them by voices and signs from heaven? Why does he not reward virtue and punish vice immediately and without delay, so that all discouragement from the one, and temptation to the other may be removed? The truth is, God treats men as reasonable and moral agents. He leaves religion to be, what it must be,

matter of choice. He sets before us motives of the highest importance and the most indubitable certainty, and calls our attention to them in the most solemn and affectionate manner. If we will not regard them, nor be influenced by them, neither should we be effectually persuaded, though one should come to us from the dead; though an angel should speak to us from heaven, or though hell were naked before us, and destruction had no covering.

It concerns us, then, to attend to the communications which are made—to improve the means which are bestowed, and obey the motives which are proposed. That the truths of the gospel may have their influence, let us contemplate their importance, and their pertinence to our condition and character—let us know ourselves, as well as know the truth. Pride and self sufficiency oppose the gospel. Let us look unto God who can make all grace abound toward us. When he opens the heart, truth enters with power, and the entrance of his word gives light and peace and joy.

To conclude: Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you. Do all things without murmuring, or disputing, that ye may be the children of God without rebuke; may shine as lights in the world—and may obtain eternal life.

SERMON V.

JESUS GLORIFIED.—A COMMUNION SERMON.

JOHN XII. 23.

Jesus answered them, saying, the hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

OUR blessed Lord came into the world on the benevolent design of instructing, reforming and redeeming mankind. In the prosecution of this design he met with great opposition from the nation among whom his kind offices were first employed. He was reproached for the obscurity of his birth and education, and the poverty of his family and relations. He was maligned as a promoter of sedition, a profaner of divine institutions, a confederate with evil spirits, a friend of sinners and a blasphemer of God. This opposition was begun by the priests, rulers and leading men of the nation, who were irritated by his just reproofs, and jealous of a diminution of their power. To serve their covetous and ambitious designs, they, by every artifice, interested the lower class against him, and raised a popular cry to have him destroyed.

Well he knew the trials, which were coming upon him. Clearly he foresaw what would be the consequence of his fidelity in his work. He foretold, that he should be arrested, condemned and crucified at Jerusalem, and that his trial and death, though in-

tended by his enemies to complete his disgrace, would be the means of displaying his glory. In the foresight of the near approach of his sufferings, he says, in our text, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified."

We are here taught, that *there are certain times when, and events by which, Jesus Christ is eminently glorified.* Some of these we will consider and improve.

1. Christ was glorified in his *trial* and *condemnation* by an iniquitous court. Here his innocence and virtue were clearly displayed.

This court consisted of his enemies. Having no hope that, in a fair and honest process, they could convict him of any real crime, they suborned witnesses to testify such matters as might be made a ground of his condemnation. But the testimony of the witnesses was so variant and contradictory, that no credit was due, and little seems to have been paid to it. None of them could convince him of sin. Though he was condemned as worthy of death, yet the judgment was not predicated on proof of any crime, but merely on that claim to a divine mission, which he had constantly asserted in his preaching, had fully confirmed by his works, and had boldly supported to that hour.

When they applied to the Roman governor for a sentence against him, they could obtain it only by clamors and threats. Pilate, after a full examination, declared publickly and repeatedly, that he could find in him no fault at all. Thus his enemies became witnesses of the innocence of his life and the divinity of his mission.

In the same manner the enemies of the gospel now bear testimony to its truth and importance. With all their malice, they can find no fault in it—nothing unfriendly to the virtue, or the happiness of mankind. On the contrary, they are constrained to confess, that its precepts are rational, and its tendency beneficent. Why then do they oppose it?—For the same cause for which the Jewish rulers opposed Christ. It condemns their corrupt hearts and wicked lives, and opens to them no prospect of happiness without repentance and amendment.

2. Christ was glorified on the *cross*.

The virtues of his life here shone with new and distinguished brightness. Here he displayed his meekness in sustaining, without resentment, the insults of his enemies—his patience in bearing, without complaint, the pains of crucifixion—his forgiveness of injuries in soliciting the pardon of his infatuated foes—his benevolence to mankind in submitting to death for their redemption—his constancy and fortitude in finishing the work which he had undertaken—his faith in God in commending himself to his care—his perfect resignation in praying, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Though he was crucified through weakness, yet, in this apparent weakness, he manifested a divine power dwelling in him. There was a majesty in his presence which confounded the soldiers who came to seize him. There was a penetration in his eye, which discerned and detected the perfidy of the dissembling wretch, who betrayed him with a kiss. There was a virtue in his touch, which instantly healed the wounded ear of Malchus. There was a tenderness and an energy in his look, which wrought conviction and repentance in Peter, who had denied him with an oath. There was grace at his disposal, which ensured salvation to a suffering malefactor. Though he was nailed to a cross, he was mighty to save.

Heaven gave open testimony in his favor. While he hung in anguish on the tree, the sun withdrew its light, and the sky was overspread with darkness. When he gave up the ghost, the earth trembled, the rocks burst asunder, the graves opened their doors, the vail of the temple was rent from top to bottom.

So convincing and amazing was the scene, that the captain of the guard exclaimed, “This was a righteous man—this was the Son of God.” And all the people who came to see the crucifixion, “beholding what was done, smote their breasts and returned.”

The virtues which he exhibited; the works which he performed; the testimonies which he received from heaven in the time of his last sufferings, were such demonstrations of his divinity, as nothing but malignity of heart could withstand. They wrought

conviction in many, who came to the scene with quite different apprehensions.

3. Christ was glorified in his *resurrection*.

He foretold, that he must suffer death at Jerusalem ; but on the third day he should rise again. To this event he referred his hearers for the proof of his mission from God, and of the truth of his doctrines. Such an event had never been known. Would an impostor have risked his reputation on a thing so strange and improbable ? He gave previous notice of the event, that enemies and unbelievers might gain full satisfaction in the case. Accordingly they took every possible precaution to prevent fraud ; and no fraud could rationally be pretended. Yet the body, on the third day, was gone from the tomb. Where was it ? It could not be removed by human contrivance. Jesus actually rose at the very time foretold. His resurrection was attended with an earthquake and descent of angels, which would naturally awaken attention and enquiry. He soon appeared to those who had known him before, and who could not have mistaken another for him. He conversed with them, ate and drank in their presence, suffered them to touch and handle him, and to examine the wounds, which he received on the cross ; and, for forty days together, gave them all the evidence they could desire of his real resurrection. Even his enemies were confounded. They knew, that the evidence of the fact must be convincing. What could they do ? They hired the guard to report, that his disciples stole away the body in the night, while they were asleep. How incredible the story ?—It supposes, that the disciples, though greatly intimidated by their master's death, now at once acquired boldness to attempt so perilous an enterprize. It supposes that the guard *all* fell asleep at once, when their lives depended on their fidelity. It supposes that a massy stone was removed, the grave entered, the body carried off without awakening any of the soldiers. It supposes that they well knew what was done, when they were all asleep.

This pitiful evasion is a confirmation of the reality of his resurrection. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead.

4. Christ was glorified in his *ascension*.

He foretold, that as he came from the Father to suffer for man's redemption, so he should return to the Father to receive the reward and the fruits of his sufferings. Of the time and place of his ascension he gave previous notice, in consequence of which, more than five hundred brethren were assembled to behold the wonderful and affecting scene, and to receive his last verbal instructions and benedictions. On his way to the place he was attended with his particular disciples, whom he instructed in their duty, commissioned to preach his gospel among all nations, and encouraged by a promise, that he would send down upon them the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When he had led them as far as Bethany, the appointed place of the ascension, he lifted up his hands and blessed them; and while he was blessing them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. As they stood wondering at the scene, there appeared angels in glorious apparel, who said, "Why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you, shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go up into heaven." On this they returned to Jerusalem, and gave themselves to prayer.

Soon after his ascension, he bestowed on them the promised gifts of the Spirit, by which they were enabled to work new miracles, speak with divers tongues, and preach the gospel with wonderful success. Thus he demonstrated, that he had actually ascended to his kingdom, was made head over all things to the church, would fulfil all his promises, maintain his own cause, and support his faithful ministers to the end of the world.

That he actually went into heaven, the disciples knew from his previous declaration—from his wonderful resurrection—from their own sight, as far as it could follow him—from the bright cloud, the excellent glory, which visibly received him—from the testimony of angels, and from the following effusion of the Spirit, which, he assured them, should be the speedy effect of his return to the Father.

We have evidence of this glorious event from the testimony of the disciples, and from the manifest accomplishment of the prom-

ises which he had made in behalf of his church. We see the church maintained—we see the gospel continued in the world—we see the preaching of this gospel accompanied with Divine power in the conversion of many from sin to God—we see the opposition, which is made to the cause of Christ, often over-ruled to its furtherance and promotion.

These things, so perfectly consonant to his promises and predictions, are plain evidences that he reigns on high, and will reign till he has put all his enemies under his feet.

This leads us to observe,

5. Christ is glorified in the *success* of his gospel.

The design, on which Christ came into the world, was to seek and to save them who are lost; to call sinners to repentance, and bring them to virtue here, and glory hereafter. This was the object of his ministry when he was on earth. This is still the great object of his gospel, since he has ascended to heaven. When his gospel is received among men with faith and love, and produces its proper effects in turning them to newness of life, then he is glorified; he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. Of such he says, "I am glorified in them."

He was glorified by the wonderful success of his gospel, when it was preached by his apostles. They went forth in his name proclaiming the news, and stating the terms of salvation through him. Many believed in him through their word. By their ministry the gospel spread far and wide. Wherever it went, it produced a surprizing alteration of sentiments and manners. The people exchanged the worship of idols for the worship of the only true God. They renounced their pagan rites and forms for the simplicity that is in Christ. They abandoned the vices in which they had lived, for the purity of manners taught by the gospel. The superstitious became rational; the immoral became virtuous; the vain became serious; the proud became humble; the contentious became peaceable; the passionate became meek; the dissolute became sober; the selfish became benevolent. They who once were foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, after the gospel appeared among them, were saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and having believed in God, were

careful to maintain good works. The happy effects of the gospel shewed it to be excellent and important, and proved that it proceeded and came forth from God.

Christ is glorified in every one, who, at any time and place, receives, professes and obeys his gospel. Such an one is an instance of the power of the word to mend the heart, and reform the life. He is a living witness, that there is a Divine power attending it. He bears testimony to its truth by his holy profession and godly conversation. He contributes to its success among others by the influence of his good example, and the efficacy of his fervent prayers.

When there is a general revival of the power of religion in any part of the christian world; in any church or society, where the gospel is preached, then Christ is glorified more conspicuously. Then his church increases; converts and professors are multiplied; truth rises and stands forth with boldness; good works abound; error is confounded; vice hides its guilty head; true christians are animated; faithful ministers are encouraged; heads of families maintain the worship of God in their houses; the young enquire what they must do to be saved; they who fear the Lord speak often one to another, and by their mutual influence provoke unto love and good works.

Then it appears, that Christ is among them of a truth—that he has not forsaken his church, nor withdrawn his Spirit from it—that he remembers and performs his holy promise—that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Christ will be more eminently and extensively glorified in a future time, when his gospel shall go forth with power among all nations; when the ancient Israel shall consider and turn to him; when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come and join themselves to his church, and the ends of the earth shall see his salvation.

How happy will be the period, when the world will be one grand community of saints under Jesus, its head; when his laws shall rule all nations, and his doctrines be the sanctions, which give efficacy to his laws; when wars shall cease among the kingdoms of the world, and controversies among christians shall be laid aside, and all shall unite in one common cause, the promo-

tion of virtue, peace and happiness. For such a period we are looking and praying. The Lord hasten the time of its coming.

Finally. Christ will be glorified in the *judgment*.

To him is committed authority to judge the world. The day is in progress, when he will come forth to execute this authority. He will come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him. He will seat himself on his throne in the clouds of heaven. Before him shall be gathered all nations. He will separate the wicked from among the just, and render to all according to their works.

He will then be glorified in the saints and admired in all them who believe.

On that great day the happy fruits of his death will appear in the *nations* of them who are saved. The value of his atonement will be conspicuous in the vast multitudes which are redeemed by it. These will unite their voices in songs of praise to him who has paid such a price for their redemption, and has applied it by his grace to their immortal souls. They will admire the glory, in which he appears—a glory of which they had little conception when they dwelt below. They will admire the compassion and love, which brought him down from his glory to a state of mortality, and subjected him to all the pains and indignities of the cross. They will admire his grace in giving them the gospel by the kind disposals of his providence, and in making it effectual to their salvation by the powerful influences of his Spirit. They will admire the grandeur and solemnity of the judgment, and the equity and justice with which it is administered. They will admire the beauty and splendor of the heavenly temple, and the order and zeal with which divine worship is conducted. They will admire the benevolence and charity with which happy spirits unite and harmonize with one another. They will admire the glory of the new raised bodies, which are fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. They will admire the expansion, enlargement and fervor which they feel in their own souls, while they mingle with their fellow-saints in the presence of their Lord. All the happiness which they possess they will acknowledge as the purchase of their Redeemer; and they will admire the grace, which has condescended to make the purchase and to bestow it on creatures

so unworthy. When they receive from his hand the crown of glory, they will cast it at his feet in thankful admiration of the gift, and humble confession of their unworthiness to retain it.

Thus Jesus will be glorified in the saints.

He will be glorified also, but in a different manner, in them that perish. It will then appear, "that their damnation is just." They will feel themselves guilty before him; and their guilt will be manifest to all. Every mouth will be stopped; every plea will be silenced; every excuse will be refuted; out of their own mouths they will be judged. When the final sentence is passed, and the guilty are detrudd to the regions of darkness, "there will be heard the voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments. He hath judged them who did corrupt the earth. Again they will say, Alleluia! and the smoke of the infernal torment will ascend for ever and ever."

The illustration which we have made of our subject reminds us of our high obligation to glorify Christ. It is the will of God, that he should be glorified. God has glorified him already, and will glorify him again. Let us give him the glory which is due from us. We are to glorify him by a grateful reception and sincere profession of his gospel—by a repentance of all our sins, by which we have dishonored his name—by fleeing from the wrath, from which he came to save us, and laying hold on the hope which he has set before us—by a humble reliance on his blood as the price of our redemption—by an active zeal to promote the interest of his religion, extend the bounds of his church, and increase the number of his subjects—by a steady obedience to his gospel and a visible display of the virtues and graces which it inculcates, and by a faithful attendance on, and improvement of the ordinances which he has instituted for the promotion of holiness in our hearts and lives.

There are seasons when we are specially called to give honor to Christ. Such a season is before us. "The hour is now come that the Son of man should be glorified." We are soon to see him exhibited before our eyes in the holy ordinance of the sup-

per. The design of this is, to bring him to our remembrance, enliven our pious affections to him, and confirm our faith in him. When we attend on it in this manner, we glorify him in our hearts. When our lives correspond to such sentiments, we honor him before men.

Let us improve the hour sequestered for this solemnity in holy meditations on our Redeemer, and in humble converse with him; go away with new resolutions of obedience to his gospel, and of conformity to his example; and in our future walk let us make it manifest, that we have been with Jesus, and that we really belong to him. Then can we say, that he is glorified in us, and we shall be glorified in him.

SERMON VI.

RELIGIOUS HOPE.

PSALM cxix. 116.

Let me not be ashamed of my hope.

HOPE is the expectation of future good. The great object of religious hope is eternal life. This comprises all the good which can be desired ; yea, more than can be conceived.

Every godly man, whatever doubts he may feel of his present claim, entertains a hope of his final admission to the happiness of the heavenly world. The apostle says, " We hope for eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, has promised." One who has no such hope, either disbelieves a future state, or is indifferent to it, or despairs of obtaining it. And unbelief, indifference and despair are all inconsistent with religion. The good man, through the influence of temptations, bodily infirmities, speculative errors, or remaining corruptions, may fall into great doubts and perplexities, and may seem to himself to have relinquished his hope of salvation. But in his most disconsolate hours, hope still works in him. His fervent prayers ; his tenderness of conscience ; his abhorrence of evil ; his converse with God's word ; his application to pious friends for their counsels and intercessions, are manifest proofs, that hope has not entirely forsaken him.

This *general* hope, however, is not *peculiar* to saints. Sinners possess it in some degree. They hope, as well as desire, to die the death of the righteous, even when they dare not pretend to have already attained this character. But the operations of this hope, in the good christian, and in the careless sinner, are widely different. In the former it excites to vigilance against sin and temptations ; to activity and diligence in duty, and to improvements in knowledge and holiness. In the latter it emboldens to sin ; to the neglect of the means of religion, and to delay in the work of salvation. While the sinner rests in an indeterminate expectation that he shall be happy at last, the humble christian searches his heart, proves his works, and gives diligence to make his calling and election sure. That his general hope of salvation, as attainable, may not make him ashamed, he labors for a more full assurance, that his salvation is already secured. The prayer of David is often in the heart and in the mouth of the real christian : “ Let me not be ashamed of my hope.”

A hope which maketh ashamed is formed rashly and presumptuously, without sincerity and without knowledge. The hope which will not make ashamed, is founded in the promise of God. and supported by a conscious compliance with the terms of the promise.

This subject I shall further illustrate by shewing, *first*, the necessity of a deep concern, lest we be ashamed of our hope. And, *secondly*, the way in which we may obtain a hope, that will not make us ashamed.

I. David in this prayer expresses a deep concern, lest he should be ashamed of his hope. Hence we are naturally led to inquire, what reasons there are for this concern.

1. One reason is *the vast importance of the object*.

If our solicitude to secure an object should be proportionate to its value, we ought to exercise the greatest diligence in relation to our final salvation ; for no other object—no other interest, can justly be compared with this. Were the object in view only a *temporal* advantage, none would blame our caution not to be deceived and disappointed. But the object of christian hope is more important than all the riches of the world. It is a salvation

purchased, not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus, the Son of God. It is fulness of joy and everlasting pleasure. It is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, fading not away, reserved in heaven for them, who by the power of God through faith are prepared for it, and kept unto it.

The enjoyments of this world are suited only to the wants of the animal nature. The enjoyments of heaven are adapted to the desires, and adequate to the capacity of the rational and immortal soul, renewed after the image of God. The world, if we possess it, is uncertain and unsatisfying. While it relieves some wants, it creates others; and while it approaches us with flattering smiles, it is preparing a stroke to wound us. Heaven will answer all the desires of the spiritual mind, and far exceed all the hopes that can previously be formed. The world can be enjoyed only while this short and precarious life remains. The enjoyments of heaven will be everlasting and always increasing.

This happiness stands in opposition, not to the loss of existence, but to extreme and permanent misery—misery described in scripture, in language which strikes the serious mind with horror.

If we contemplate the different states of good and bad men in the future world, can we feel indifferent to our final destination? Salvation, considered as a deliverance from extreme and endless misery on the one hand, and as the possession of complete and eternal happiness on the other, must concern us infinitely more than every other interest that can be desired or imagined. In some proportion, if any thing can be in proportion, to its value, should be our solicitude and diligence to secure it, and our concern and vigilance lest we form and entertain those fallacious hopes, which will issue in disappointment and shame.

2. *The deceitfulness of the heart* is another reason for caution and attention in this most important business.

“The heart is deceitful above all things—who can know it?” “Who can understand his errors?” “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” There are some, “who feed on ashes, and whom a deceived heart has turned aside.” There are some, “who

seem to themselves to be religious, when all their religion is vain, and who think themselves to be something, when they are nothing.”

This deceitfulness arises from the corruption of the natural principle of self-love. By nature we are formed to love ourselves, or to desire and seek our own happiness. This self-love, guided by unblinded reason, would direct us to take into view our whole existence; to look forward beyond this world to another, and to deny ourselves every present gratification, which is inconsistent with our greater happiness in future. But this principle, perverted by worldly affections, operates in a different manner. It consults present satisfaction at the expense of future happiness. For a morsel of meat it will sell an inheritance. Hence men labor to acquire and maintain a favorable opinion of themselves. They seldom look into their hearts, or review their lives. If at any time, awakened by adversity, they apply themselves to the work of self-examination, they conduct it with great partiality. They attend chiefly to the brighter parts of their character, and, as far as possible, overlook whatever is exceptionable. If their consciences reprove them for gross faults in practice, or palpable corruptions in temper, they are studious to find, and forward to admit any excuses, which will pacify their minds, and preserve their hopes. They treat themselves as we usually treat those particular friends, to whose interest we are strongly attached. We palliate their faults, magnify their virtues, reject ill reports, and believe only such as we wish to be true.

Since there is such a predilection and partiality for ourselves we should form our judgment of our own character with fear and caution. If our judgment be erroneous, the hope grounded on it, will ultimately make us ashamed. No man loves to think himself under the wrath of God, and exposed to the misery of the world to come. Rather than entertain so awful an apprehension, he will rest on a slender hope. Convinced that he is a sinner, he sees that repentance, or punishment is the alternative. He dreads the latter, and is averse to the former. He therefore chooses to prevent or suppress this conviction, and to enjoy a more favorable opinion of himself. It concerns us, then, to form

our hopes on fair and impartial views, and in all our self-examinations to exclude the blinding influence of this corrupt self-love. Since every man is exposed to self-deception, every man, who entertains a hope of salvation, should beware lest his hope make him ashamed. "I judge not mine own self," says St. Paul, "for though I know nothing of myself, yet am I not hereby justified, for he who judgeth me is the Lord."

3. Not only is there *danger* of a false hope, but *some have actually entertained such a hope* to their own confusion.

There is "the hope of the hypocrite, which will fail, when God takes away his soul." Many, whom Christ has not known, will confidently claim admission into his kingdom. Let every one, therefore, take heed lest his hope deceive him.

No man, in this imperfect state, has so full an assurance of hope, but that there may be still occasion to examine its foundation. The apostle Paul "kept under his body to bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway." He recommends it as a duty common to all christians, "to examine themselves whether they be in the faith; and to fear, lest a promise being left them of entering into rest, they should seem to come short of it."

There may be too much confidence even in good men. Peter, too little acquainted with himself, thought too highly of his own fortitude. When, in his hearing, Christ warned the disciples, that they would all be offended because of him, this disciple replied, "Though all should be offended, yet will not I." When Jesus foretold to Peter expressly, that he would soon deny him, he answered with confidence; "Though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee." Yet, in a few hours, while his master's premonition and his own resolution, one would think, must be fresh in his mind, he solemnly and repeatedly denied his Lord, on a much smaller temptation than that, of which he had just before spoken so lightly. Hence Jesus, after his resurrection, put to him this question again and again, "Lovest thou me?" Thus intimating, that since he had been so sadly deceived in himself, he should ever be cautious, how he trusted his own heart.

4. A false confidence in this world, *will aggravate the misery of the next.*

The troubles of the *present* life, accompanied with the disappointment of high expectation, fall on us with accumulated weight. In like manner the vain hopes of presumptuous hypocrites will plunge them into deeper misery. Thus our Saviour has warned us; "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are; then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." The hypocrite may derive some present comfort from his false hope; but this temporary comfort will be bitterness in the end.

5. A false hope obstructs the influence of the gospel, and thus *hinders men's salvation.*

The hypocrite, flattering himself that he is safe already, repels the convictions of his conscience. The terrors of God's word reach not his heart, because it is guarded by a confidence in his own righteousness. He knows not that he is poor and blind and naked, but imagines himself to be full and in need of nothing; and therefore despises the counsel of Christ to receive from his hand true riches, white raiment and eye-salve. His false confidence quiets his soul in his guilty state, and prevents his seeking pardon by repentance. Well may he be ashamed of a hope, which not only fails of bringing him to the object, but proves the very cause of his fatal miscarriage. How carefully should we guard against a hope so baleful in its nature and tendency. Many a hypocrite might probably have escaped destruction, if he had only been willing to be undeceived.

6. There will be *no opportunity, after death, to correct the errors and revoke the mischiefs of a false hope.*

If when we become ashamed of our hope, we could establish a better one in its place, the present indulgence of it would be far less dangerous. But this remedy cannot be admitted. This is the time, the only time to make our calling and election sure. If inattentive to our own hearts, we live on our delusions, we shall soon be ashamed of them; and our shame will continue forever. Eternity is before us. In a few days we must begin a new manner of existence; and this will be determined, not by our previous hope, but by our real character. God will judge us, not by the opinion which we have formed of ourselves, but by the works which we have done in the body. Can we live regardless of the nature and permanence of our hope, when the term of our probation is so short and uncertain, and the issue of it so vastly important? "Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Our passage is critical—a fall tremendous. Let us tread with caution. Alas! where are we? Whither are we going? What is before us? We are like men walking on a plank laid across a gulf ten thousand fathoms deep, the sight of which would almost turn the brain, and the possibility of a fall would make the frame to tremble. What delirium has seized us, that we tread so heedlessly in so perilous a passage? Well may we adopt the Psalmist's prayer; "Uphold us according to thy word, that we may live: Let us not be ashamed of our hope. Hold us up, and we shall be safe. Order our steps by thy word."

Such is the importance of a hope, which will not make us ashamed. We proceed,

Secondly, to shew how such a hope may be obtained.

To this branch of our subject I may certainly expect your attention.

1. You must gain a good acquaintance with the gospel; not only be persuaded of its truth in general, but understand the nature of that religion which it teaches, the way of salvation which it has marked out, and the terms on which it has promised this inestimable blessing. Without this knowledge your hope can have no basis.

In the gospel you find that salvation is purchased by the blood of a divine Saviour, and, through his atonement, is promised to all who submit to the terms required. These terms are repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. These qualifications are wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God; and his gracious operations you are to seek by earnest prayer and a diligent attendance on instituted means.

A hope of eternal life must be founded on the promise of God, which is made, not in consideration of the worthiness of our future works, but in consideration of the virtue of the Redeemer's righteousness. The purchase of Christ and the promise of God are the basis on which our hope must rest, and the ground on which we must view our salvation as attainable. But then, in order to a good hope of a *present* interest in this salvation, we must be able to discern in ourselves, those qualifications to which this benefit is promised, or those characters which the gospel makes evidential of a title to this blessing. Though the promise of God gives us the assurance of *fact*, that there is a salvation to be obtained; yet nothing can give us the assurance of *hope*, that this salvation is *already ours*, but the discernment of those qualifications, to which the promise is made; such as faith in Christ, repentance of sin, a new creature, a heart and life devoted to God in the love and practice of religion. Therefore,

2. That we may not be ashamed of our hope, we must *heartily subject ourselves to the government of the gospel*. We must have not only a doctrinal acquaintance with it, but such a sensible persuasion of the great things contained in it, as shall give them a practical influence—such a persuasion as shall bring us to renounce sin and the world, and to serve God in newness of spirit and life. In a word, we must find ourselves fashioned into the temper of the gospel, before we can ascertain our claim to the blessings of it.

3. That we may maintain this hope, we must live *in the exercise of those graces, and in the practice of those duties, which the gospel requires*. Whenever we grow remiss and negligent in religion, we have cause to call in question the sincerity of our hearts and the soundness of our hope. Let us then be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for thus we

shall know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. Let us see, that our repentance be followed with carefulness in duty, and our faith with increasing holiness, and that our new obedience be constant, animated and unreserved, guided by God's word as its rule, flowing from love to him as its principle, directed to his glory as its end, and relying on the blood of the Redeemer as the ground of its acceptance. Thus we shall have peace in repenting and joy in believing. The Apostle says, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

4. That we may not be ashamed of our hope, we must *aim at religious improvements.*

This is St. Peter's advice; "giving all diligence add to your faith virtue," and all the graces of the christian character; "for if these things be in you and abound, they make that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. If ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the kingdom of Christ."

If we were perfect in holiness, we should need no other evidence to support our hope. But since perfection is unattainable, growth in holiness is our best evidence. Though we are conscious of great deficiencies, yet if we find that we are making some advances, that we more and more subdue our unruly passions, improve in our love to God, and enlarge our charity to men, conquer temptations more easily, perform duty more cheerfully, and govern ourselves more steadily, we shall then have no cause to be ashamed of our hope.

5. To the enjoyment of steady hope there is need of *frequent and intimate converse with ourselves.* Without this we cannot know what we are, nor what we do; whether we are attempered or opposed to the gospel; whether we live in the practice, or in the neglect of duty; whether we grow, or decline in grace. Self-examination, being a gospel duty, is necessary as an evidence of religion in the heart, as well as to the discernment of other evidences. The habitual neglect of it indicates such an indifference

to our salvation, and such a disregard to the divine commands, as is inconsistent with a religious temper.

Finally; *Prayer to God* is an important means of establishing our hope. The Psalmist prays; "Search me, O God, and try my heart; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

We have seen the *importance* of a hope which will not make us ashamed; and we have seen by what *means* we may make this attainment.

Let us not be careless and indifferent in a matter of such serious consequence. No attention—no labor can be too great for such a hope as has been described—a hope which will be our support in adversity, our comfort in death, our joy in the presence of Christ at his coming, when the conscious sinner and the detected hypocrite will tremble and be dismayed. Let us not reckon our lives dear to us, that so we may finish our course with joy. Let us never indulge those flattering imaginations, nor admit those presumptuous conclusions, which will only raise the soul aloft, that it may receive a more terrible downfall. Let us search our hearts with jealousy, form our hopes with caution, and work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Let us press toward perfection with ardor, discharge our duty with zeal, resist temptations with firmness, serve God with faithfulness, and thus give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. Animated by an increasing hope of heaven, let us pursue the object with warmth, quicken our motion toward it daily, as it draws nearer to our view, till at last all our desires and pursuits terminate in it, all our hopes are lost in enjoyment, and all our affections are swallowed up in God.

SERMON VII.

THE NEW HEART A DIVINE WORK.

EZEKIEL, xxxvi. 26.

*A new heart 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 a heart of flesh.*

AT the time when Ezekiel delivered this promise, the Jews were under the yoke of the Chaldean monarch, in a state of captivity, which, from its beginning, continued seventy years. During this period, though by their impenitence they rendered themselves unworthy of God's favorable notice, yet he mercifully remembered them, and inclined the heart of their oppressor to allow them privileges, which he denied to other captives. They still enjoyed the ministry of their prophets, and they received many comfortable assurances of emancipation from their bondage, when the set time to favor them should come.

To give the more effectual support to the faith and hope of good men, the prophets, in their sacred lectures, often extended their views beyond the time of this deliverance, to a more glorious day, not yet arrived, when the veil shall be wholly removed from the eyes of that people, and their hard hearts shall be softened into repentance and obedience. The promises contained in the latter part of the chapter where our text is, are probably of

this kind. Though they had a primary respect to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, and to the meliorated disposition with which they returned to their own land, yet they received a farther accomplishment in the time of Christ and his apostles, when many among Jews, as well as Gentiles, turned to the Lord. But their entire completion is referred to the day foretold in the eleventh chapter to the Romans, "When the deliverer shall come out of Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and all Israel shall be saved."

The blessings promised them in our context are chiefly of a spiritual nature; such as sanctification, pardon, a new heart, a heart of flesh, and the presence of the Divine Spirit. To these shall be added peace, safety, plenty, and every kind of temporal prosperity, which can consist with a happy state of religion. "I will take you from among the heathen," saith their God, "and will gather you out of all countries, and will bring you unto your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. 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 a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."

The great change to be made in this people, when they should be brought into favour with God, is expressed by *a new heart and a new spirit*.

We will consider the *nature*—the *importance*—and the *attainableness* of this change.

I. We will consider the *nature* of the change.

A holy temper is often, in scripture, represented under this character. David prays, "O God, create in me a clean heart, *renew* in me a right spirit." We are taught by the gospel, that "we must be *renewed* in the spirit of our mind—must put on the *new man*—become *new creatures*—walk in *newness* of life."

This newness of heart is, in our text, opposed to former filthiness and profaneness. It pre-supposes, therefore, a depraved and vitiated state of mind, as what renders the change necessary; and it imparts, not the creation of new mental faculties, but the introduction of holy tempers and dispositions. Thus it is described

by Saint Paul; "We were sometimes foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But God of his mercy hath saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." They, who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, "have put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts, and have put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."

This change intends something more than an external reformation. It has its ground-work in the heart. There may be an observable amendment in the outward behaviour, while the inward temper remains the same. New circumstances may produce a great alteration in the manner of life, when there is no habitual change in the disposition of the heart. We read of those, "who in their trouble, return and enquire after God; but are not steadfast in his covenant, because their hearts are not right with him"—of those, "who return, but not to the most High"—of those, "who turn to the Lord; but feignedly, not with their whole heart"—of those, "who for a time escape the pollutions of the world, but are again entangled therein and overcome."

A bare restraint on the vicious inclinations, or a partial, or temporary amendment of the manners, amounts not to the scriptural import of the new heart and the new spirit. The apostle says, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away, all things are become new."

1. This new heart implies some new views and apprehensions of divine things.

Sinners are often said to be in darkness, either on account of their ignorance of the great truths of religion, or their disregard and inattention to them. They have eyes but see not, and they have ears but hear not. Their heart is waxed gross, so that the things of God are not discerned in their spiritual nature, nor felt in their mighty importance. In conversion, the eyes of their understanding are opened—they are made light in the Lord; not by an immediate discovery of new truths, but by a sensible apprehension of truths already known.

When one, who has lived in gross ignorance of religion, becomes a subject of conversion, the change will be accompanied and followed with new accessions of knowledge. This was the case of those, who, in the apostles' times, were converted from heathenism to Christianity; and may still be the case of many, who for want of a proper education, or through their own negligence, have lived strangers to the doctrines of the gospel, until the time when God began a good work in them, by awakening them to a conviction of their guilt and an apprehension of their danger.

This enlightening, however, is not in a way of immediate discovery, but only in a way of rational improvement—not by a new revelation, but by a proper use of the revelation which they have.

The gospel contains all things which we need to know. Many under the gospel, through their own carelessness, remain ignorant of the things which are there taught. When their hearts are awakened to a sense of the importance of religion, they attend with diligence on the means of knowledge, and make easy improvement in it. They will know, when they follow on to know the Lord.

It was in this way that men, in the apostolic times, were enlightened in the knowledge of the truth. Paul was sent to open the eyes of the Gentiles, and turn them from darkness to light. Peter was sent to Cornelius to tell him words, by which he should be saved. Ananias was ordered to go and instruct Paul in the things which the Lord would have him to do.

It may be hoped, that few, educated under the gospel, are ignorant of its essential doctrines and precepts. At least, it is certain, men may have knowledge in the great mysteries of religion, without the temper of it.

When such as these become the subjects of conversion, if no addition is made to their doctrinal knowledge, they may yet be said to be turned from darkness to light, because they have new apprehensions of the things, which they before understood and believed; they consider them more attentively, discern them more clearly, feel them more sensibly, and are influenced by them more powerfully.

2. Though the new heart receives no addition to the intellectual faculty, yet this faculty is employed in a new manner.

The sinner, by false reasoning, often perverts the doctrines of religion to his encouragement in sin, or to the excuse of his misconduct. The convert enquires, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He prays, "What I know not, teach thou me." He searches God's word, that he may find his duty, learn the truth, know himself, rectify his mistakes, and strengthen his good resolutions.

The sinner applies his reason chiefly to the purposes of the present life. The convert directs his intellectual powers to the great work of his salvation. He has a new object, and his thoughts run very much in a new channel.

3. In the new heart there is a sensibility of conscience—or habitual tenderness with respect to duty, and a watchful fear with respect to sin.

The sinner, in his former state of security and indolence, felt little remorse for his transgressions, and little concern about the consequences of them. Conscience, if by any means it was awakened, easily sunk down again to its wonted rest and quietness. It seldom reproved him for his sins, or warned him of his danger. It overlooked smaller iniquities. It started only at more gross enormities, and these it palliated and excused. Now it is afraid of sin in every form, and in its remotest appearance. It trembles at God's word, and stands in awe of his judgments. It is quick to discern, and severe to condemn iniquity. It dictates with authority and commands with power.

These properties of the new heart are comprehended in the heart of flesh, which is opposed to the heart of stone.

4. In the new heart there is a new choice and intention.

The chief end, which the sinner has in view, is temporal convenience, pleasure and interest. The convert has a purpose and design superior to these. His governing aim is to obtain the approbation and secure the favour of God. He looks more at things future and unseen, than at things present and sensible.

In his former state, he chose the interests of the world for his happiness, the customs of the world for his rule, and the men of

the world for his companions. Now he chooses God for his portion, Jesus Christ for his Saviour, the Divine Spirit for his helper, the word of God for his guide, heaven for his home, and them who fear God for his friends. Once his enquiry was, "Who will shew me any good?" Now he prays, "Lord lift up the light of thy countenance upon me."

5. His affections operate in a new manner, and with regard to different objects.

Worldly things were once the great objects of his desires; now he intreats God's favour with his whole heart. Nothing used to alarm his fears like poverty, reproach, or adversity: now he is far more afraid of sin and the Divine displeasure. Temporal calamities and disappointments formerly awakened the most painful anxiety: but his own sins and follies are now his greatest trouble. Indignities and affronts from men were once the only incentives to anger: but now his indignation turns on himself, for the injuries he has done to God, his Saviour, and his soul. He sees reason to be displeased with none so much as himself, because he has suffered from no man's sins so much as his own. Spiritual things are now the chief springs of his joy. The victories which he gains over sin and the world, the hopes of a heavenly inheritance, and the foretastes of future happiness, give him more satisfaction than the greatest earthly possessions.

6. He who is renewed in the spirit of his mind, walks in newness of life.

The actual turning from sin to holiness will be more or less observable, according to the manner of his former life. If he has lived in the open indulgence of vice, or neglect of duty, his conversion will be visible. If he has lived in the regular performance of external duties, the alteration will be, indeed, less remarkable; but still it will be real. He now acts from new principles, with new zeal, with growing constancy, and with respect to all God's commandments.

Having illustrated the nature of the change expressed by a new heart, we proceed,

II. To consider the *importance* of it.

This is supposed in the solemn manner, in which it is promised; "A new heart will I give you," as well as in the blessings annex-

ed to it, "I will put my spirit within you—and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

This new heart is the recovery of our nature from its depravity and corruption, to the image and likeness of God himself. "The new man is created after God, in righteousness and true holiness."

It prepares and disposes us to honour God, and promote the happiness of mankind. It raises us above those low and unworthy ends, which govern the corrupt and vicious part of the world: It qualifies us for great and good designs, and prompts us to pursue them with constancy and zeal.

It is a great security against temptations, as it excludes the dominion of fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and admits the stated residence of the Divine Spirit, who dwells with the humble and contrite, and helps their infirmities. Where God gives a new heart, there he puts his own Spirit; and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

This renewal of the heart renders us objects of God's approbation and complacency. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil; but he takes pleasure in them who fear him, and his countenance beholds the upright.

The subjects of this spiritual change find new sources of pleasure and enjoyment. They look with aversion on some, and with contempt on other of their former entertainments. They are convinced, that they then had no fruit in the things, whereof they are now ashamed. They experience joys, which strangers intermeddle not with. They delight in communion with God—in contemplating his perfections and works—in meditating on his great and precious promises, and the wonders of redeeming love—in attending on his worship and ordinances—and in anticipating, by hope, the good things hidden within the veil. They have pleasure in the order and harmony of their affections—in the practice of duty—in the consciousness of their sincerity, and in the peace of their minds. "Great peace have they who love God's law, and nothing shall offend them."

This new heart is a necessary qualification for heaven. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." A man under the dominion of an impure and corrupt heart, has no relish for the enter-

tainments, and no capacity for the employments of the world of glory and love. His own temper subjects him to misery, in whatever place he may be. "The pure in heart," and they only, "shall see God." "Into his presence nothing enters that defiles or works abomination." Hence our Saviour says, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Great and important then is the change under consideration. But great as it is, the text teaches us,

III. That it is *attainable*. "A new heart will I give you." It follows in the next verse, "My Spirit will I put within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."

We cannot understand this as an absolute promise, that *all* the people returning from Babylon should have a new heart put within them; for, in this unqualified sense, the promise was never performed. Neither are we to suppose, that the promise was of such a nature, as to supersede the necessity of means on their part, for obtaining this new heart. For what is here promised as a blessing, is elsewhere required as a duty. "Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye." But the import of it must be, that God would grant them such external means, and such internal influences, as were proper, on his part, to be given; and that, in the due improvement of, and concurrence with these means and influences, they should have a new heart and a new spirit.

This is God's gift. The means themselves, the opportunity to enjoy them, the excitement to apply them, the success which attends them, are from him. But still, converts are said to make themselves a new heart, as this is ordinarily given in consequence of their applying the stated means of grace, and improving the common influences of the Spirit.

Whatever connection there is between the endeavours of sinners and their conversion to holiness, it is a connection founded, not in their desert, but in God's abundant grace. And those convictions of sin, apprehensions of the importance of religion and desires of a new heart, which excite their endeavors, and animate

their prayers, are from him, from whom comes every good gift. In their corrupt and depraved state, they are not sufficient to think any thing as of themselves, but their sufficiency is of God. But then, it should be thankfully remembered, that where God sends his word, he sends his Spirit to accompany it; and that there is an influence of the Spirit common to those, who enjoy the word. When the gospel is called a ministration of the Spirit, and the Spirit is said to be ministered in the hearing of faith—when Christ is said to stand at men's door and knock, that they may hear his voice and open the door—when the Spirit is said to strive with sinners, in order to their conversion—when God promises the people whom he has taken into his covenant, that he will pour his Spirit on their seed and his blessing on their offspring, and that his Spirit which is upon them, and his words which he has put in their mouths, shall not depart from them nor from their seed—when sinners are reprov'd for having always resisted the Holy Ghost, and for having rebelled and vexed the Spirit of God—when men are cautioned not to grieve and quench the Spirit—when they who oppose the gospel are said to do despite to the Spirit; it is manifestly supposed and implied, that there is a common and promiscuous agency of the Spirit, which attends the publication of God's word, and which is, in some degree, afforded to all who attend on the dispensation of the word; and that, in consequence of this agency, of which they are the subjects, they are capable of such a use of appointed means, as may, through the farther work of the Spirit, issue in their real conversion.

It is often asked, Whether the unregenerate can do any thing of themselves, and whether any thing is expected, or required of them. But the answer is, They who enjoy the gospel are not left to themselves.

Suppose a man under the power of vicious propensities and habits, a stranger to gospel instructions and motives, and destitute of all divine influence; and then you will have the idea of a sinner, properly left to himself. But this is not your case. You have the gospel; and where this comes, there is an influence of the Spirit which attends it. You have been, and, it may be hoped, you still are the subjects of its influence. With these means and excite-

ments, there is something which you may do. You are not to confound your case with that of the heathens. "God has given you all things which pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called you to glory and virtue." Your case is different from theirs "who are without Christ, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Whatever kind, or degree of imbecility you may think to plead, this cannot be admitted as an excuse, when you are assured, that God grants his Spirit even to sinners; for Christ sent his Spirit to convince the world of sin; and, in respect of his awakening and convincing influences, he is beforehand with you, and anticipates your requests. Jesus knocks at your door, before you invite him to come in. He stretches out his hand even to the disobedient and gainsaying.

If you ask then, what you must do to obtain a new heart, the answer is, Exercise yourselves in serious consideration. Meditate on the purity and extent of God's commands, and compare your hearts and lives with them, that you may gain a knowledge of your sins. Think on the awful issue of a guilty and impenitent life, that you may apprehend your danger. Contemplate the invitations and promises of the gospel, that you may see the hope which is set before you. Consideration is a necessary step to repentance. David thought on his ways, and turned his feet unto God's testimonies. It is God's complaint of sinners, that they do not consider. It is his command, that they consider their ways.

Apply yourselves to the means of knowledge; for it is in knowledge that the new man is created. He is begotten by the word of truth. It is by hearing this word, that faith comes. Paul was sent that he might turn men from darkness to light. Cry after knowledge; thus shall you understand the fear of the Lord.

Abstain from every thing which has a tendency to suppress the honest convictions of your minds, and to obstruct the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit. This is the exhortation of the Prophet, "Cast away all your transgressions, and make you a new heart." Similar is the advice of the Apostle, "Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

Encourage serious sentiments awakened in you, pursue the good resolutions which you have formed, and hold fast what you have received.

Implore the grace of God to create in you a new heart; for, after the promise in the text, he expressly declares, "I will for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

Say not, that until you have this new heart, your prayers will be vain. God has said no such thing. He says, "He will be enquired of." He who hears the ravens when they cry, will also hear sinners, when, awakened by his own word and Spirit to a sense of their danger, they call on him in the use of appointed means, to put a new spirit within them.

Give yourselves up to God through Jesus Christ. Follow the example of those, whose repentance the prophet thus describes; "They shall go weeping and mourning, and shall seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, and shall say, come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten.

SERMON VIII.

SINNERS CONTRADICTING THEIR PRAYERS.

JEREMIAH XXXVII. 3.

And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, PRAY NOW UNTO THE LORD OUR GOD FOR US.

NOT long before the time here referred to, the king of Babylon, who had brought the kingdom of Judah under his power, appointed Zedekiah to be king or viceroy of the country.

He swore allegiance to the king of Babylon, and bound himself to pay him a certain tribute. But afterward, with an intention to throw off the yoke, he made a treaty with the king of Egypt, who agreed to send an army for his support. On this encouragement, Zedekiah revolted from the king of Babylon, who, to reduce him, came and besieged Jerusalem. On hearing of the approach of the Egyptian army, he raised the siege, marched against the Egyptians, defeated them, and then renewed the siege which issued in the reduction of the city, and the capture of the king, and all the people who were with him.

Jeremiah had been a faithful reprovcr and monitor. But it is observed, in the words preceding the text, that neither the king, nor his servants, nor the people of the land hearkened to the

words of the Lord, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah. In this time of distress however, he sent messengers to the prophet, requesting his prayers. He said, "Pray *now* to the Lord for us."

There were many idolatrous prophets in Jerusalem, who had promised the people deliverance from their enemies, and had raised a clamor against Jeremiah for his faithful warnings. Why did not the king send to *them*, and ask *their* prayers?—The truth is, he had no confidence in them now. He saw that their predictions had failed; that they had only flattered the people with false promises, and deceived them with lying words: and he applied to Jeremiah, who had spoken with honest plainness, and whose words were now verified. He hoped that the prayers of such a righteous man would avail much. He saw no help but in God, and no intercessor so good as a prophet of God.

There was a time, when Jeremiah was taken up as a traitor—denounced as an enemy to his country—imprisoned—thrown into a dungeon, and there confined till he was half dead; and all this for no other cause, than his fidelity in his office, good will to his country, and prudent advice to the rulers of the people. But at this time, when the city was besieged, his prayers were solicited by the king and his servants, as what, they hoped, might save them and their country in so dangerous a crisis.

We see the inconsistency of these wicked men, and we condemn it. It may be proper to inquire, whether there be not the same inconsistency in others, or even in ourselves.

1. They *persecuted* a good prophet while they thought themselves safe; and sought his *prayers* when they found themselves in *danger*.

There is in most men an inward conviction of the truth and importance of religion. If the men of the world ridicule the strict piety, and resent the just reproofs of the friends of religion—if they endeavor to blast their reputation and destroy their influence; still, in their sober judgment, they esteem *these* as the excellent of the earth, and place much more confidence in them, than in men like themselves. *These* are the men whose advice they ask in cases of difficulty, to whose justice they apply for redress of injuries, and whose prayers they solicit in seasons of distress. If

to serve a party design, they wish to promote unprincipled men to places of *public* trust, yet they will not commit their *private* interests into such men's hands. They will often cavil at religion and slander the professors of it, that they may keep themselves in countenance. But in their conscience they cannot but revere religion and honor the professors of it as wise in their choice. Herod feared John the Baptist, viewing him as a just man; yet because John opposed and reprov'd his vices, he gave orders to take off his head.

Sinners, in the day of prosperity, may wish to believe that religion is all a fable, that its friends are fools and its professors hypocrites. But whenever they are awakened by distress, or the approach of death, they wish to fly to religion for protection, and to take a share in its hopes and comforts. When they can live no longer, they, like Joab, run to the altar, lay hold on its horns and resolve to die there.

But let the contemners of religion consider, that in order to secure its comforts in the day of trouble, they must embrace its doctrines and obey its precepts in their more prosperous days. Let them attend to the divine warning; "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though one declare it to you." If they reject God's salvation in the time of his patience, "will he hear their cry when trouble comes?" "I have called," says Wisdom, "and they refused; I have stretched out my hand, and they have not regarded; therefore I will laugh at their calamity, I will mock when their fear cometh. Then shall they call on me, and I will not answer; they shall seek me and shall not find me, because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

2. Zedekiah and his attendants in the day of their trouble, asked the *prophet's* prayers; but we find not that they gave *themselves* to prayer.

Are there not many, who are guilty of the same inconsistency? They live unmindful of God's presence, and insensible of their dependence on him. But in the day of *affliction*, they ask the prayers of their pious friends.

Most people, if they are dangerously sick, choose to have a visit from their minister. When he comes, they request him to pray with them. They expect that he will pray for the restoration of their health, for the pardon of their sins, for the grace of the Divine Spirit to sanctify their souls, for the consolation of their anxious friends, and for such mercies as are adapted to the state of the family; and on this occasion they will require the attendance of the household. If they are in a capacity for conversation, they will desire his advice. When he retires, they will ask him to continue his prayers and repeat his visits. If he should not visit them at their request, and perhaps without their request, or should decline to pray with them and the family when he came, they would think he much neglected his duty, and was too unfeeling to the distresses of his flock. If their disorder should appear very threatening, they would ask the prayers of the *assembly* on the Lord's day, in hope, that the prayers of *many* will avail.

But perhaps among those who desire prayers on such occasions, there are some, who have rarely prayed in their families or in their closets, and who, if they should recover, will neglect prayer in future, as they have done before. Now I would ask such persons, what benefit they expect from other people's prayers, when they offer none of their own. By asking prayers you profess to think them important. If you think them important, why do you not offer some for yourselves? It is as much your duty to pray, as it is the duty of others. You are as much bound to pray for yourselves, as your neighbors can be to pray for you. If you would censure a minister, a professor, or a church, who should decline to perform this charitable office, why do you not condemn yourselves, for neglecting a personal duty? Or do you imagine, that prayer is necessary only when you are sick? If it be necessary then, why not at other times? Is this the only case in which you are dependent on God, or in which God will hear you? You are dependent at all times, and therefore you ought to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance."

We pray for men's recovery from sickness, that they may live to God's glory. Ought you not then to live to his glory before you

are sick, and to seek his grace, that you may live to his glory? We pray, that the sick may have a further space of repentance and preparation for death. Ought you not then to repent and prepare for death, while you have a space allowed you? If prayer is of any use in the work of preparation for death, it is as much a duty in health as in sickness.

3. Zedekiah asked the prophet's *prayers*, but heard not his *words*.

There are many like him. They seldom visit the house of God to join in its sacred solemnities. If you ask them the cause of their neglect, they will probably give you a careless and evasive answer. "It is not convenient for us to attend at the place of worship—we live remote—we have been wearied with the labours of the week—we can read good books at home—we can pray for ourselves."

If there should be a death in the family—if a child should be removed from its parents, or a parent from his children—if a man should lose his wife, or a woman her husband, there would probably be, on the next sabbath, a general attendance of the surviving members of the family, and prayers would be requested for them all, that the affliction might be made subservient to their spiritual good. But perhaps you will rarely see them in the sanctuary again, till another family affliction calls them there. Why are not such persons as inconsistent with themselves, as was the king of Judah, who asked the prophet's prayers, but would not hear his words?

If I knew there were any such now present, I would take the liberty thus to argue with them.

If it is the duty of the church to pray for you in affliction, why is it not your duty to pray for others in a similar case? Your neighbors are liable to affliction as well as you. But if you seldom come to God's house, you will seldom have an opportunity to join in the prayers of the church for your afflicted neighbors. Do you think, that *you* are the only persons who should be remembered in the day of adversity? If all should neglect the worship of God, as you do, where would be the assembly who could pray for you, or for any body else? By asking prayers you sig-

nify, that public prayers are important ; by neglecting stated worship you signify, that they are of no importance.

When we pray for the afflicted, what do you expect will be the substance of our prayers ? You expect we shall pray, *that their affliction may be sanctified*. This is the common phrase. And what is it for an affliction to be sanctified ? It is then sanctified to them, when it is the means of sanctifying them, and making their hearts better. But will your affliction sanctify you, or make you better, while you live in the careless neglect of a plain institution of God—an institution which was designed to be the means of religious instruction and improvement ? And what consistency is there in you, more than in the nobles of Judah, when they sent to desire the prayers of the prophet ?

Think not that we disapprove of desiring publick prayers in times of family affliction. This is very proper ; and it is also proper that the family should attend the publick devotions at the time when prayers for them are offered. But then it is desirable that they should be consistent with themselves, and should attend at other times as well as this. Otherwise there is too much the appearance of formality, and of a mere conformity to custom, and too great a resemblance of the hypocrisy of the men of Judah, who, in their trouble, sent to Jeremiah, saying, pray *now* to the Lord for us, and yet hearkened not to the words which the Lord spake by the prophet. They wished for his prayers, but would not hear his sermons.

4. There is a like inconsistency in those, who contradict their prayers by a *wicked life*.

The prophet speaks of some, “ who seek God daily, and yet multiply their transgressions—who spread forth their hands and make many prayers, when their hands are defiled with blood.” “ Draw nigh to God,” says the Apostle, “ and he will draw nigh to you.” But how shall we draw nigh to him ? He adds, “ Cleanse your hands, ye sinners ; purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep.” “ If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us.” We cannot be said to draw near to God, as long as we retain our known iniquities, and refuse to renounce them. Vain was the request, which the Jews

sent to the prophet for an interest in his prayers, while they disregarded his exhortations to repentance of sin and amendment of life. It was their wickedness which had brought them into trouble, and which threatened their destruction. Their deliverance depended on the mercy of God. This they were to seek by prayer. Their prayer was to be accompanied with repentance. They were to pray for grace to mend their hearts and reform their lives, as well as for mercy to pardon their sins and avert their dangers.

It was doubtless proper, that they should ask the prophet to pray for them. But if they resolved still to pursue their past course of life, there was no sincerity in their application, nor would his prayers avail to their deliverance. This was God's message to them by Isaiah, "When ye spread forth your hands and make many prayers, I will hide mine eyes, and will not hear you, for your hands are full of blood. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do well." Then "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, and though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."

5. We are inconsistent with ourselves, when we pray for divine favours, and *neglect* the proper *means* to obtain them.

As we are dependent on God for every thing which we need, prayer must be a reasonable service; for what can be more reasonable, than that we should seek all good from him, from whom all good comes? But as God requires of us particular duties, as means of obtaining the blessings which we desire, so there is the same reason why we should attend to these duties, as why we should pray. In common life we see this connexion, and we act accordingly. No man, if his house were on fire, would expect to extinguish the fire by prayer, without the application of water. We are to pray, that God would give us, day by day, our daily bread. But who expects to obtain his daily bread by prayer alone, without the labours of industry? Prayer will not plow one's field nor fence it, nor reap the grain nor thresh it. But prayer may procure him strength to labour, and a blessing to accompany and succeed his prudent industry. When the Israelites, in their flight from Egypt, found themselves pressed in their rear by the Egyptians, just as their front had reached the Red Sea, they cried

to the Lord in despair, and murmured at Moses for bringing them into such perplexity. But this was no time to delay. God said to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak to the people, that they go forward." Prayer on this occasion was proper, if it were made in faith and humility, and by secret ejaculations from individual hearts. But prayer was not to retard their march, for their enemies were upon them, and they must go forward trusting in the power and promise of God for their deliverance.

In religious, as well as secular life, there must be a concurrence of prayers and means. We must do what is appointed for us to do, and humbly look to God for success. To trust in our own works without regard to God, is impiety. To trust in our prayers without attention to other duties, is mockery. "Trust in the Lord and *do good*, and verily thou shalt be fed." Seek for eternal life, by a patient continuance in well doing, and surely thou shalt obtain it. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. But what is it to seek the Lord and call upon him? This is immediately explained, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

You desire the pardon of your sins and the salvation of your souls. They are God's gifts; go seek them of him. But how? In the way in which God bestows them. Seek them by faith in his promise, by repentance of sin, by amendment of life. Seek them by prayer; but let your prayer be accompanied with a resolution against all sin, and with a desire of God's grace, that you may carry this resolution into effect. Otherwise your prayer is vain.

You desire the spirit of grace to work in you repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus. God gives the spirit to them who ask him. Go then and seek the spirit. But if you seek the Spirit, take care that you do not oppose and resist it. If, when you ask the Spirit, you suppress the convictions awakened in you, indulge the lust of the flesh, and walk according to the course of the world, you contradict your prayers.

You lament the temptations which frequently assault, and sometimes overcome you ; and you pray to be delivered from them, or strengthened against them. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” is a reasonable and important petition. But remember, watchfulness must accompany your prayer. They must go hand in hand. “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” If, when you have made your prayer, you trust in this for security, and take no precaution to escape, and call up no resolution to repel the temptations to which you are exposed ; if you immediately run into the company, where you have always been ensnared, and indulge those lusts, which naturally draw you aside ; you plainly contradict your prayer, and show that you did not intend what you said, nor desire what you asked.

What did you really mean, when you prayed that God would not suffer you to be tempted above what you were able ? Did you mean that he should take away your reason, that so you might cease to be a moral agent ? Or when you deprecated criminal excess, did you mean that he should cripple your limbs by a gout, so that you could not go to the place of sensual indulgence, or handle a cup if you were there ? Or when you asked to be restrained from the vices of the tongue, such as profaneness, slander, and obscenity, did you mean that your tongue should be disabled by a palsy so that you could not speak at all ? No : If you meant any thing, it was, that God by his good providence would prevent temptations, or by his good Spirit would excite in you such serious sentiments as might overcome the temptations. If you pray with such a meaning in your hearts, you will not invite a temptation, nor suppress those serious sentiments which oppose it. On the contrary, you will shun the known occasions of sin, and set God always before you, that you may not be moved.

6. They contradict their prayers, who having dedicated their children to God in baptism, neglect the religious education of them.

The dedication of children to God is an institution as early as the existence of a human family. The creation of one woman for one man was, that there might be a godly seed ; or that children might be trained up in knowledge and piety. Under all the

dispensations of religion, the patriarchal, the Jewish and the christian, attention has been paid to children, and for them a particular form of dedication has been appointed. Youth is the most favorable season for planting the seeds of piety in the mind; and on the rising generation depend the continuance of religion and the preservation of the church. "God established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded the fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generations to come might know them, even the children who should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget his works, but keep his commandments."

Parents generally think, and they have scripture authority to conclude that they ought to give up their children to God in baptism. But what is the purpose of this transaction? It is to declare their faith in God, that children are within his covenant—it is to commend them to the care of his providence and grace—it is to offer their own prayers, and to obtain the prayers of the church, that their children may be early sanctified, may grow up in the knowledge and fear of God, may live in holy obedience while they are in this state, and may, through the redemption of Christ, be admitted to glory, when they leave this state.

Now no serious person imagines, that the prayers made at the baptism of his children are all the prayers which ever ought to be made for them. If he sincerely joins in these prayers, he will add many more of his own. But is prayer the only duty which he is bound to perform for his children? No: He is to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

God has committed children to the care of the parent. His fidelity in their education, is one of the means which, by the blessing of God, form them to piety here, and prepare them for glory hereafter. If the parent should neglect his duty to God and them—should never instruct them in the nature, nor inculcate on them the importance of religion—should not encourage any hopeful appearances in them, nor restrain them when they make themselves vile—should allow them to run into the worst company they can find, and to imitate the worst examples they see, and should

exhibit before them no better examples of his own; he would plainly contradict all the prayers which he pretends to make for them, and all the solemnity of their baptismal dedication.

If God is pleased to restrain these children from vice, form them to piety, and prepare them for heaven, it is done by his unpromised grace, not in answer to any prayers of such a parent. He may as well expect that their bodily wants will be providentially supplied without his care, as that their souls will be enlightened without his instructions, and their lives virtuously regulated without his example and precepts.

He is to pray that God would bless parental instructions and precepts for the benefit of his children. But if he gives them none, what is such a prayer, but mockery? He may as well pray that their bodies may be warmed and filled, when he withholds from them food and raiment.

The observations which have been made, may be sufficient to illustrate our subject.

We will conclude with some reflections.

1. Prayer appears to be a great and difficult duty. It consists not only in occasional addresses to God, but also in a manner of life corresponding with these addresses.

When we have reasonable desires we ought to lay them before God, and request that he would fulfil them. But we should remember, at the same time, that we have something to do for ourselves. For God will not do that for us immediately, which we can accomplish in the use of such means, as he has put into our hands. God, doubtless, by his kind providence often preserves us from dangers which we cannot see. But if we run into *visible* dangers, we cannot rely on his protection. And a prayer for preservation in a presumptuous action would be mockery.

The scripture requires several qualifications, which ought to attend our prayers; such as humility, meekness, charity, forgiveness of injuries, diligence in duty, patience and perseverance in waiting on God. A man of prayer is a man of religion—a devout man is a man devoted to God. A wicked and ungodly life cannot be a devout life. They who seek God must patiently continue in well doing. Jude describes a religious life in this exhortation

to christians ; “ Build yourselves up on your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

2. We see the necessity of being conversant with ourselves.

We are to pray often—to pray without ceasing. But we should enquire how we pray ; whether we pray with real desires and with right affections ; and especially whether we live agreeably to our prayers.

There are certain things which we desire. We examine them ; they are good. We ought to desire them ; God has commanded us to seek them. But do we seek them humbly, and in the use of the proper means to obtain them ? We resort to the throne of God, and while we are there we watch over our hearts. But do we keep our hearts at other times ? It would be impious, we think, to indulge vile affections and malignant passions and mischievous intentions, while we stand praying. We endeavour to exclude them on such an occasion. But do we, as soon as we retire, invite them back again ? We then defeat the prayer ; for the reason why we should exclude them from mingling with a prayer is, that we may maintain purity of heart at all times.

3. We see the principal reason, why our prayers are unsuccessful. It is because we oppose and contradict them. We ask for things which we desire, and then hinder them from coming to us. The prophet says to the Jews, “ Your sins have withholden good things from you ; your iniquities have turned them away.” James says, “ Ye lust and have not ; desire to have and cannot obtain. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your lusts.”

The good man often asks for worldly things, which the wisdom of God sees not best to bestow. But for these things he asks with humble submission to the divine will. If God withholdeth them in merey, or grants him things which are better for him, his prayers are answered. Spiritual blessings we may request without reserve. If these are not granted to our prayers, it is because our iniquities withhold them from us. In all our prayers let us maintain a consistency. If we ask a favor, let us see that we do not ourselves hinder the bestowment of it. We are to lift up our

hands to God, and be careful, that while we reach after a blessing with one hand, we do not thrust it back with the other. If we pray for the pardon of past sins, and go on to repeat them, we reject the pardon. If we pray for the grace of the Spirit, and indulge the lusts of the flesh, we resist the spirit. If we pray for divine consolations, and wound our souls by known wickedness, we refuse to be comforted. They who walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, are such as walk in the fear of God.

To conclude. Let us maintain a life of prayer, and see that our life and prayers be consistent.

Our religion, in order to comfort us here, and save us hereafter, must be all of a piece; it must be a uniform work, directed to one great end, the favour of God and eternal life.

Religion does not consist merely in the forms of prayer, or in any other external forms. It consists in the love of God, a conformity to his character, faith in his Son, benevolence to mankind, contentment with our condition, and heavenly affection. The use of prayer is to promote these tempers in our souls and elicit the fruits of them in our lives. Thus prayer becomes useful to ourselves and acceptable to God. If we make prayer a substitute for religion, and not an instrument of it, then it ceases to be prayer. It becomes sin. And instead of procuring God's blessings, it brings down guilt on our souls.

SERMON IX.

THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE BELIEVER.

ROMANS IV. 4, 5.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned 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.

THE apostle, in these words, teaches us, that the reward of eternal life comes to fallen men, not in a way of works, but in a way of faith; and that consequently it is of grace, not of debt. He makes a distinction between him who worketh, and him who, working not, believeth in God who justifieth the ungodly. To the former, he says, the reward is reckoned of debt, not of grace; to the latter faith is imputed for justification; and if this is of faith, then it is by grace.

There are several things in the text, which are worthy of our attention.

I. The apostle's meaning, in the distinction between works and faith, will properly be the subject of our first enquiry.

To deny the necessity, or to exclude the influence of works in our salvation, cannot be his intention; for this would be contrary to the uniform tenor of his doctrine in all his writings. Though we are not *saved* by works; yet he says, "we are created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath ordained, that we

should walk in them." This he constantly affirms, "that they who have believed in God, ought carefully to maintain good works." Works of piety to God, and of righteousness to men, are in their nature obligatory, and can no more be dispensed with, than our relation to God as creatures and dependents, and our relation to men as fellow-creatures and brethren, can be dissolved. If we are to love God with all our hearts, we are to serve him with a willing mind. If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we are to do good to them as we have opportunity. Love to God will prompt us to obey him, for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. Charity to men will excite us, in our various relations, to render to every one his due; for all the law is fulfilled in this one precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." To talk of being saints, believers, converts, or regenerate, without a regard to good works, is the same absurdity, as to talk of pleasing God without doing his will—of going to heaven without a heavenly temper—of being godly without likeness to God—or christians without an imitation of Christ.

The gospel lays as much weight on good works, as on faith. It considers the former as the fruits of the latter, and as what render it perfect. By him, therefore, *who worketh not, but believeth in God*, the apostle cannot intend one, who, living in the neglect of good works, relies on the mercy of God to justify him, and thus expects to be saved by his faith. Such a man as this never has believed in God.

Farther; When Saint Paul excludes works, he must have some other meaning, than merely to exclude the *merit* of works; for, in this view, he might as well exclude faith; there being no more merit in the one, than in the other. Faith, in distinction from works or from the deeds of the law, is made a term of our justification. "We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law." To say that we are justified without the *merit* of these deeds, certainly does not amount to the apostle's design; for this is to say no more than what may be said of faith and every other grace. Even an innocent being can merit no reward from his Maker. After every work which he has done, he is an unprofitable servant. From the justice of God he can claim no more, than an exemp-

tion from positive evil ; or such an existence as is, on the whole, desirable. If he receives a complete and everlasting reward, he receives it from the goodness, not from the justice of God ; for justice is not bound thus to reward him. Now if an innocent being merits nothing by his works of righteousness, much less does a guilty creature merit pardon in this life, and eternal glory in the next, by his repentance of sin, and faith in the mercy of God. So that, in regard to merit, there is no room for the opposition which the gospel makes, between faith and works.

By him that worketh, then, in distinction from him that believeth, the apostle must intend him who performs those works which denominate him completely righteous in the construction of the law ; or him who obeys the law perfectly without defect, or transgression. He is said to work in the sense of the law, who works as the law requires. And the law, in the nature of it, requires perfection. For a law to allow transgression is a contradiction. Thus far, it would cease to be a law. The Divine law enjoins every virtue, and forbids all unrighteousness ; and it condemns, without any intimation of mercy, every one who continues not in all things written therein to do them.

To him who thus works, if such a one could be found—to him who thus perfectly obeys God's perfect law, the reward is reckoned, not of grace, but of debt—not as bestowed according to the gracious plan of the gospel, but as due according to the strict tenor of the law, which says, "The man who doth the things required, shall live by them." If a man perfectly obeys God, he may, from the purity and equity of the Divine character and government, conclude that he shall be treated as innocent and righteous. He is in no danger of punishment, for he deserves none ; and he seeks no pardon, for he needs none. Whatever good is by promise annexed to obedience, all this is his due—he is entitled to it—he has no occasion for that faith, which looks to God as justifying the ungodly, for he is righteous in himself. He stands approved on the foot of his own works. He needs no justification, for he never was under condemnation.

This is the man intended, when the apostle speaks of him who *works* in distinction from him who *believes*. Whenever works

are opposed to faith, and excluded from a concern in our salvation, such works are meant as the law requires—such as import perfection. These are not, and cannot be, the terms of our justification; for we have no such works. If we had them, we should need no justification. If we never had offended, in heart or life, our own righteousness would be our defence; we should have no occasion for the righteousness of another. “By the deeds of the law,” says the apostle, “shall no flesh be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” We cannot be justified by the deeds, which the law requires, for we have not done these deeds; but we must be justified by that faith, which rests on the mercy of God to pardon the ungodly. The apostle does not reject the deeds of the law, because he disapproves them, but because they are not to be found; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If then they are saved, it must be on the ground of a better and more perfect righteousness than their own. For,

II. We observe, in the text, they, whom God justifies, are called *the ungodly*. They have broken God’s law.

In the qualified sense of the gospel, they cannot be called ungodly at the time when they are justified; for no sinner is pardoned and accepted without repentance toward God and faith toward Christ; and these imply the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts. But they are called ungodly with respect to the time past; for it is only past sins which pardon cancels. And they may still be called ungodly in construction of law, for in many things we all offend; and if we say, we are perfect, that will prove us perverse. Believers, then, are not justified for the good works which they have done; but they are justified from their evil works for the sake of that which Christ has done. This matter our apostle has clearly explained in the preceding chapter. “There is none righteous; no, not one. All have sinned. The whole world has become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified.” How then?—“They are justified freely by God’s grace, through the redemption which is in 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.” To justify is to admit to favour and treat as

righteous one who has been a transgressor. In this sense God justifies the ungodly, or remits sins that are past.

But then it must be observed,

III. The justified person does not *retain* his ungodly temper—his evil heart of enmity and unbelief; for, the apostle says, “He believes on God.” “He is justified by *faith*.” His faith is imputed for righteousness. The prophet says, “The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to them who turn from ungodliness in Jacob.”

The faith which justifies, respects God, not merely as the Supreme Ruler and righteous Judge of the world; but especially as a God of mercy, who pardons the guilty and justifies the ungodly. Viewing him only in the former character, the conscious sinner would sink into despondence. It is by faith in him, in the latter character, as a God gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquities, transgressions and sins, that we are encouraged to draw near to him, and excited to obey him. “He who cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” It is the goodness of God which leads us to repentance. It is by the mercy of God that we are persuaded to present ourselves to him. It is by hope that we draw near to him, and by hope that we are saved.

As God exercises his forgiving mercy to sinners through the righteousness of Christ, so faith in God, as justifying the ungodly, includes faith in Christ, through whose righteousness the ungodly are justified. Faith ultimately respects God, the Almighty Parent, of whom are all things; but it immediately respects Christ the Mediator, by whom we draw near to God, and obtain acceptance with him. “We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and by him we believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.” Hence faith in God, and faith in Christ are promiscuously used in the gospel, and alike made the term of our acceptance. Christ says to his disciples, “Ye believe in God; believe also in me.”

This faith supposes a conviction of sin; it is accompanied with a godly sorrow for sin; and it produces works of righteousness. No man will apply to God, as justifying the ungodly, until he is

convinced of his own ungodliness. Nor will he come to God in the name of a Mediator, until he sees himself unworthy to come in his own. This conviction of sin and humiliation for it, will operate to resolutions of new obedience. The faith, then, which justifies us in the sight of God, includes in it repentance of sin—a new creature—a turning from ungodliness—a submission of the soul to the gospel of Christ. Accordingly, faith, repentance, regeneration, conversion, and even works themselves, are made the terms of our justification and acceptance. This is the language of the gospel, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved.”—“Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”—“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”—“God hath saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he hath shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”—“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature—faith which works by love, and keeping the commandments of God.”—“Faith purifieth the heart, and is made perfect by works.”—“By works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

It hence appears, that the faith, which is the term of our justification, is not a simple assent to the truth of the gospel; or an inactive recumbence on the mercy of God; or a bold confidence in the atonement of Christ; but it is such a full consent of the heart to the gospel plan of salvation, as produces an actual compliance with it. Faith is not a mere speculative opinion, but a practical principle. It is not presumptuous, but humble. It is not indolent, but operative. It is not unprofitable, but full of good fruits. This faith God accepts as the condition of our forgiveness. Hence it is said to be imputed for righteousness.

By the tenor of the law, no man is reputed righteous, but he, who continues in all things written therein to do them. By the tenor of the gospel, he, for Christ's sake, is reputed righteous, who believes in God as justifying the ungodly, and, thus believing, repents of his transgression, and devotes himself to newness of life. It is not perfection, but sincerity—not a sinless compli-

ance with the law, but a penitent and unreserved dedication of ourselves to God, which is the condition of our acceptance with him. Sins past are forgiven on repentance ; and new obedience, proceeding from an honest and good heart, is accepted, even though imperfections attend it. “The free gift is of many offences unto justification.” Though on repentance there is the actual remission of sins only which are past, yet there is the gracious promise, that all future sins, on the renewed exercise of repentance, may also be forgiven ; and that in answer to the humble prayers of the believer, such support shall be granted him as will preserve him from final apostacy. Whom God justifies, them he also glorifies. They are kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation.

Between the law and the gospel there is then a great difference in several respects.

1. The law condemns sinners, without giving them any hope of pardon ; the gospel provides for the forgiveness of all sins.

2. By the law judgment comes on all men for one offence ; by the gospel the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

3. The law accepts of no obedience short of perfection : the gospel accepts of sincerity.

4. The law leaves the subject to his own strength : the gospel offers grace to help in time of need.

We may observe, once more,

IV: That the gospel scheme of salvation is wholly of grace. As to him who worketh the reward is reckoned, not according to grace, but debt ; so to him who believeth in God as justifying the ungodly, salvation comes, not in a way of debt, but grace. “By grace we are saved through faith, not of ourselves, but by the gift of God.”

Grace, in our text, is opposed, not merely to *merit*, but to *debt*, or to that which is due in virtue of the promise made to sinless obedience. As opposed to *merit*, the reward promised to *Adam* was of grace ; for what could he have done to deserve so favorable a constitution as that under which he was placed ? Even the highest angel cannot be said to merit any positive happiness—much less the eternal continuance of that glorious state,

which he enjoys. As he is God's creature, no wrong, or injury would be done him, if a period were put to his existence. His happiness is the free gift of God's bounty—not the meritorious purchase of his own services. When, therefore, the apostle says, "To him who worketh, the reward is reckoned of debt," he cannot mean the merit of a reward, properly so called; but that *right* to it, which is conveyed by God's promise to perfect obedience.

To this debt he opposes *grace*, by which he evidently means benefits bestowed on *guilty* creatures already under the condemnation of God's law. The blessings which God grants to innocent beings, flow from his bounty and goodness: Those which he vouchsafes to sinful creatures, proceed from his mercy and grace. In this sense the word, *grace*, is used by this apostle, in our text and many other places.

The gospel supposes mankind to be sinners. It provides for their recovery in a way which excludes boasting. It discovers to them a great salvation, which it represents as the purchase of a Redeemer, and the gift of God through him. This salvation it offers to the penitent and humble believer, and promises him acceptance with God, as if he had not offended. It invites sinners to the throne of grace, that they may there receive the assistance of the Holy Spirit, both to the exercise of repentance, and to the performance of all the duties of a godly life. The reward which it promises, is not only beyond what innocence could claim, but also far superior to that which the bounty of God promised to the obedience of Adam. "Christ came, that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." The free gift through him has abounded to many. They who believe have received abundance of grace in the forgiveness of all their sins; and they will receive still more abundant grace, when they shall reign in life through Jesus Christ.

REFLECTIONS. 1. The mighty and wonderful preparation which God has made for our recovery from the ruins of the apostacy, may lead us to suppose, that the human race is of great importance in the scale of rational beings, and in the scheme of God's universal government. Though in ourselves we are unworthy of God's notice, yet he has done much for us—far more

than we could have asked, or even now can think. He must, then, have some great design to accomplish by us. In us his glory will, by some means or other, be wonderfully displayed.

2. Our compliance with the terms of the gospel appears to be a matter of vast importance. So wonderful a dispensation of grace cannot be rejected without awful guilt and danger.

A salvation procured in the manner which the gospel discovers, must be a great salvation—greater than we can imagine. And proportionably great will be the guilt and punishment of those who neglect and despise it. If without the grace revealed, our state would have been hopeless and wretched, how dreadful will be their doom, to whom it is offered in vain? “He who despised Moses’s law died without mercy; Of how much sorer punishment will they be thought worthy, who tread under foot the Son of God, profane the blood of the covenant, and do despite to the Spirit of grace?”

3. It is a great matter really to comply with the gospel.

As it is a plan contrived by Divine wisdom for the redemption of guilty creatures, so we must see that we are sinners—must condemn ourselves as such—must be sensible of our desert of punishment—must renounce sin with purpose of heart—must commit ourselves to the hands of divine mercy—must seek pardon in the name of the Saviour, and accept it as a free gift from him—and must hope for eternal life, not because we deserve it, but because the Saviour who died for us, has purchased it, and God, who cannot lie, has promised it.

4. Humility becomes the most improved saints. For by the grace of God they are what they are. It is not owing to their own works, but to God’s sovereign grace, that they are brought into a state of salvation, and made heirs of the heavenly inheritance. They were once guilty, polluted and condemned: But they are washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of God. By the mercies of God let them be excited to every good work; and, when they have done all, let them remember, that they are unprofitable servants; and let them glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

SERMON X.

THE DIFFERENT ENDS OF THE TWO THIEVES CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST.*

LUKE XXIII. 39—43.

And one of the malefactors, which were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

THE story now read affords us two examples, directly opposite to each other; but both instructive; and more so by the contrast in which they stand. Here are two malefactors suffering in company with the great Redeemer, one on his right hand, and the other on his left. One dies with a heart full of impiety and a mouth full of blasphemy: The other expires humble and penitent, confessing his guilt and imploring the mercy of the Saviour.

Both these criminals seem to have been under the same external circumstances, as well as of the same vicious character. They

* For some thoughts in this sermon the author is indebted to Bishop Sherlock.

had followed the same course of life, were condemned to the same punishment, and were to suffer at the same time, and in equal nearness to the Saviour. Both had the same need of his help, and the same opportunity to seek it. But one reproached, upbraided and insulted him; the other penitently condemned himself, acknowledged the justice of his sentence, rebuked the impiety of his companion, declared the innocence of his Saviour, applied to him for salvation, and obtained a promise of acceptance.

These two examples are recorded to teach us, that the greatest sinners may hope for pardon in a way of repentance; but that none ought to presume on Divine mercy in a way of sin. The dying example of the penitent thief is a powerful antidote to despair; the awful death of the other is a solemn warning against presumption.

The example of the malefactor who obtained mercy on the cross, is well suited to prevent despair, and to encourage repentance in every thoughtful and awakened sinner.

The causes of despair must be either in the sinner's apprehensions of the Saviour, or in his views of himself.

If you doubt of mercy on any apprehension of the Saviour, it must be because you distrust either his *power*, or his *readiness* to save.

If you feel any distrust of his power, look up to the cross: There you will see enough to dispel all your fears.

Never did Jesus appear in so much weakness—never did he look so unlike a saviour, as when he hung on the tree; and yet even here you see him mighty to save. If in this condition he could bend the stubborn heart of a sinner long accustomed to do evil—if here he could wipe off the guilt contracted by the foulest crimes—if here he could open to a miserable criminal the gates of the heavenly paradise; surely now, since he has loosed the bands of death, ascended to his heavenly kingdom, and taken possession of his glorious throne, he must be able to save to the uttermost all them who come to him; for he was exalted to be a prince and a saviour, that he might give repentance and remission of sins,

Or do you distrust his grace? Still keep your eyes directed to the cross. If he could, at any time, be regardless of the cries of anxious sinners, surely it must be at that hour, when his own personal distress was wrought up to its highest pitch. Now were his limbs racked with pain; his head wounded with thorns; his hands and feet pierced with nails; his flesh torn with stripes; his ears filled with reproaches; his soul overwhelmed with anguish. But in the extremity of these sufferings, he felt a tender compassion for a poor malefactor, who hung by his side. He did not indeed exert his miraculous power to deliver the man from death; but he displayed the riches of his grace in saving his soul from hell. What wonderful! what unexampled mercy is here! If this malefactor, who applied to Jesus on the cross, was so readily accepted; surely they who penitently cry to him now, when he sits on his throne of grace, will in no wise meet a denial.

But you will say, "We have no doubt either of the power, or the grace of Christ; our fears arise wholly from a sense of our numerous transgressions, and accumulated guilt."

If this is the state of your mind, still attend to the example before you. Here is a man who had been a thief and a robber—a man who had run to such lengths in wickedness, that he was judged unfit to live any longer; a man who had neglected the concerns of religion to a late period of life; and probably had never seriously thought of a reformation, until he found himself in the hands of justice, and in danger of a violent and infamous death. Yet this man by the abundant grace of Christ, was brought to repentance, admitted to pardon, and received to the paradise of God. For this cause the thief obtained mercy, that in him as one of the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern and encouragement to them, who afterward should believe in him to life everlasting.

"Well then," the careless sinner will say, "here is this remedy of a death-bed repentance; on this I may rely to cancel the guilt of a wicked life. This thief was a greater sinner than I am; and greater than probably I ever shall be; yet he, under many disadvantages, obtained mercy, at the last hour. I will dismiss all my

troublesome reflections and fearful forebodings, and walk in the way of my own heart and in the sight of my own eyes."

But stay, my friend; consider well what a resolution you are forming. This is not to improve, but to pervert the example before you. The only use which you can reasonably make of it, is to encourage yourself in an *immediate* application to the mercy of God. Here is not the least ground for presumption on a late repentance.

Consider what a kind of repentance this criminal exercised. If you rely on a death bed repentance, you must mean by it something which is within the compass of your own power. For if you are dependent on the grace of God, you can be sure of a future repentance, no farther than you are sure that God will vouchsafe to you his grace. You think, perhaps, that the thief's repentance consisted in this petition; "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." As much as this you may probably say, if you should have the warning which he had. But attend carefully to the story, and you will see, that his repentance was a greater matter. If you expect the pardon which he obtained, seek it by the same kind of repentance, by which he sought it. However wickedly he had spent his former life, he improved the close of it in such a manner, as few had done before, and few, perhaps, will do again.

This malefactor believed in Christ as the Saviour of the world, when one of his own disciples had betrayed him, another had denied him, and all had forsaken him. He honoured him as the Son of God and the prince of life, when he was hanging on the cross and suffering the pains of death, as one forsaken of heaven and earth. He proclaimed him the Lord of paradise, when Jews condemned him, and Gentiles crucified him as a blasphemer and impostor. He feared his God, owned the justice of his sentence, and quietly submitted to his punishment, even in the extremity of his sufferings. He condemned himself as a sinner, and justified Jesus, who was crucified with him, declaring that he himself suffered only the due reward of his deeds, but Jesus had done nothing amiss. He expressed no solicitude for the preservation of his life; his only concern was for the salvation of his soul. He asked the

Saviour, not that he would rescue him from that infamous cross, but that he would remember him in the kingdom of glory. He rebuked the impiety of his fellow criminal, exhorted him to the fear of God, and put him in mind of the justice of his condemnation. In a word, he did all, that, under his circumstances, could be done. The glory which he gave to Christ by his penitence, faith, piety and charity on the cross, was such as few have given him in the whole course of a long life.

Think not then, that a few expiring words will be accepted for repentance: You must turn to the Lord with your whole heart. If you trust in the example now before you, take it as it stands. It is, indeed, an example of a late repentance: but an eminent example. You will scarcely find another which can equal it. On such a repentance as this, be it ever so late, you will doubtless be accepted. But that you shall exercise such a repentance on a death bed, you cannot promise yourself. It is therefore the greatest presumption to defer till such a time, so serious and necessary a work.

Consider farther; It is by no means certain, that this thief was so late in beginning his preparation for death. It was upon the cross that he gave the striking evidence of his repentance. But can you tell, how much time he had before spent in prayer, humiliation and self-examination? A season of confinement must have preceded his trial and execution. Do you know what use he made of this season? He seems to have been acquainted with Christ, the innocence of his life, and the divinity of his character. These things he could not have learnt on the cross; he must have had some knowledge of them before he came there. It is therefore probable, that the time between his first imprisonment and his execution was spent in religious exercises. If so, his case but little resembles that of a sinner, who thinks nothing about religion, till he comes to his death bed. And surely, the example of one who employed weeks, or perhaps months, in the work of preparing himself for eternity, and who embraced the first opportunity that he had to testify his repentance of sin, and his faith in a Saviour, and to express his charity to men, and his submission to the justice of providence, can give no reasonable encouragement

to any sinner to delay his repentance, till he sees death approaching.

But still perhaps you choose to think that his first serious thoughts were on the cross. We will admit the supposition. But then we must also admit another supposition, not much in your favour; that this was the first opportunity he had to become acquainted with Christ, and with the way of salvation through him. Hence, then, it will follow, that he had not sinned against such light, abused such grace, rejected such calls, and broken such vows, as you have done, who have enjoyed the gospel from your youth. You are not, like him, a thief or a robber; but, in the sight of heaven, you may be more deeply guilty than he was, because you have abused those advantages and opportunities, which he never enjoyed. If a sinner, who obeyed the first call of the Saviour, obtained mercy at a late hour of life; will you hence conclude, that you can obtain mercy at as late an hour, although you have not only rejected the calls of the gospel in time past, but continue to reject them still? By your impenitence under all the means of grace, you make your case so vastly different from his, that this example, I am afraid, will soon be little to your purpose. It affords you encouragement to repent now; but this is all: It gives you none to delay.

Consider again; You cannot be sure, that you shall have as much warning of death, and as much time after warning, as it is probable this criminal had. Being apprehended, condemned and sentenced to die, he well knew he had not many weeks to live. He therefore had no temptation to delay his repentance in prospect of a long life, or a more convenient season. Who knows but you may be destroyed suddenly and without remedy? Who knows but you may be driven away in your wickedness and have no hope in your death? While life and health remain, you flatter yourself with a future opportunity of repentance. But if your death should be the instant effect of some violent and unforeseen accident or disease, where is your intended repentance? Or if your last sickness should be attended with a delirium, a stupor, or agonizing pain, which is no uncommon case, your condition would be little more hopeful.

But admitting, that you should be capable of consideration; can you say, what a turn your thoughts may take, and what effect they will produce in the state of your mind? When you behold your sins standing in order before you—when you reflect on your long and continued abuse of divine grace—when you contemplate your violated promises and broken vows; your conscience may be affrighted at the prodigious magnitude of your guilt, and your soul amazed at the dismal prospect before you. And how do you know, but your past presumption may now terminate in the horrors of despair.

There is also an opposite state of mind equally inconsistent with repentance: I mean hardness of heart, which may be the effect of your continuance in sin. The scripture speaks of those “who despise the riches of God’s goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, and, after their hard and impenitent heart, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath”—of those, “who, being often reprov’d, harden their necks, till they are suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy”—of those “who, in the greatness of their folly, go astray, till they are holden in the cords of their sins, and die at last without instruction.”

There is another remarkable difference between the thief’s case and yours. There is no intimation, that he delayed his repentance on presumption of a future opportunity. He was probably bred up in ignorance of religion, seduced into a course of wickedness, and beguiled along, till God mercifully interposed to awaken and reclaim him. At least, it does not appear, but that this was the case.

From the lateness of his repentance, then, what encouragement can you draw to delay yours; or to presume that you shall obtain mercy at last as he did; when this very presumption is an aggravation of guilt, which entirely distinguishes your case from his?

It appears then, that, from the example before us, sinners under the gospel can derive no encouragement to delay their repentance; though, indeed, they may hence collect strong hopes of mercy, when they frame their ways to turn to the Lord.

To enforce the cautions and warnings that have been suggested, we will contemplate the impenitence and obstinacy of the other malefactor on the cross.

These two criminals had both lived in the same wicked course—were both condemned to the same death—and were both to die in the company of the only Saviour. The story points out no difference in their crimes, or in their advantages and opportunities for repentance: and yet we see, that one of them died a real and remarkable penitent; the other died in all the stupidity of vice, and in all the insolence of impiety. With his latest breath he upbraided and insulted the Saviour; “If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.”

You would think it a mighty privilege, if, when you lay on your last bed, you could have your Saviour by your bed side. You imagine, that if you could enjoy such a privilege as this, you would improve it to good effect. You think, you would humbly confess to him all the sins you could recollect—would employ every moment in conversing with him, seeking his direction and supplicating his grace—would pour out your whole soul into his bosom, and intreat his mercy with an importunity too strong to be denied. You would hold him by the hand, and not let him go until he blessed you. But here you see one who enjoyed this very privilege; and what was he the better for it?—what use did he make of it?—Why, only to rail on that wonderful Saviour, from whose bleeding wounds salvation was then flowing for a guilty world. Not one penitent expression—not one petition for pardoning mercy was heard from him. He joined, not in the confession and supplication of his fellow criminal; but in the scoffs and jeers of the unbelieving multitude. He saw the blood which was shed for the redemption of sinners, and yet he perished without faith to apply it.

You see by this example, that a wicked life may issue in an impenitent death. If now you live regardless of Christ and his salvation, you cannot be sure, that you shall find a heart to apply to him in your latest hours.

Can you have fairer opportunities, or higher advantages hereafter, than you have now? Christ is not personally with you: but you have his gospel in your hands, which contains all that he saw necessary to be taught, when he was on earth. If you will not consult his gospel to learn the way of salvation, you would not ap-

ply to his person for instruction, though he were with you in the flesh. He is in heaven ; but he can hear you as easily, and will answer you as readily, as he did those who made their addresses to him, while he dwelt below. If you will not cry to him there, you would neglect him here. What stronger motives to repentance can be imagined, than those which the gospel proposes? If you will not regard them now, neither would you regard them, though you heard them from your Saviour's mouth. He has withdrawn his bodily, but not his spiritual presence. He has sent forth his Holy Spirit to strive with sinners, as well as to help the infirmities of the saints. If you resist his Spirit, what reason have you to suppose you should obey the living voice of his lips? And take heed lest you fall under that threatning, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

If you sin now in hopes of repentance, you may run to such a length, as to become incapable of repentance ; and when you lie on your death-bed, you may be as far from all relentings, and from any disposition to apply to the Saviour, as was this unhappy malefactor. If you once give yourself up to a course of sin, you cannot set bounds to your progress. Habits gain strength insensibly. He who sets out with some caution and reserve, may, before he is aware, be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

When, from the example of the thief who cried to Jesus on the cross, and was remembered, you are tempted to delay your repentance, and to hope for mercy on a death-bed ; look, I beseech you, on the other side of the cross, and behold the awful example there. You hope to imitate the former example : But beware, lest it be the latter.

SERMON XI.

ISAIAH LIII. 3.

Thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought ; and ye shall be redeemed without money.

THIS chapter relates to the captivity and restoration of the Jews. They had sold themselves into the hands of the Chaldeans by their iniquities, and had suffered under the oppressions of their enemies, without any compensation. But the time would come when they should be delivered, and their redemption should be free.—A king should arise in Babylon who would release them from their captivity without money. This king was Cyrus. In his reign the prophecy was fulfilled.

The words in the mystical sense, may be applied to the miserable captivity to which sinners enslave themselves, and the freedom of that redemption which Christ has wrought out for them. In this application we will consider and improve them.

Sinners have sold themselves for nought. And their redemption is without money.

I. Sinners have sold themselves for nought.

It is said of Ahab, that he sold himself to work wickedness. He gave himself up without restraint to the service of sin. They who are carnal are said to be *sold* under sin. St. Paul seems to use this phrase in relation to himself. But it could not be applied to him in his regenerate state. He must be understood as personating an unregenerate man. And it is applicable in a greater or less degree, to all in whom the power of sin reigns.

The scripture represents sinners as being in a state of bondage and captivity. Sin has dominion over them. They are led captive by it. They are servants to it, and obey it in the lusts thereof.

You will observe,

1. This is a *voluntary* slavery. “*Ye* have sold yourselves.” In a preceding chapter, God demands, “which of my creditors is it, to whom I have sold you?” He adds, “For your iniquities ye have sold yourselves.” All sin is matter of choice, not of compulsion. It is said of habitual sinners, “They have *chosen* their own ways, and delighted in their abominations. “They have given themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness.” “They have yielded themselves servants to iniquity unto iniquity.” “They do evil with both hands earnestly.”

Slavery, in other cases, proceeds from necessity, and is therefore to be pitied. This moral slavery proceeds from choice, and is therefore to be condemned. It is criminal in its nature, and aggravated in its circumstances. Nothing can be pleaded in its excuse.

Men often acquire such strong habits of vice, as carry them into the most dangerous and detestable practices. But are these habits an extenuation of their guilt? No; they are an aggravation of it; for these habits are their own. They are introduced by their own choice. And they still love to obey them. A delight in sin is no excuse for the indulgence of it. In this state of mind the evil and guilt of sin chiefly consists. Will you say, your depravity originated from an ancient transgression, in which you had no concern? Be it so. The question now is, Have you not chosen it? If so, you have made it your own, and your slavery is voluntary.

Observe,

2. In the servants of sin there is a *complete* slavery. They who sell *themselves* have nothing left, which they can call their own. This servitude extends to all their powers—their reason is enslaved. Their understanding is darkened through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts. They have the faculty of reason; but the exercise of it is perverted. They

are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no understanding. They discern nothing in a spiritual manner. The things of religion are foolishness to them. They often confound the distinction between moral good and evil. They study to excuse sin, to explain away the obligations of virtue—to destroy the efficacy of Divine threatenings—and to quiet their fears of future punishment.

Their *conscience* is defiled, hardened and unfeeling. They call evil good, and good evil, and are not ashamed when they commit abominations. If conscience, at any time awakes to remonstrate against their wicked works, they put it to silence by sensual indulgence, by false reasoning, by recurring to the example of others, and by mingling with the ungodly who strengthen their hands in their evil ways.

Their *affections* are enslaved to the objects of the world. They love the world and the things that are in the world, and their hearts are at enmity with God. They are not subject to his law, but subject to the lusts of the flesh.

They have yielded their *members* instruments of unrighteousness to sin. Thus the Apostle describes them. “Their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongue they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.

Such is the character of those who have sold themselves to do evil.

Our text adds.

3. They have sold themselves for nought. When men sell an article, they aim to make some gain—to receive an equivalent, which may be more useful to them, than that which they alienate. But when they sell themselves, they can receive nothing in return. They sin and pervert that which is right and it profiteth them not. The Apostle demands of penitents—“what fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed.”

They who sell themselves to do evil, hope to gain at least some worldly good. But they are usually disappointed.—If they seem to succeed for a time, they fail at last. “He who hasteth, in any evil way, to be rich, brings trouble on himself and his house.”

“He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.” “The curse of God entereth into the house of them that steal and swear falsely; and consumeth it with the stones thereof and the timber thereof:” “His table becomes a snare, and that which should have been for their welfare, becomes a trap.” We often see the wicked designs of men turn to their own confusion and ruin. It is so in private life. It is remarkably so in public and national transactions. In the judgments of God on sinners in this world, we have evidence that there is a God, who judgeth in the earth; and we have a prelude of a future judgment, by which God will render to every man according to his works.

Sinners not only sell themselves for nought, but for that which is worse than nought—for death and misery. Death is the wages of sin—the wages in which it pays off its servants at last. And what would a man be profited, if by sin he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul! And what can he give in exchange for his soul.

Death, when it is denounced in scripture as the final consequence of a sinful life, intends not merely a natural death, but the misery of the soul after death. “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is *eternal* life.” Death here stands opposed to *eternal* life, and therefore must intend *eternal* death. The unrighteous shall go away into everlasting punishment—but the righteous into life eternal. The scripture when it speaks of the wrath to come, from which Christ died to save us, signifies that there is a wrath to come, to which the ungodly are exposed, and to which they are bound over by the sentence of God’s holy law.

This completes their bondage. They are criminals, condemned to suffer the demerits of a corrupt heart and a sinful life.

How awful is their condition? They are slaves while they live, and miserable when they die.

As they have sold themselves for nought, they have no means in their hands by which they can redeem themselves. They deserve the threatened punishment. And there is nothing which they can do, and there is no price which they can pay, to cancel

this desert. They have sold themselves—their slavery is voluntary—it is what they have chosen—and there is no opposite choice; no love of spiritual liberty, which will prompt any effectual exertions to deliver themselves from their bondage. Hence they are said to be dead in trespasses and sins. If ever they are quickened and made alive to the love of holiness, it must be by a Divine influence, and not by any natural principle of holiness in themselves. If they are saved, it must be by grace from above—not of their own works. The power of sin consists in a prevailing love, and predominant inclination to moral evil. Where there is a predominant inclination, there cannot be at the same time, a prevailing inclination to oppose it. An opposite prevailing disposition must be from divine excitement, not from the corrupt heart itself. A sinner left wholly to himself will continue in sin. He will wax worse and worse. He will add sin to sin. He has loved it, and after it he will go. “His own iniquities will take the wicked himself;—he is holden in the cords of his sins, and in the greatness of his folly, he will go astray.” The Apostle speaks of those who have yielded themselves servants to sin, as proceeding from iniquity unto iniquity.

Such is the dreadful condition of habitual sinners. Is there, then, any hope for their deliverance?—Yes. There is hope. Of those who had sold themselves, the text says,

II. Ye shall be redeemed. But how?—They had sold themselves for nought; and what had they with which they could purchase their redemption?—Truly they had nothing, and they needed nothing; for it is said, “Ye shall be redeemed without money.” Here lies the sinner’s hope. If he would be redeemed only by money, his case would be desperate. For he has no money that can be received as the price of his redemption. This must come in another way—in a way of grace—in a way of absolute favor. God has sent a Redeemer into the world. He has paid the price of our redemption by his own blood. The apostle says, 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. And the benefits of this redemption are offered to us freely, without money and without price. They are

offered to such as have no money—and such are we all. We are in debt, and have nothing to pay. If we humbly and penitently accept this redemption, we are graciously and frankly forgiven.

The redemption by Christ is two-fold—from the *power and pollution*, and from the *guilt and condemnation* of sin. One branch of redemption is from the power and pollution of sin. The apostle says, He gave himself for us to redeem us from iniquity—from our vain conversation, and to purify us unto himself.

This part of redemption is effected in that change which is called renovation, regeneration, repentance, and conversion.

This change consists in a new temper and disposition of mind, which is the reverse of the former slavery to sin. In the renewed soul there is a supreme love to God, and a general benevolence to mankind—there is an extirpation of former ungodly lusts and guilty passions, such as envy, hatred, malice; and an introduction of opposite tempers. The understanding is enlightened to discern spiritual things in their excellency and importance. The reason is employed in examining and proving the good and acceptable will of God. The conscience becomes tender, and susceptible of holy impressions. The heart of stone is taken away and a heart of flesh created in its place. The affections are withdrawn from earthly things, and set on things above. The perverse will is subdued, and made subject to the will of God. The life is devoted to God in new and willing obedience. The language of the renewed soul is, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? What I know not, teach thou me. Wherein I have done iniquity I will do no more.”

This change is effected in the soul by the word and spirit of God, both which are procured for us by the redemption of Christ. The apostle says, “God hath saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he hath shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ the Saviour, that being justified by his grace we may be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

The word of Christ is the means of conversion, and the Spirit of Christ accompanying it gives it efficacy and power. Hence the word is called the sword of the Spirit. The apostle says,

“God of his own will hath begotten us by the word of truth, that we might be holy as the first fruits, which were dedicated to God.” “Therefore,” says he, “be swift to hear, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word.”

The word comes to us as a free gift. We have done nothing to procure it. It is not owing to ourselves that a revelation has been afforded to mankind, or that we were born and educated under it. Our enjoyment of this privilege is the fruit of God’s sovereign goodness. It is he who has made us to differ from the many thousands, who have never known the gospel.

The Spirit is God’s free gift through Christ. It is a benefit, which our guilty race could never have claimed. It is called the spirit of grace, because it is granted in a way of grace. They who have been the subjects of its awakening and renewing influences must acknowledge that God of his own will hath begotten them; he worked in them of his own good pleasure. The Spirit has come to them freely without money—without any previous works of their own, which could give them a claim to it. The convert when he looks back on his past life, sees that he has done much to grieve the Spirit, and nothing to give him a right to it either on the foot of his own desert, or on the foot of God’s promise. He admires that grace, which has made him to differ from those, who still are under the bondage of sin.

The other part of redemption is from the guilt and condemnation of sin. This comes by Christ without money—without any desert of our own. As transgressors of God’s law, we are under a sentence of condemnation. And the sentence is just. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God, that God might, consistently with the ends of his government, pardon our sins, and receive us to favour. He has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

This plan of redemption is all free—all gracious. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“Jesus so loved us, that he gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.” “Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. But God commended his love toward us, in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.”

These two parts of redemption perfectly coincide. The remission of guilt without renovation of heart, would be no real benefit, because if the power of sin remained in full operation, guilt and condemnation would immediately return. The pardon is necessarily suspended on our repentance of sin and deliverance from its power; for otherwise pardon would cease to be pardon. It would still leave us obnoxious to eternal misery.

Let us admire that grace which brings salvation in such a wise and wonderful manner. It teaches us to live soberly, righteously and piously, and thus to look for the blessed hope of salvation, through Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from iniquity, and purify us unto himself, and make us zealous of good works.

Let us all examine ourselves whether we are among those who have sold themselves to sin. If we find in ourselves the characters of such slaves, it becomes us to consider the dangerous predicament in which we stand. Slaves now, and bound over to punishment. Let us realize the infinite importance of a speedy deliverance. Final condemnation for sin we all dread. We wish this may be prevented. The prevention of it depends on our present emancipation from the slavery of sin. This emancipation as we have heard, is not effected by the powers of our corrupt and enslaved nature.

But God has put into our hands the means of deliverance, and he has give us reason to expect, in the use of these, such concurring influences of the spirit, as may be sufficient to render the means effectual. This, therefore, is the command of the gospel. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you of his own good pleasure.”

You have perhaps felt, and now sometimes feel, the awakening and convincing power of the word. This effect is, doubtless, owing to a Divine excitement. Resist not the spirit—obey its

strivings—yield to its impressions—attend on the instructions of the word. Receive them with a teachable mind—and wait upon God continually in the way which he has prescribed.

Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know. Seek eternal life by a continuance in well doing. This is a day of hope ; lay hold on the hope set before you.

SERMON XII.

BIGOTRY, PRIDE AND CARELESSNESS IN RELIGION.

ACTS xviii. 12—17.

And when Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, This fellow persuaileth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong, or of wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would, that I should bear with you. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things.

RELIGION is a matter of such universal importance, that, if observation did not shew us the contrary, we should suppose it would engage the most serious attention of every man, who had an opportunity to acquaint himself with it. Common reason teaches us, that we ought principally to attend to our highest interest. Religion instructs us what this is, where it lies, and how it may be secured. Religion therefore ought to be every man's first concern. And yet a great part of mankind, yea, many of supe-

rior rank and education, appear as indifferent to it, as if it were a mere fable or romance. And among those who seem to have some kind of zeal for it, you will see not a few, whose zeal is little else than pride, curiosity and party design.

These two tempers with regard to religion, *indifference and false zeal*, both equally wrong, and equally inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, remarkably appeared in the persons mentioned in the story now before us. The Jews and Greeks, warmed against each other by religious differences, proceeded to open violence. Gallio was perfectly indifferent about the matter in question, and cared not which party was in the right, or whether either of them.

In order to understand the characters here exhibited, it will be useful to attend a little to the story. Gallio was governor of Achaia, one of the ancient Grecian states; but, at that time, a province of the Roman empire. The chief city was Corinth, a place distinguished by wealth, learning and vice. Here Paul spent a year and six months preaching the gospel; and he found considerable success. The Jews had a synagogue in the city, the chief ruler of which was *Crispus*. This man, under Paul's ministry, became a convert to the gospel, and was baptized with all his family. He now, it seems, resigned his office, or was removed from it; for soon after his conversion, *Sosthenes* is called the chief ruler, and is represented as being at the head of the party, which rose against Paul.

In this synagogue Paul used to preach every Sabbath, not only to Jews, but also to Greeks, many of whom came to hear this new and extraordinary preacher. The Greeks were a curious and inquisitive people, and very fond of hearing those who taught any thing new. The Jews offended at the doctrine of Paul, especially at his asserting the abolition of the legal ceremonies, and the sufficiency of faith in Christ to salvation, made an insurrection against him, and brought him before Gallio, the governor of the province, alleging, that he persuaded men to worship God contrary to their law.

We here see the force of prejudice, and into what palpable inconsistencies it will drive men. The Jews condemned the Ro-

man dominion over them as an unjust usurpation and a cruel oppression. They were anxious to shake off the yoke. Had a man pleaded in defence of it, they would have denounced him as an enemy of their nation. But they would apply to it, when they could serve their own turn by it. They would bring Paul before a Roman governor to obtain judgment against him even in a matter of religion, which of all things is most remote from the proper jurisdiction of a civil magistrate.

Paul hearing the accusation laid against him, arose to make his defence. But the governor stopped the process. He said to the accusers; "If it were a matter of wrong, or of wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would, that I should bear with you; but if it be a question of words, and of names, and of your law, look ye to it, for I will be no judge of such matters." If ye had brought a charge against this man for any injury, or trespass, or violation of the laws of the state, I would patiently hear you. But if it be only a question, whether his doctrine be agreeable to your law; whether the name of Messiah belong to Jesus whom he preaches, and whether his religion or yours be the truth, I shall not interpose. You may dispute it out between you. So he drave them from the judgment seat.

Gallio, indeed, as a magistrate had no concern in this matter. But as a man, he was as much interested in it as Paul himself. Every man has a right to think for himself in things which relate merely to religion; and he ought to be at liberty to examine and judge without fear or control. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Though the magistrate is bound to aid and protect what he believes to be the true religion, yet he is never to punish men for a religious opinion, nor for speaking or professing that opinion, in case it interferes not with the peace of society, which truth never does.

But though Gallio had no right to decide judicially in the matter brought before him; yet it was infinitely important to himself, that he should decide conscientiously, and settle his own private judgment. The question referred to him, whether Jesus, whom Paul preached, was the Saviour of a guilty world, and whether the doctrine, which Paul taught, was the true way of salvation,

ought to have engaged his most serious attention. He had now a fine opportunity to gain the necessary information. One of the most noted preachers of christianity was brought before him and accused for his doctrine. This preacher was now opening his mouth to explain and defend his religion. Would Gallio have had a little patience, he might have heard what it was, and on what foundation it stood, and might soon have been able to judge whether he ought to become a christian. But he abruptly dismissed the business ; not merely because he would not interfere in a case foreign to his judicial character, but because it was a matter of religion, in which he was not disposed to concern himself either as a magistrate or a man.

The Greeks resented the abuse which the Jews had offered to Paul. And finding that the governor would not patronize the Jews, they immediately seized Sosthenes, the head of the Jewish faction, and beat him before the judgment seat. Gallio looked silently on ; he would not use his authority so far as to preserve peace and order in his own presence. He cared for none of these things. Religion, he saw, was the object of the quarrel. It was a matter too low for his interference. He would leave the parties to fight it out among themselves.

We see in these Jews the extravagances of a blind, religious zeal. We see in the Greeks the mischievous effects of vain curiosity and self-conceit. And in Gallio we see a proud indifference to all religion. It will be useful to employ a few thoughts on each of these tempers.

I. We will consider the extravagance of that religious zeal which actuated the *Jews*.

Bigotted to their own sentiments and usages, they despised all who embraced not the same, and persecuted all who dared to oppose them, or even to dissent from them. The apostle says, "They killed the Lord Jesus, and have persecuted us. They please not God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved." When Paul preached the doctrines of Christ to the Jews in Corinth, influenced by this spirit of bigotry, they opposed themselves and blasphemed ; rose against him tumultuously, and brought him before

the magistrate for teaching doctrines contrary to their law. They gloried in their zeal for God, which prompted them so violently to oppose a man, who taught doctrines so different from their own. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, because they could bear no contradiction to their own religious opinions and ceremonial usages. But in all their zeal there was nothing of the spirit of true religion. This is always meek and humble, peaceable and benevolent.

Godly zeal in religious matters is concerned to know what is truth. It entertains a modest self-distrust in all doubtful cases. It is swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. It will, indeed, contend earnestly for the truth; but will contend with a calm, not with a violent spirit. It will allow others the privilege which it claims for itself. It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits. The zeal, which is accompanied with bitter envying and strife, descendeth not from above, but proceedeth from an earthly, carnal and infernal source.

In the *second* place, we will attend to the conduct of these *Greeks*. They were of a different cast from the Jews. They had not the same contracted bigotry; but they had more of a vain curiosity. And this led them into the same extravagance, as appeared in the Jews. They criminated each other, and yet both acted alike.

The Greeks sought after wisdom; after new schemes of philosophy—new deities—new forms of worship. They were fond of hearing and telling something new. They were eager to hear Paul, because they imagined he would bring to their ears some novel sentiments, which might amuse and entertain them. And when they found that the Jews were endeavoring to stop his mouth, mortified at the disappointment, they used Sosthenes, the Jewish leader, with the same violence, as the Jews had before offered to Paul. Yea, they carried the matter farther; they beat the ruler of the synagogue in the presence of the court. They despised the narrow spirit of the Jews, and valued themselves on that liberality which was willing to hear what every man had to say. And yet they were as remote, as the bigotted Jews, from

that peace, candor and condescension which is the spirit of true religion. They could persecute a Jew for not allowing Paul to preach, as readily as the Jews persecuted the apostle for preaching contrary to their sentiments. They were as violent against the Jewish bigotry, as the Jews were against Paul's christianity. They ran into the same excess, which they condemned in others.

True liberality, in this case, would have pitied these blinded zealots, and labored to bring them to a better temper. It would, indeed, have interposed to support the injured apostle; but it would not have retaliated on his opposers the violence which they offered to him. A wise man and one endued with knowledge, will shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

You see, that men may be zealous about things which relate to religion, and yet have nothing of that temper, which essentially belongs to religion. It is, therefore, important, that every man carefully examine his own heart.

If you have no concern at all about religion, there is little need of examination. Your character is obvious. But, perhaps you are not indifferent. You feel a warm displeasure against the men who differ from you in the doctrines and forms of religion. You take all opportunities to speak against them; to malign their persons, to discredit their opinions and to vindicate your own; and you think a love of truth and virtue reigns in your heart, because you cannot bear them that are evil. But perhaps all this may proceed from pride, envy, self-confidence and worldly affection. Do you not feel and conduct in the same manner toward those who oppose your favorite sentiments in politicks? If you would know whether your zeal is pious, enquire whether you are zealous to discover truth—to detect your own errors—to amend your own tempers—to maintain good works—whether your zeal against the sins and errors of other men be mixed with that charity, which suffers long and is kind, and which labors rather to promote their virtue, than to wound their character.—You readily embrace every opportunity to hear the word preached. So far is well. But are your motives pious? Are you doers as well as hearers of the word? Do you lay aside all guile and hypocrisy, and receive the

word with meekness and self-application? These Greeks were eager to hear Paul preach, but were little influenced by that gospel which he preached. Curiosity and a love of novelty were their motives. It was not the spirit of the gospel which prompted their outrage on Sosthenes. It is wise to examine what motive influences you. Is it a desire to know your hearts, your duty, and your character—to be instructed and quickened in the way of salvation? Or is it a desire to hear some curious speculations—to know what will be said on some controverted points, or to follow the custom of the times? You may be pleased with a sound argument, a good style, and an agreeable manner, and yet have no relish for truth. If it be a love of the gospel which governs you, you will be as careful to live by it every day, as you are to hear it one day in seven. Religion is consistent with itself. If it rules your heart, it will make you holy in all manner of conversation.

We see further, that it is no uncommon thing for men to run into the same absurdities, which they condemn in others. The Jews complained of the oppressions of the Roman government, and yet would subject Paul to this government. They denied the right of the Romans to rule over them, and yet would prosecute this, their countryman, in a Roman court. The Greeks condemned the violence with which the Jews proceeded against Paul, and at the same time treated the Jews with greater violence. We easily see faults in others, but are often blind to our own. Let us watch over ourselves, review our conduct, and enquire whether it be such as we should approve in another—such as we should justify in an enemy, or recommend to a friend. In a case of doubt, let us ask ourselves, what advice, in a similar case, we would give to a son, or brother. Thus we may often judge of our own selves, what is right.

I proceed, *thirdly*, to consider that spirit of carelessness which appeared in *Gallio*.

He despised the bigotry of the Jew, and the pride of the Greek. He saw their dispute rise to blows, but took no measures to terminate it. He felt superior to such matters as they were contending about. But unhappily, poor man, he was as indifferent to the doctrine of salvation preached by Paul, as he was to the philoso-

phy of the Greeks, and the ceremonies of the Jews. He cared for none of these things. He would neither interpose to part the contending Jews and Greeks, nor condescend to hear Paul explain and defend his religion. We condemn his carelessness, as much as he despised the vanity and the obstinacy of the others. And how many among us are chargeable with the same indifference in religion—the same carelessness about their souls.

There is, in some, an indifference to all religion. Though they think it well for society, that some apprehensions of a Deity and a future judgment, and some forms of worship should be maintained; yet to religion, considered as the means of rendering us acceptable to the Deity, and preparing us for future blessedness, they pay no attention. But if we are rational and immortal beings, religion must infinitely concern us all; and every man must be indispensably bound to believe its truth and divinity, understand its doctrines and precepts, and govern his heart and life by them.

There are few who profess to disbelieve the gospel; and yet there are many who live as if they disbelieved it. But what advantage can they expect from it without a care to live agreeably to it? And where is their consistency in assenting to it as true, and contradicting it in practice? Will such a faith save them? Their faith, being without works, is dead.

There is such a thing as a man's being careless and easy in his mind, when he has no persuasion of present safety. If convictions of sin, and apprehensions of judgment, now and then, press upon them, they smother or divert them by the employments, or amusements of the world, and compose their minds to the former state of indifference.

Delay is carelessness. For now is the day of salvation. The future is not our's. We know not what shall be on the morrow. If we dare not dismiss all thoughts of religion, we ought to attend to it now. If it be too important to be finally neglected, it is too important to be postponed to another day.

They who rashly expose themselves to temptations, or run into the known path of iniquity, discover as great carelessness, as the man mentioned in our text. He was careless about religion in general. He little concerned himself whether there was such a

thing ; and if there were, whether it were to be found among Romans or Greeks, Jews or Christians. This was carrying his indifference to a great length. You believe that there is such a thing as religion, and that it is found among Christians. So far is well. But what is the design of this religion ? Does it not teach you a holy life ? Does it give any hope but in this way ? If you still go on fearless in a course of sin, what benefit can you expect from such a religion as you at present have ?

A neglect of, or negligent attendance on the means of religion is an evidence of a careless heart. You have God's word ; does it lie by you, unread ? His house is near you ; do you turn away your feet from it ? Or do you read and hear divine truths without any application of them to yourselves ? Is your mind unimpressed with the warnings set before you ? Do you make light of the calls and invitations of divine grace ? When you hear the terms of salvation stated, do you feel no concern to comply with them ; but depart from God's house with the same cold heart, which you brought thither ? Do you live without prayer and without the serious thoughts of death, judgment and eternity ? You are like the heathen magistrate, who cared for none of these things.

SERMON XIII.

THE DANGER OF CARELESSNESS.

ACTS xviii. 12—17.

And when Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, &c. &c.

FROM the carelessness of Gallio, the Roman governor of Achaia, we have taken occasion to consider and illustrate that spirit of indifference to religion, which is too common and observable in all times and places.

I shall now, as I proposed, shew the unreasonableness and danger of indulging this careless temper in a matter of such immense and universal concern as religion.

If there be such a thing as religion, it is a matter of infinite importance. It cannot be indifferent in itself; and a spirit of indifference to it, must be unreasonable in its nature and fatal in its consequences. It is impossible, that a thinking man should enjoy a settled peace of mind on any principles, but those of religion; because on no other can he feel himself safe. Set these aside, and all before him is darkness, confusion and horror.

I pity the unhappy man, who disbelieves the government of a Deity and the immortality of the soul; for what comfort can he find under the adversities of life, or in the approach of death?

There is no throne of grace for him to resort to—no future happiness for him to anticipate. Annihilation is his refuge from the terrors of conscious guilt. But it is a gloomy refuge. He runs to it, not because he loves it, but only because he prefers it to the punishment which his sins deserve. He is like a man who leaps from his chamber window, when his house is on fire; not because he wishes to hazard a fall, but because he would escape destruction in the flames.

But alas! poor man, he is not sure of this sad exemption from future misery. Here is a wonderful fabrick, which exhibits every mark of wisdom, goodness and design. It came into existence somehow or other. Whatever supposition he may make to quiet his fears, still he must fear there is a God who formed, and who supports it. And if there is a God who made the world, and made him a rational being, he must fear that this God, in some future period, will call him to an account for his conduct, and punish him for his wickedness. Let him flatter himself as much as he pleases, still, if he opens his eyes, he will see reason to fear, that a day of retribution will come, and sin will be punished. Yea, even though he could be sure, that there were no God, and that the world and every thing which belongs to it were the effects of mere chance, he has no security from misery. The same chance, which has brought him into existence here, may bring him into existence elsewhere. The same contingency of events which has subjected him to many troubles in this world, may cast him into a condition eternally and completely miserable in another. What satisfaction, then, can a mortal have, but upon the firm belief, that there is a holy, wise, just and merciful Being, who made and governs the world—that there is a way in which he may secure the favour of this Being—that he has been instructed in, and has complied with, the terms of his favor—that consequently he shall be forever happy, when life shall end, and all his connexions with mortality shall be dissolved? A wise and prudent man, as he regards his own peace and happiness, will endeavor to be well settled in the principles of religion—to understand what it requires and what it forbids. and what fears and hopes it sets before him.

He will submit to the influence of this religion, and give diligence to ascertain his interest in its promises.

Such a general contempt of all religion, as Gallio discovered, is an infatuation, of which we should hardly think the human mind capable. You condemn his carelessness. But enquire whether you are not guilty. You believe there is a God, a future state, and an eternal retribution. You believe the gospel to be a Divine revelation and to contain the words of eternal life. But do you feel and act, as if you believed these things? You wonder at the carelessness of the infidel, who disbelieves the truth of religion, and yet neglects to examine it. May not he, in his turn, wonder at you, who profess to believe the truth of religion, and yet live in a practical neglect of it?

You say, you believe the divinity of the gospel. On this ground permit me to argue with you, and evince the danger of a careless manner of life.

1. Seriously consider what it is that you are careless about. It is not wealth or honor—it is not food or raiment—it is not health or life. It is something greater than all these. It is your *eternal salvation*.

You are placed here on probation for another state of existence. Happiness or misery is before you, according as you acquit yourself in this probation. Is not this a serious thought?—You are soon to die. Death terminates your probation, and brings you to a judgment, which will fix your condition for eternity. You must hereafter stand before the righteous Judge. You are careless now. Will you be so then? What defence will you make? What intercessor will you find? To which of the saints will you turn? Angels and men and your own conscience will condemn you. The compassionate Redeemer, who once wept over careless sinners, will not interpose for you, there. He will be the Judge. The scripture, in reference to the final judgment, speaks of the wrath of the Lamb. Guilty and impenitent souls will be sentenced to everlasting punishment. What this punishment will be, we can at present but imperfectly conceive. But destruction from God's presence—a lake of fire burning with brimstone—torment in this flame—a worm that dieth not, and a

fire that is not quenched—weeping and gnashing of teeth, are expressions of solemn meaning, and of awful import. The distant possibility of such an issue of a careless and impenitent life, ought to arouse every sinner from his guilty slumbers. Especially, when he considers ;

2. That he is *now exposed* to this issue.

Your time of trial is but short. The day of retribution draws near. Though now you carelessly sleep away the precious hours on which the happiness of eternity depends, you know not, but at the next hour, you may open your eyes in the world of despair. Can you think of this, and be careless still? You hope for time yet in reserve, but you know not what shall be on the morrow. It is presumption beyond all description to risk your eternal salvation on the continuance of so precarious a life.

3. Consider what *circumstances* you are placed under, and how these will *aggravate* the guilt of a careless life.

The negligent heathen may plead, that he had but an imperfect knowledge of duty and of the means of happiness. A future state, the forgiving mercy of God, the way of salvation for sinners through a dying Saviour, had not been revealed to him. He will be beaten with few stripes. But your case is widely different. You have the word of God in your hands. Life and death are set before you. To you the wrath of God on the one hand, and the grace of God on the other, are revealed from heaven. You have assurance of pardon on repentance—you have the offer of Divine assistance on your seeking it—you have repeated invitations and warnings—the word, the providence, the Spirit, the ministers of God urge your attention to your eternal interest. How will you excuse a careless life? You have known your Lord's will. If you prepare not to meet it, you must be beaten with many stripes.

4. It may be proper to consider, that there are *no means* better adapted to awaken you, than those which God is using with you.

You well know, that you must apply yourself to the great work of salvation, for you cannot be saved in carelessness and indifference. But what means of excitement do you expect, other than those which you have? Do you need instruction? The word of

God is able to make you wise unto salvation. Do you need conviction of your sinful state? The gospel gives you the most perfect rules of trial. By these is the knowledge of sin. Do you need ardent desires of future happiness? There are promises of fulness of joy and everlasting pleasure in God's presence. Do you need encouragement? Through Jesus Christ is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. He came to save them who are lost. Do you need an impressive sense of your danger in a state of impenitence? The gospel reveals the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and assures you, that without repentance, there is no way of escape. Would you be assured, that God is merciful to forgive the penitent? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for you, how shall he not with him also freely give you all things?—Do you doubt whether a careless life will end so miserably as you have been told? Look into God's word—consult you conscience—consider the tears, the entreaties and the sufferings of the Saviour. Why did he weep over sinners—why did he warn them to flee from the wrath to come—why did he die for their salvation, if there were not some amazing danger before them? Think what agonies he endured; how the heavens were wrapt in darkness, the earth seized with convulsions, and the rocks torn from their seats, while he was suffering for your sins. And then say, if these things were done in a green tree, what will be done in the dry?—Do you need a nearer view of the punishment which awaits you? Think it not remote. You know not what shall be on the morrow. Your life is a vapor.—Do you doubt whether sin tends to misery? Consult your experience. Have you never felt the painful consequences of your own misconduct? Have you never seen men reduced to wretchedness by their obstinacy in vice? Have you never been stung with remorse for your sinful actions?—Do you plead in excuse for your negligence, the impotence of your nature? God's grace is sufficient for you. He gives his Holy Spirit to them who ask him.

You presume perhaps, that God will sooner or later interpose to awaken you by some special operation of his Spirit. It may be so. But if you rest in this presumption, consider,

5. That by indulging your careless disposition you may provoke God wholly to withdraw his spirit from you. Have you not often found serious thoughts, convictions and resolutions excited in your mind? What use have you made of them? Have you practically complied with them? Or have you resisted and suppressed them, and fallen back into your former indolence? Should the Spirit strive with you again, how do you know it would be better obeyed? The awakened sinner has every encouragement to seek God's grace; "for he that hath, to him shall be given." But he who repels present convictions, and walks in the way of his own heart, presuming, that God will, at some future time, effectually work in him, is of all men the most unlikely to receive that effectual grace, on which he so unwarrantably presumes.

6. If the means of awakening fail of their proper effect, they usually have a contrary effect. The tendency of evil habits is to gain strength by indulgence; and none more so than a habit of sloth. The oftener you suppress your convictions, the fainter they will grow. The oftener you break your resolutions, the weaker they will become. The oftener you reject Divine warnings, the smaller will be their effect. The more you accustom yourself to evil, the more disinclined you will be to do good. The longer you continue in your indolence, the less probability is there of your awaking out of it.

Finally. Be intreated to consider, that you are every day in danger of falling under this denunciation, "My Spirit shall no longer strive." And wo to you, when God departs from you. That this has been the case of some, and may be the case of others, you cannot doubt, when you hear God saying to the ancient Jews, "My people would not hearken to my voice; so I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts"—when you hear the Saviour saying of the perverse generation in his day, "O that they had known in this their day the things which belong to their peace, but now they are hidden from their eyes." And when you hear the apostle saying of some, "Because they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them up to a reprobate mind." If such has been the case of some, beware lest the same evil come on you. If the consideration of guilt and danger awak-

ens secret relentings in your heart, you may conclude you are not utterly forsaken. But you know not but these may be some of the last touches God will give you. Improve these, lest his Spirit depart from you.

Let every one now examine whether the marks of a careless spirit appear in him. Do you study to become well acquainted with religion? Do you cultivate the temper and maintain the practice of it? Are you diligent to make your calling sure? Do you watch against temptations? Do you feel a godly sorrow, when you are conscious of transgression? Are you affected with the warnings of God's word and providence? Are you careful to attend on the instituted means of salvation? If you care for none of these things, you are in the dangerous state described. Can you think of your danger, and still remain careless? What is this but stupidity? Can you consider the amazing scenes which will soon open upon you; the certainty and nearness of death; the awful solemnity of judgment; the different ends of a holy and unholy life; the aggravated guilt of impenitence under the gospel; how often you have quenched the Divine Spirit; the danger of your being left to a reprobate mind, and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin? Can you consider these things with unconcern? What can be spoken to awaken you?—But if from these considerations, you are excited to enquire, “Lord what wilt thou have me to do?” Take with you words and turn to the Lord, and say, “Take away my iniquity, and receive me graciously.” Your present thoughtfulness gives great encouragement. It is a Divine excitement. The voice of God to you, is, “Seek now my face.” Let your heart reply, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face from me. Cast me not away in anger.” Be watchful, that you relapse not into former carelessness. The latter end will then be worse than the beginning. Improve present convictions, and rest not till they produce repentance unto salvation. Converse with the holy scriptures; think on your ways; direct your views to future and eternal things; search your heart, and correct the errors which you find there; abstain from the appearance of evil, and from every thing of a hardening tendency; improve the means of grace, and fall in with the good motions

which may be excited in you ; seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near ; give yourself to him to serve him in newness of life ; and whatever you do, or resolve to do, place a humble reliance on the abundant mercy of God through the great Redeemer. Thus you may be assured, God will have mercy on you, and pardon, strengthen and save you. He hath not forsaken them who seek him. But remember you must seek him by a patient continuance in well doing. Then will you obtain everlasting life.

Can any now hesitate, what choice to make, and what course to pursue ? Have you not all come to a decision on this question ? Can any man be in suspense, whether to choose life or death—happiness or misery ? If you choose life, then you must choose religion. This is her voice, “ They who hate me, love death.” Attend to the nature of religion—consider the deep concern which you have in it. View life as it is, a short probation, which will terminate in happiness or misery according to the choice which you make. Consider what God has done to bring you to the knowledge of religion, to convince you of its importance, and persuade you to a compliance with it. Look forward to the time, when you will stand between this and the eternal world ; anticipate the apprehensions which guilt will then feel, the judgment which wisdom will form, and the joys which religion will give. Make now the choice, which you will then approve, and reject the part which you will then condemn. You cannot feel indifferent to religion, long. Be indifferent no longer.

SERMON XIV.

THE FATE OF LOT'S WIFE—A WARNING TO SINNERS.

LUKE xvii. 32.

Remember Lot's wife.

THE Jews, from a misconception of the prophecies, entertained grand expectations of the temporal glory and extent of the Messiah's kingdom. And, as they imagined Jerusalem would be the seat of his empire, they were in haste to have it erected, that they might the sooner obtain deliverance from the oppressions of the Roman government. Jesus of Nazareth now appeared among them and declared himself to be the promised Messiah. But in his appearance they saw nothing of that temporal glory, which they thought the prophecies imported. They therefore, perhaps in derision of his pretensions, demanded of him, "When the kingdom of God," or the kingdom of the Messiah, "should appear." To correct their mistaken notions, he told them, that the kingdom of God would consist, not in any peculiar form of government erected in this or that place, and propagated by the terrors of war; but in the subjection of men's hearts, and the conformity of their lives to that dispensation of religion which was already discovered to them and begun among them. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say.

Lo, here, or lo, there ; for behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

Our Lord, now, in the presence of the Pharisees, turns himself to his disciples, and foretells the utter destruction of the Jewish constitution, which event would bring on such a scene of distress, that many, however they might despise the Messiah now, would wish, but wish in vain, for his power to support and comfort them.

He next cautions them against giving heed to deceivers, who, in that time of general distress, would arise, with pretensions to the Messiahship, promising them deliverance.

That these pretenders might be better distinguished from the true Messiah, he foretells that they would make their way by clandestine practices, whereas his appearance for the protection of the faithful would be open and undisguised, and attended with plain tokens of Divine agency. "When they shall say, See here, or see there, go not after them ; for as the lightning shineth from one part of heaven to the other, so shall the coming of the Son of man be in his day."

But, previous to this, he says, "The Son of man must be rejected and suffer death from that generation." He here signifies, that the great display of his power will be after his resurrection, when he will shed forth his Spirit in miraculous gifts.

He then foretells the general stupidity of that wicked generation, comparing it to the stupidity of the old world in the time of Noah, and to that of Sodom in the days of Lot. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man ; they ate, they drank, they married wives and were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was in the days of Lot ; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded ; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all : even so shall it be in the day, when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he that shall be on the house top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away ; and he that shall be in the field, let him likewise not return back." The houses of the Jews

were flat-roofed, and had two ascents, one without and the other within, by which they went up to the roof. Christ's meaning, therefore, was, that as soon as they observed the signs of impending ruin, they were to fly for their lives, without staying to save their substance. He who was on the house-top was not to go down into the house to secure his stuff, but to go off by the outer passage, as the speediest way of escape.

To enforce this warning, he refers them to the example of Lot's wife, intimating, that the danger was as threatening, and the necessity of haste as urgent, in their case, as in her's.

The story here referred to, is well known. You have often read it in the 19th chapter of Genesis.

The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. Unreclaimed by the ministry of Lot, they were doomed to an exemplary destruction. Lot was warned of their impending danger, and commanded to flee with his family from the devoted city. While he lingered, the angel of God laid hold on his hand, on the hand of his wife, and on the hands of his daughters, and set them without the city, and said, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, but escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." In obedience to the heavenly warning, they began their flight; but his wife, either through affection for her friends in the city, or through a fondness to save her substance, or through disbelief of the threatening, stopped in her way, and perhaps turned back to save her substance, and thus was overtaken by the fiery storm.

This example our Lord applies to his disciples as a warning to make their speedy escape from the impending destruction of Jerusalem; and with equal propriety may it be applied to sinners in general, to urge their flight from the wrath to come.

In reference to such, I shall improve the example.

In the case of Lot's wife, there are several things worthy to be remembered: Such as the *warnings* which were given her—the *instructions* which were added—her *conduct* under them—the *causes* of this conduct—and the *consequences* which followed.

I. Remember the *warnings* which were given to Lot's wife. Here several particulars deserve our attention.

1. She was warned by *angels from heaven*.

The angels, whom Lot had entertained, said to him, "Hast thou here any besides" those whom we see under thy roof? "Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in this city, bring them out of this place; for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them hath waxen great before the Lord, and he hath sent us to destroy it." "And Lot went out and spake unto his sons-in-law, and said, Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city."

As this warning of the angels was given in Lot's house, his wife probably heard it from them. Or, if she then was not present, she certainly heard it from *him*. When he went and informed his friends in the city of the message which he had received, surely he would not forget those of his own house. She had, therefore, sufficient notice of the danger which threatened her; and her disobedience was inexcusable.

What then shall we say of the stupidity of sinners under the gospel. To warn them of their danger, and to hasten their escape from it, God has sent his own Son from heaven. "And if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression received a just recompense of reward; how will they escape who neglect that great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed by them that heard him?"

2. Lot's wife had *sufficient evidence* that the warning given her was from heaven. The wickedness of the city in which she dwelt, rendered it credible, that a just and holy God would soon shew some awful tokens of his displeasure against it. The angels, who announced its destruction, produced competent credentials of their Divine commission. They, by a miraculous power, rescued Lot from the violence of a lawless mob, and smote with blindness the ruffians who assaulted his house, and threatened his person.

But more convincing demonstration has God given, that there is destruction for the wicked, and a strange punishment for the workers of iniquity.

If we consider the holiness, justice, and wisdom of God, we must conclude, that he hates sin, and will manifest his displeasure

against it—that, in regard to the honor of his own character and government, he will make a difference between the good and the bad, and that consequently he will sooner, or later, set forth irreclaimable sinners as examples of his wrath.

If we consider the nature of sin, the incapacity for happiness which it introduces into the soul, and the misery which naturally grows out of it, we shall be led to the same conclusion. God is the fountain of all real felicity—the object of all rational enjoyment. There can be no moral pleasure without a conformity of heart to his character, and a conscious interest in his favor. “Whom have I in heaven, but thee?” says the Psalmist, “and there is none on earth, that I desire besides thee.” “Thou art my portion, O God; I entreat thy favor with my whole heart.” All sin is opposite to the nature, and contradictory to the will of God, and consequently the habitual, impenitent sinner must be miserable.

This conclusion seems plain and undeniable: But lest sinners, intent on their guilty pursuits, should be regardless of the voice of reason, God has spoken to them in a more plain, solemn and commanding manner. He has sent his own Divine Son, and, after him, the holy apostles, to deliver to men, in express words, these certain dictates of sober reason. And that he might awaken their attention and regard to the messengers whom he has sent, he has confirmed their words by miracles, signs and wonders. The wrath of God is now revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Assurance is given us that God has appointed a day in which he will judge, not merely this, or that person, city or country, but the whole world of mankind, and will render to every man according to his works; indignation and wrath to every soul of man that doth evil; but glory, honor and peace to him that worketh good. To prove the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, there is no need of a labored train of reasoning; for we find this solemn doctrine expressly and abundantly asserted in the gospel, which has been demonstrated by miracles to be a revelation from God. The man, therefore, who continues in sin, acts in open and bold

contempt of God's threatenings; he dares the thunder of heaven, and bids defiance to the tempest which threatens him.

3. The evil from which Lot's wife was warned to escape, was the *destruction* of her city. This was the declaration of the angels, "We will destroy this place, because the cry of it is waxen great, and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it." It was a temporal destruction, from which she was commanded to flee. Jude indeed says, "Sodom and Gomorrha are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of *eternal* fire." The fire which consumed these cities is called *eternal*, because it gave them a *total* overthrow, and they never could be restored; as it was said of Amalek, "His end shall be that he perish *forever*"—and as it was said of the idolatrous city; "It shall be burnt with fire, and shall be an heap *forever*, and shall *never* be built again."

The destruction from which the gospel warns sinners to flee, is more terrible than this. It is the vengeance of *eternal* fire; not in the sense in which the fire of Sodom was so called, because it made an end of the subject; but in a more solemn and awful sense, because it will burn for ever, and none can quench it—neither the sufferers will die, nor the flames be extinguished.

4. The destruction of which this woman was warned, was *near at hand*. There was, in her case, no time for debate or delay. What she had to do, she must do immediately. The angels declared, that God had sent them to destroy the city; and they were now come on the business. They did not fix the moment when execution was to begin; but they plainly signified that the day was come, and that before they left the ground, they should perform their work.

This circumstance in the case of Lot's wife, sinners in general ought to remember and apply.

God has not seen fit to inform you, how long his patience will wait on you; but he assures you, that there is only a day of salvation, a limited time of acceptance, and that this time is short. Your days are an hand-breadth; your age is as nothing. A few more giddy rounds of sin and pleasure will close this mortal scene, and put an eternal period to your space of repentance. If you

should spin out the tender thread of life to its utmost extent, yet, in the review, it will appear to be what the Psalmist calls it, a span—vanity—nothing. You know not the time of your death. It may be nearer than you imagine. Lot's wife was allowed only one day to prepare for her flight. You cannot boast of so much. Your souls may this night be required of you. The destroying angel may be already on his way to your dwelling. The storm of brimstone and fire may be now gathering in your sky. Snares and destruction may, in a few hours, or moments, be rained on your guilty heads. "The day of the Lord so cometh, as a thief in the night; for when men shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them. But ye are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are the children of light and of the day. Therefore, sleep not as do others; but watch and be sober."

5. The warning sent to Lot's wife was not only given her plainly, but *repeated* to her, and *pressed* upon her *earnestly* and *affectionately*. "When the morning appeared, the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, who are here, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, they laid hold on his hand, and on the hand of his wife, and on the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him, and they brought him forth and set him without the city, and said, Escape for thy life."

As frequent and urgent are God's warnings to sinners in general. If he had only pointed out to them their danger and the way of escape, their inattention must have been without excuse, and their destruction must have been chargeable on themselves. But being merciful to them, and not willing that they should perish, he, from time to time, renews his applications to them, and urges them with compassionate vehemence. He warns them by his standing revelation, and the ordinary dispensations of his providence. He sends among them his ministers to instruct them in their duty, admonish them of their danger, and call them to repentance. He often orders events, in his providence, with a particular design to awaken and alarm them. To external means he

adds the kind and seasonable motions of his good Spirit, by which convictions are awakened, warnings are impressed, and new resolutions are excited. Thus God takes them as by the hand, leads them without the devoted city, and commands them to escape for their lives. While they linger, he still strives with them, and urges their flight. With some, yea, with most sinners, he strives repeatedly. He begins with them early, even in the morning of youth; and he stretches out his hand to them all the day long. This is the language of Divine mercy, "How shall I give you up, and deliver you to deserved destruction? How shall I make you as Admah, and set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together." "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die? I have no pleasure in your death; wherefore turn and live." "Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." After an unavailing repetition of his calls and warnings to sinners, he speaks as one desirous of their repentance, but in doubt what further means to use. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For thy goodness is as the morning cloud; as the early dew it goeth away."

Such were the warnings given to Lot's wife; and these are worthy to be remembered and applied; for the same, yea, more solemn warnings, are given to others, and they who despise these are doomed to a more marvellous destruction.

I proceed to say,

II. This woman was not only warned of her danger, but *instructed* how she might escape it.

Let us recollect the *instructions* which were given her. When the angels had brought Lot and his family without the city, they said to him, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." When Lot, doubting whether he could reach the mountain, begged that he might find security in a little city near at hand, he received this condescending answer; "See, I have accepted thee in this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for which thou hast spoken: Haste thee, escape thither."

Here are several things which deserve notice.

1. You ought to remember, that Lot's wife was to flee from Sodom, leaving her substance and her friends. Your flight must be like her's.

If you would save your souls, you must renounce your sins. As Lot's family were to leave this guilty city, lest they should be consumed in it, so you must renounce your sinful course of life, lest you perish in that. Pride, luxury, and idleness, or any other sin, indulged and cherished, will be as fatal here, as they were in Sodom. The apostle, speaking of the abominations of the heathen, says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing. Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Sodom was a place of great riches. Lot's family forsook all they had, to save their lives. We must also renounce the world. We must mortify our inordinate affections, shun every dishonest and unworthy art, dismiss all anxiety and solicitude about the events of time, and seek first the kingdom of God.

Lot's wife probably was a native of Sodom. There, she had many relatives and friends, sons-in-law who married her daughters and children too of her own flesh. The angels say to Lot, "Take thy daughters, which are *here*," intimating that there were others elsewhere. These she was to leave behind. In like manner Christ requires those, who would be his disciples, to forsake all and follow him. He who loveth father or mother more than him is not worthy of him; and he who forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be his disciple. The gospel, indeed, does not require us, under ordinary circumstances, to withdraw from our natural and civil connections; but when the friendship of the world is inconsistent with our duty to Christ, we are to renounce the former. And in no circumstances may we have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but we must rather reprove them.

2. Lot's family were commanded to *escape for their life*.

The command, though given immediately to Lot, respected the whole family; one as much as another. The expression de-

notes great earnestness. All that a man hath will he give for his life. Let sinners remember, that their life, not the life of their bodies, but the life of their souls, is in hazard. Let them flee from the storm which pursues them. Let them take refuge in the mercy of God. That they may save their souls, they must exert themselves, as men who are struggling for their life. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," says our Lord, "for many will seek to enter in and shall not be able."

3. Lot's wife was forbidden to *look behind her*.

Sinners, remember this caution. It is as necessary in your case, as in her's. "He who putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God." If you are once convinced of the danger of a guilty state; if once you begin to realize the necessity of repentance and a religious life, then immediately obey these convictions and sentiments, and pursue them until you find their proper effects wrought in you. Indulge no self-flatteries, yield to no delays; what your hands find to do, do it with your might. "Let your eyes look right on, and your eye-lids look strait before you; ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove your feet from evil."

4. Remember and apply the caution farther given by the angel, *stay not in all the plain*. You must make no stops by the way, but continue your course without intermission. Run with patience the race set before you; run and be not weary, walk and faint not. Let your religion be, not an occasional, but a stated business, and make all your temporal concerns give way to this one thing needful.

This order, *stay not in all the plain*, imports, that the family of Lot were to make no stand, until they had reached the appointed place of safety. They who enter on a religious course, must continue in it with patience and perseverance; they must not reckon their life dear to them, that they may finish their course with joy; they must be faithful to the death, that they may receive the crown of life.

5. Remember, farther, God's great *condescension* to this family. When Lot expressed his fears, that he could not escape to the

distant mountain, lest some evil should overtake him, and begged that he might find security in a little city which was near at hand, the angel answered, "See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city for which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing until thou be come thither."

Here is something instructive and encouraging to us. God, in condescension to our impotence, and in compassion to our guilt, has provided a Saviour, through whom he will not only accept our humble faith in his mercy, and sincere repentance of our sins, but also grant us the seasonable influences of his Spirit, that we may comply with these terms of salvation. The righteousness of the law is like the distant mountain, pointed out to Lot. We cannot escape thither, lest some evil overtake us, and we die. God has provided a place of safety nearer at hand, and easier of access. The righteousness of Christ is our security—our strong tower. Guilty as we are, we shall be accepted as righteous, and protected as innocent, whenever we penitently repair to, and humbly trust in this refuge. Let none say, "We cannot escape thither." The grace of God is sufficient for our direction and support. "Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees. Let not that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed."

Since a city of refuge is provided near at hand, flee thither, and lay hold on the hope set before you. Seek the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit; improve the external means, and internal influences afforded you; penitently confess your sins before God, and trust in the atonement of the Saviour as the ground of your pardon; submit to his authority, and put yourselves under the law to him; and, conscious of the weakness of your best intentions, and the imperfection of your best obedience, live by faith in the Son of God, who has loved you, and given himself for you.

The next thing to be remembered, in the case of Lot's wife, is her *conduct* under the warnings and instructions which she received. But the consideration of this, with the following parts of our subject must be deferred.

SERMON XV.

THE FATE OF LOT'S WIFE—A WARNING TO SINNERS.

LUKE XVII. 32.

Remember Lot's wife.

THE example of Lot's wife, who perished by delay in her flight from Sodom, our Lord improves as a warning to his disciples, against delay in their flight from the impending ruin of Jerusalem: And it may be applied to impenitent sinners in general, as a call to hasten their escape from the wrath to come.

In the case of Lot's wife, there are several things worthy of their consideration and remembrance; such as the *warnings* which were given her—the *instructions* which were added—her *conduct* under them—the *causes* of this conduct—and the *consequences* which ensued.

We have already considered the *warnings* and *instructions* given to this woman. Let us,

III. Consider the *course* which she took. This deserves to be remembered.

1. In consequence of the heavenly warning, she *set out* to escape from the devoted city. So far she did well. She did not treat with contempt the Divine message, like her sons-in-law, to whom Lot seemed as one that mocked, when he told them God

would destroy the city. She at first discovered a hopeful disposition. She heard the warning ; she saw the impression which it made on her husband ; influenced by his example, and probably by his advice, she set out with him to flee from the desecrated city to a place of safety. It is a great advantage to sinners to live in connection with some pious and holy person. His example, admonitions and counsels will have considerable influence, and may be the means of recovering them out of the snare of the destroyer. Through the influence of a good education, wholesome instructions, seasonable reproofs, and awakening providences, sinners are often brought to serious convictions and hopeful resolutions ; which, sometimes, prove the beginning of a religious life. It is not every sinner, that dares to treat with mockery the means used for his repentance. Some are really reformed, and many are checked and restrained by those human reproofs and heavenly warnings, which others insolently trample under foot.

2. It is to be observed, that Lot's wife, though she began her flight from Sodom, yet *looked back* in disobedience to the Divine command. She did not run with constancy, but loitered in her way, and perished in the flames of the city. In this respect she is an emblem of those sinners to whom it may be said, in the apostle's words, "Ye did run well ; who did hinder you ?"

Some set out in religion with a reserve in favour of particular sins. True conversion is a turning from *all* sin to the *whole* service of God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away ; all things are become new." He who makes a determined exception against any Divine command, or in favor of any known iniquity, has never experienced a real conversion ; but the love of sin still reigns in him. While the sinner feels a sense of guilt and danger pressing on his conscience, and hears the terrors of God's wrath sounding in his ears, he thinks, that nothing shall any longer detain him in his present awful state. He resolves upon a speedy repentance, and he actually begins to reform his life. But when he comes to the trial of renouncing some favorite pleasure, and mortifying some ruling lust, his resolution perhaps fails him : He spares the sin, and loses his

soul. Thus Lot's wife, while ministering angels urged her flight, endeavored to escape from the impending storm. But, when she came to the trial of parting with all that she possessed, her heart relented; she turned back and perished.

3. Her looking back may import *dilatoriness*. She looked back *from behind him*. There are few who wholly cast off the thoughts of religion. There are few who would dare finally to renounce it. Most men believe, or, at least, suspect, that there is some truth and importance in it; and they intend, sooner or later, to engage in it as their greatest concern. The intention is wise; but many are slow to execute it; and while they delay, the intention is forgotten, and the opportunity lost. "When Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, Felix trembled, and said, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." But we do not learn that he ever found this convenient season. When Christ said to a certain man, "Follow me," he, in reply, intimated an intention to follow him, but asked leave to wait, till he had buried his father. Another professed a resolution to follow him; but wished to be excused, till he could go home, and take leave of his friends. But Jesus said, "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back," no man, who, being convinced of his duty, deliberately neglects it, "is fit for the kingdom of God."

4. The woman's looking back toward Sodom, imports *unsteadiness* and *inconstancy*.

There are some who make the care of their souls only an occasional business. They attend to it only now and then, when some special providence awakens them, or when the world has no demands upon them. They, by turns, look forward, and backward. Their regards are divided between this world and the future, and they are found faulty. Being double-minded, they are unstable in all their ways. Hence they receive nothing from God.

5. It is probable, that Lot's wife, not only looked back, but *turned about* with an intention to save some part of her substance. This may be collected from the words of our Saviour; "Let

him who is in the field, not return back to save any thing out of his house. Remember Lot's wife."

Some, when they seem to have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are again entangled therein and overcome, and their latter end is worse than the beginning.

Such was the conduct of Lot's wife; and like her are those sinners, who, awakened to a concern for their souls, form good resolutions, but trifle, delay and perish.

IV. We will consider the *causes* which might probably operate in her to such a fickle, unsteady, fatal conduct.

1. We may suppose a great degree of *unbelief*.

Though she did not wholly disregard, yet neither did she fully believe the threatening; at least she doubted its speedy execution; hence she presumed to delay her flight. So it is still with the careless part of mankind. They hear the words of God's curse; but bless themselves in their hearts, saying, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts. They cannot be said to believe the awful threatenings of scripture against the impenitent. They read and hear them, and seem to assent to them; at least they will not openly contradict them. But still they indulge in their hearts a secret doubt, whether these threatenings will ever be executed; or, if they should be executed on some, they hope for themselves to escape, either by a future repentance, or by God's abundant mercy; and hence they encourage themselves in present delay. Or if they believe these threatenings as they are expressed in the bible, yet they defeat the influence of them by inattention. If they would seriously consider what awaits them in another world, they would not be so indifferent to their conduct in this. If they sensibly realized what it is to die, they would be more careful how they lived. If at any time the thoughts of death and eternity crowd into their minds and awaken their slumbering consciences, they dismiss these intruders, as Felix dismissed his preacher, "Go your way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for you." They entertain a loose, superficial kind of belief, that religion is

true, rational and important; but their belief loses all its effect, because they never call it into action by sober reflection and serious consideration.

2. *Curiosity* might have some influence to turn back the eyes of this woman on the devoted city.

Jonah, after he had denounced destruction against Nineveh, went and sat over against it, till he should see what would become of it. So Lot's wife, having heard that Sodom was presently to be overthrown, might be curious to observe, whether the prediction would be verified, or in what manner and by what means so rich and populous a city should be reduced to ruins.

It is amazing, what trifles engage men's attention, when the salvation of their souls is depending. If Lot's wife ran the hazard of her life, to see and observe the appearance of Sodom in flames, she did not act more absurdly than thousands do, still. To multitudes the little affairs of the world are matters of greater solicitude, than the vast concerns of eternity. How many neglect their souls for the sake of their bodies, and forego their future salvation for some present convenience! How many are more diligent to enquire into the affairs of other people, in which they have no real concern, than to learn the nature of repentance, faith and obedience, which are the terms of eternal life! How many are more busy to acquaint themselves with the things which pass in the families of their neighbors, than they are to examine their own hearts, and prove their own character! How many spend more time in deciding useless controversies than in gaining the knowledge of themselves and their duty!

It is too common a folly among men to employ their thoughts much on matters which little concern them, and to overlook the things, in which they are most essentially interested. This dangerous folly our Saviour often rebuked. When the disciples saw one who was born blind, instead of reflecting on the sovereignty of God, and his distinguishing goodness to them, they enquired, Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Our Lord answered, "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

As Jesus was teaching in a particular place, one of his hearers, instead of enquiring, what he must do to be saved, asked the Divine teacher, whether the number of the saved should be great or small. This impertinent question Christ improved to a practical use; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." When his disciples asked him, what should be the signs of his coming and of the end of the world, his answer was, "Watch ye and be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Some were solicitous to know, who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven; but Jesus told them, that unless they humbled themselves and became as little children, *they* would never enter into the kingdom of heaven: and that it was of more importance to secure their own entrance, than to learn who would be the greatest. Even Peter, when he was about to take his final leave of his Lord, had the curiosity to ask, what John should do. But Jesus answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me."

By such unprofitable enquiries men's thoughts are too often diverted from the great concerns of futurity. Curiosity in unnecessary matters is inconsistent with a due attention to the one thing needful.

3. The *strict command* of the angel, "Look not behind thee," might excite the woman's curiosity to see what was there. For such is the perverseness of sin, that restraint increases its rage. Thus the apostle observes, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence; for without the law sin was dead."

There are some who seem to rush on through forbidden wickedness, the rather because it is forbidden. One would imagine, this was the case with profane swearers. It is impossible to see what temptation men can have to dishonor God's name, unless it be the prohibition, which he has laid them under. One cannot imagine, what end they have in view, unless it be to shew how much they despise the commands and threatenings of the Almighty. Let such perverse transgressors remember Lot's wife,

who, in contempt of Divine orders, stood to gaze on the burning city; and while she gazed she perished.

4. We may suppose, that she lingered in her flight from a *presumption*, that the destruction of the city would not be sudden. Her setting out indicated an apprehension of danger, but her dilatoriness shewed a hope, that the danger was not so near as her husband imagined.

This is too common a delusion of sinners. They hear and pretend to believe the threatenings of God, but imagine, that he speaks of times afar off. They would by no means abandon the thoughts of religion, but they hope a future opportunity may be as favorable as the present. Thus they quiet their consciences in a guilty course, and suppress the fears awakened by the word and providence of God, not considering the uncertainty of life, and the danger that their hearts may be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

They know not, indeed, how long God may suspend the execution of his sentence against their evil works; neither do they know, but he will execute it speedily. They ought to act on the latter supposition. It is not for them to try God's patience, but immediately to obey his command. If they think of delaying, let them remember Lot's wife. While she lingered, the fatal storm overtook her.

5. It is possible she might now think herself *out of danger*. The angels had brought her without the city; she stood at some distance from it; she imagined, that the flames of the city would not reach to her. Hence she ventured to stop and look back, not considering, that she could find no place of security short of Zoar.

Some sinners, after temporary convictions and partial reformations, begin to flatter themselves that all is well. The terrors of the Lord take little effect upon them, because they imagine, that they are not the persons concerned.

It is no uncommon case, that when men hear general exhortations to repentance, they recur to some former religious sentiments and feelings, and pacify their consciences by the recollection of past awakenings and resolutions. They have fled so far from im-

pending wrath, that they seem to be out of its reach; and they stop where they are, or perhaps look back and return. But remember Lot's wife. She was commanded to run until she had reached the appointed place of security. But she stopped in the plain and perished. There was no place of safety between Sodom and Zoar. You must run with patience the race set before you—must endure to the end. It is only by faith and patience, that you can obtain the promise. If depending on what you have done, you sit down and do no more, you betray an insincerity of heart, which cuts off your claim to the protection of Divine mercy.

6. An *attachment* to the *friends* left in Sodom might have much influence in drawing back Lot's wife.

"Beware," says the apostle, "lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness." It is no easy matter to be blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, to forsake former companions in sin, and renounce all fellowship with their unfruitful works. Young and tender minds are easily decoyed and seduced by the slight and craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive. "How can ye believe," says our Lord to the Jews, "who seek honor one of another?" He requires it, as an indispensable qualification for his kingdom, that you love the praise of God more than the praise of men—that you be not ashamed of his gospel—that, in comparison with the salvation of your souls, you even hate your dearest earthly connections.

Are any of you detained in, or near to Sodom—detained in your corrupt and guilty state, by the example of the wicked, or by your fondness for the society of companions in sin? Remember Lot's wife, who, while she lingered in the conflict of parting with her friends in Sodom, was overtaken and destroyed by the pursuing tempest.

7. *Grief* for the *loss of her substance* might retard her flight, or a *desire to save her goods* might turn her about. This our Lord intimates. "Let not him who is in the field, turn back to take any thing out of the house. Remember Lot's wife."

Many sacrifice their souls to mammon. The cares of the world divert their thoughts from religion; earthly affections blast their good intentions; eagerness in their temporal pursuits excludes the interests of eternity; the inordinate desire of wealth urges them to forbidden means of acquiring it, and restrains them from the pious and charitable use of what they have acquired. "They who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." There are some, who despise the invitations of the gospel, and reject them, that they may go to their merchandize and their farms. There are some who hear the word in vain, because the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and render it unfruitful. There are some, who, having professed a regard to religion, afterward forsake it, having loved this present world. There are some, who, with a desire of eternal life, enquire what they must do to obtain it; but, when they learn that they must consecrate to the service of God all that they possess in this world, retire disappointed and offended. Let such remember Lot's wife, who, too anxious to save her substance, disregarded the Divine warning, and lost her life.

8. It is said, "She looked back *from behind him*:" from behind her husband. She kept not pace with her company. Seeing them before her, and considering the length of her way, she, perhaps, in her grief and vexation, turned about, stood, and wished to return.

Some, after they have set out in the religious life, finding unexpected difficulties in their way, feeling many infirmities within them, or seeing others who appear to make better progress than they, grow weary and faint in their minds. They seem to run well for a time; but are hindered by unforeseen discouragements. Let such remember, that they are commanded to pray always and not to faint—to continue in well-doing—to wait on God and be of good courage: And let them apply the Divine promises, that they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; shall mount up with wings as eagles; shall run and not be weary; shall walk and not faint; and, being faithful to the death, shall receive a crown of life.

It now only remains,

V. That I call to your remembrance the *awful destruction*, which befel Lot's wife, because she looked back from behind him. "She became a pillar of salt."

A *pillar* sometimes signifies a *monument*, and *salt* denotes *perpetuity*: hence, as some suppose, the phrase may import, that she was made a *perpetual monument* of God's wrath. So a covenant of *salt*, is an *everlasting* covenant. Others apprehend, that being seized by the sulphureous storm, she was stiffened and petrified into a statue resembling her natural shape; and was called a *pillar* of salt, because she was metamorphosed into the likeness of such a pillar.

Let either of these be the intention of the phrase, we are taught by it thus much, that for her disobedience to the plain warning of God, she was suddenly destroyed and made a lasting example of God's wrath against impenitent and presumptuous sinners.

The danger of apostacy, after hopeful convictions and promising resolutions, is represented to us, not only by this sad example, but also by many awful declarations of scripture. "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary." "If we draw back, it is to perdition. God's soul will have no pleasure in us." "If after we have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of Christ, we are again intangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with us than the beginning." "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

We hence learn, that they who relapse into sin after hopeful beginnings, are in a state awfully dangerous.

Such, unless they are renewed to repentance, will justly receive an aggravated condemnation. They oppose the convictions of their own minds, suppress the feelings of conscience, violate their solemn vows and promises, and resist the Spirit of God. Hence they are threatened with a punishment singularly severe, except they repent.

And the recovery of such sinners is peculiarly doubtful. When they have begun to apostatize, where will they stop? Vice stands on a precipice. Every step is down the hill. One step urges forward another. The farther it advances, the more difficult is the retreat. Lot's wife fell behind in her flight; being behind, she looked back, lost her resolution, and turned to save her substance. Ye, who have been awakened to serious resolutions; if you feel your resolutions failing, your temptations returning, and your lusts reviving, remember Lot's wife, who, yielding to one temptation after another, fell back irrecoverably into the flames of Sodom. When, after convictions of danger and a resolution to escape, you turn about, you give new advantage to the tempter, who will draw you back into destruction. By an active motion forward, you will best defeat his seducing influence, and escape his fiery darts.

By relapsing into a course of sin, you harden your hearts. Nothing so soon produces stupidity of conscience, as doing violence to its convictions. Thus also you resist the Spirit of grace, and provoke it to retire. And woe unto you, when God departs from you. It is in the sickness of the soul, as in diseases of the body; a relapse, after hopeful symptoms of recovery, is more dangerous than the first attack. The constitution is more debilitated, the distemper more fixed, and medicines less efficacious.

And now, let the things which have been spoken, be brought home to your consciences in a serious application.

Have you not been warned to flee from the wrath to come? Has not God spoken to you by his providence, word and Spirit? Has he not set before you strong proofs of a future judgment? Has he not given you an awful representation of the strange punishment which awaits the guilty? Has he not repeated to you his warnings and pressed them upon you with affection and earnestness? Has he not assured you, that the time of your probation is short and uncertain? Has he not pointed out to you the way in which you may escape the danger that threatens you?

What effect have his warnings and instructions produced? If you feel their force, comply with their design. "Escape for your

lives ; look not behind you ; stay not in all the plain ; flee to the mountain, lest you be consumed."

Flatter not yourselves, that you shall have peace, while you walk in the imagination of your hearts. Let no worldly trifles divert you from the care of your souls. Dare not to trespass on God's commands and break through his prohibitions. Presume not on his patience, nor trust to future opportunities. Rest not in partial amendments, or past convictions. Let no worldly connections seduce you into sin, nor any difficulties and oppositions discourage your pursuit of heaven. Remember the warnings and threatenings of God and lay them deeply to heart. Think of the examples of his wrath against the impenitent, especially against apostates ; and work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

If you were in the situation of Lot's wife, just without the walls of the desecrated city ; if you beheld the storm of fiery sulphur gathering thick around it and over it ; if you saw the vivid fires flashing down from above, and kindling into flames the bituminous substance of the soil on which the city stood ; if you were met on every side with the shrieks of despairing mortals, the crash of falling houses, and the convulsions of the cleaving ground ; would you not think it time to flee ? Would you not wonder at the stupidity of any who should stand within the confines of the storm to gaze at the tremendous scene ?—Remember, there is a scene foretold far more tremendous than this, at which you must appear, and which may be near at hand. Apply, then, the warning, and obey the counsel of the angel to the family of Lot, and escape, lest you be consumed.

SERMON XVI.

THE OPENING GRAVE CONTEMPLATED AND IMPROVED.

JOB xvii. 1.

The graves are ready for me.

THUS spake Job in a time of sickness and adversity ; and thus every man may speak in health and prosperity. Let all, then, keep themselves in readiness for the grave.

The disease with which Job was afflicted was of such a nature as threatened death. From various expressions in his discourses with his friends, we find, that he had given up the hopes of recovery. He felt like one in the last conflict of a dissolution—like one who saw the solemn preparation making for his interment.

Job, though a man of great piety, yet found the same stupifying effect, as many others find, from a long course of prosperity. In his more happy days, too insensible of human weakness, and too unmindful of the uncertainty of the world, he said, “I shall die in my nest ; I shall multiply my days as the sand ; for,” adds he, “my root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch, and my glory was fresh in me.” But when he saw his glory fading, and perceived his nature decaying, he entertained quite different apprehensions. Death and another

world were now full in his view. He considered his life as extinct, and the grave as opened for the reception of his flesh. It would be well, that we all, in our happiest circumstances, and especially under certain threatening appearances, should accustom ourselves to similar contemplations on human frailty, and our own near approach to the grave. For,

1. Every one may say, "The grave is ready for me." This circumstance is not peculiar to the aged and infirm: it is common to all.

So short is the life of man, that the time of death cannot be really remote, though to some it may seem so. In the verse next preceding our text, Job says, "When a *few years* are come, then shall I go the way, whence I shall not return." But he immediately corrects the expression, as if a mortal man might hardly talk of *years*. "When a *few years* are come?—Nay, my *days* are *extinct*."—What are a few years to a man who knows that he must die, and that eternity is before him? Job, for the period in which he lived, was not an old man; there were then with him men much elder than his father. But impressed with a sense of the vanity of man, he thinks, the few years, which might possibly remain to one of his age, scarcely worth bringing into the reckoning.

This life, though considered by itself, or compared with the duration of an insect, may seem something, yet contrasted with eternity, vanishes into nothing. "My days," says David, "are an hand-breadth, mine age is as nothing *before thee*. Surely every man, at his best state, is altogether vanity." "A thousand years, *in thy sight*," says Moses, "are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch of the night."

Life is almost an imperceptible part of our existence. It is only our entrance into being. We here but just open our eyes, and begin to live. Our real life—that duration which properly deserves the name, is beyond the grave—it is in another world. This part of our existence is so short and transient, that, in the first moment of it, the grave is near—it is ready for us. Job lived in an age, when human life far exceeded our present term;

and yet he speaks of it in the most diminutive expressions, as an empty shade—a passing wind—a withering flower.

2. The length of human life is various.

Few, very few, reach the period, which is commonly called *old age*. Multitudes, in every stage, from the earliest infancy to the last decay of nature, are removed from our world; and no man can, long beforehand, conjecture, in what stage of the progress he must close the scene. Every one, therefore, may justly say, “The grave is ready for me.” At least, every one ought to entertain this idea and act on this supposition.

3. There are many of the human race, whose exit is sudden, and without any special warning by previous sickness and decay. Or if there have been warnings of this kind, they have come and past away so often, that they have lost their effect, and death comes suddenly at last. And that which happens to many, no man can be sure will not happen to himself.

It is, doubtless, true of some, now in full health, that their breath is almost spent, their life is nearly finished, and their grave will soon be opened. And who can say, this is not his own condition? Who can boast of to-morrow, or tell what it will bring forth? Who can promise himself another hour, or another breath? The uncertainty of the time when death will come, and the frequent intimations given us, in the providence of God, that it may surprize us suddenly, are reasons why we should always watch, and always be ready. It is the command of our Lord to us, and to all, “Watch, for ye know not when the time is—watch, lest, coming suddenly, it find you sleeping.”

4. Some, under sensible decays of nature, have special reason to view the grave as ready for them. It was disease and affliction which so deeply impressed on Job, a sense of mortality and the grave.

When one feels his nature languishing, his strength failing, and his spirits wasting, the concerns of futurity ought surely to command his attention. In the firmness of health, and the flow of spirits, we are insensible of our weakness and frailty; we cannot realize the nearness of death; we almost forget that we are mortal. Sickness teaches us what we are, points us to the grave, and

tells us, that we must soon lie there. Sickness is death already begun—already preying on our nature, and reducing it to ruins. There are some diseases, which, by their violence, or obstinacy, or usual effects on others, give the patient reason to conclude, that they will terminate in his death. And every disorder and infirmity of body, in the most moderate degree, is an admonition to think of, and prepare for such an event. Diseases spring from the same fatal cause, and are the effects of the same awful sentence, as death itself. The sin, which brought death into the world, has also introduced those numerous maladies which afflict the human race. The same Divine curse which subjected mankind to mortality, has also subjected them to pain and sorrow, sickness and vanity.

5. The aged have special reason to apply the language of the text.

In the course of their life, they have passed through various scenes. They have stood spectators on this gloomy theatre, and beheld their fellow-mortals around them, dropping off, and falling into the grave. They have seen the young, as well as the aged; the strong, as well as the weak, yielding to the power of death. They have visited the mansions of the dead a thousand times, there to lodge, and there to leave, in long darkness, a friend, a neighbor, or acquaintance. They have sometimes had the sentence of death in themselves by diseases, casualties and dangers. They have heard the sentence loudly sounded in their ears by the deaths of their contemporaries, and of their intimate relatives. They have seen death pass along near them to smite the friend who stood by their side, and have felt the wind, and even the stroke of his destroying weapon. Through a thousand perils they have been brought on to the present stage; and here they stand almost alone. In vain they look around for their early friends and associates. There is left of these only here and there a mortal, as faint and as solitary as they. Few, very few, of those who sat out in their company on the journey of life, are now to be found. These have fallen by the way, and slept together in the dust. The aged have reached the point, which few are known to pass, and which none pass far beyond. They feel their powers

wasting, and their nature sinking toward the grave. Their strength bows down; their limbs tremble; their eyes are darkened; the door is shut in the streets; and fear is in the way. With much propriety they may say, "Our spirit is spent, our life is extinct, the grave is ready for us."

Such is the state of mankind. Let us attend to the reflections which such a state readily suggests to us.

1. Undoubtedly there is, for man, another scene of existence, action and improvement.

It is by no means credible, that God should make such an order of intelligent beings for so poor—so short—so precarious an existence as the present life.

How many are cut off in infancy, before the mind opens into rational exercises? How many are removed in the first stages of reason, before they have opportunity to act a part which can be useful to themselves, or others? They who reach the latest period, have but a short duration. Time is not allowed them to make those advances in knowledge and happiness, which, in a longer space, they might have made. Here the man—the intelligent being is imprisoned in a dungeon of clay. He cannot go forth and make excursions in the field of science. He can only just peep through the windows of his prison, and perceive that there is a mighty field around him, inviting his eye, but guarded from his entrance. In this short life, the human mind, thus inclosed and confined, cannot reach its full maturity, nor arrive at its just perfection.

Would the Creator make rational beings merely for such a state as this? Would he give us reason and understanding only to see and lament our mortality—only to feel and bewail our ignorance—only to look and long after, but not to taste and enjoy, the tempting fruits which hang around us? The supposition is not consistent with our apprehensions of his wisdom and goodness. The Psalmist, contemplating the shortness of human life, ex postulates, "Lord, why hast thou made all men in vain?" Men, considered as rational creatures, were made in vain, if death finished their existence. The brutal tribes eat and drink, and sleep and wake, and enjoy all the pleasures of sense, probably in as high a

degree as men. And their sensitive pleasures are not, like ours, interrupted and alloyed by the continual apprehension of change, and the certain foresight of death. If nothing greater and better is designed for us than for them, why were reason, reflection and forethought given us?—Why were we not, like them, secured from fear and anxiety, in a happy unconsciousness of obligation and blindness to the future? Was this distinction given us only to subject us to peculiar pains, or expose us to delusive hopes?—Most certainly there must be another world, in which man, having acted well his part here, may exist in a more noble manner, rise to his just perfection, and enjoy his true felicity.

2. The present condition of mankind bears evident marks of a fallen, and a probationary state. Here is too much misery for a place of rewards; and too much goodness for a place of punishment.

The world in which we dwell is not capable of affording us full satisfaction and complete enjoyment. By disappointing our hopes and crossing our wishes, it calls upon us to look for happiness in a future state. If ever we are happy, it must be there; and surely some way must be provided by which we may arrive there. Had man continued in his primitive innocence, a more easy and eligible passage than death would have been allowed him. But to creatures so corrupt and degenerate as we are, this solemn, gloomy, humiliating change seems necessary, not only as a testimony of God's displeasure against sin, but as a continual admonition of our fallen, and probationary state. If our fellow-men passed softly and silently from this to the other world, we should be little affected and awakened by their change. But now their painful conflicts and dying groans; their pale, unanimated bodies; their putrid, disgusting and mouldering carcasses, arrest our attention and solemnize our thoughts. To render such spectacles often new, and always alarming, providence calls men out of life at every age, and in an endless variety of ways. These various, repeated, awful admonitions, are well adapted to awaken and quicken such indolent, drowsy creatures as we are, dwelling amidst so many stupifying objects. The afflictions which attend us are suited to our probationary condition. They are useful to wean us from

this world, and call our thoughts to another. They serve to prove our faith and sincerity, our hope and patience. They give opportunity for the mutual exercise of kindness and benevolence, and thus they aid our preparation for that world, where love is the distinguishing virtue.

3. Our mortal condition constantly reminds us of God's awful displeasure against our guilty race, and of his abundant mercy in sending a Redeemer.

That men should be originally formed by the hand of a holy Deity, with those impure and distempered inclinations which they so generally discover, cannot be supposed. "Their spot is not the spot of his children: They have grievously corrupted themselves." The state in which he has placed them, and the manner in which he deals with them, are suited to the case, not of sinless, but of degenerate creatures. The scripture teaches us, that death entered into the world by sin—by the disobedience of the first man; and that by his single transgression death has obtained dominion over the whole race in all generations. When we see what dreadful effects one act of sin has produced through the world, in all ages, we are constrained to acknowledge, that it must be highly offensive to God; and that its guilt must be too vast—too immense for man, by any means, to expiate.

God's commandment is exceeding broad, and its sanctions awful and tremendous. By the law we obtain the knowledge of sin; and sin, by the commandment, becomes exceeding sinful. But, by the deaths which it works among men, it appears more sinful still. If one transgression, of the first offender, has filled the world with deaths, surely nothing that we can do—nothing that we can suffer—not even our death itself, will expiate the guilt of our *innumerable* transgressions. Men have died in all ages, from Adam to this time: And still men die. Not all past deaths have satisfied the sentence, nor exhausted the curse of God's broken law. Deplorable, then, must have been our state, if a Divine Redeemer had not interposed; more deplorable, still, will be the state of those who reject this Redeemer. His death can atone for the guilt of the world—his blood can cleanse from all sin. But, while it secures pardon to the penitent, it will dread-

fully augment the guilt and punishment of those who go on, still, in their trespasses.

It was not the design of Christ's interposition to rescue men from *natural* death. This must be continued as a token of our fallen state, and as an admonition to apply to Divine mercy by repentance. After the mission of a Saviour was promised to destroy the works of the devil, the sentence of death was passed on men, to shew that they still must die. But the death of Jesus, the Redeemer, will save believing, penitent souls from the *future consequences* of sin's demerit, and secure to them the happiness of immortal life. Does it not, then, infinitely concern every son of Adam immediately to repair to the Saviour, apply by faith the blood which he has shed, and thus secure an interest in the glorious immortality which this blood has purchased ?

The guilt of sin, considered simply as a transgression of God's law, is so great, that nothing less than the Saviour's blood could expiate it. What expiation, then, will be found for the guilt of those who despise and reject this blood ? "If he who despised Moses's law died without mercy ; of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who treads under foot the Son of God, and counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing ?" "Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life. If any man believe in him, though he be dead, yet he shall live." A glorious hope is presented to fallen mortals. Who would not lay hold on it ? Who would run the hazard of delay, when he considers that life is the only season to secure the happiness of immortality ; and that this season is short and precarious ?

4. If the grave may, even now, be ready for us, let it be our first concern to be ready for the grave. "Be ye ready," says our Divine monitor, "for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

Were life a long duration, and its continuance certain, there might be more ground to plead some excuse for delaying our preparation for death. But under our present circumstances, delay admits not any excuse whatever. Our greatest interest demands our principal attention ; and if this interest may depend on the present hour, it demands our *immediate* attention.

As death removes us to another world, readiness for death must consist in a due preparation for that world. To this preparation the first thing necessary in fallen creatures, is *repentance of sin*. Christ came to seek and to save them who are lost. He effects their salvation, not only by expiating their guilt and procuring their pardon, but also by calling them to repentance and preparing them for pardon. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from iniquity, and purify us to himself, a people zealous of good works."

We must then examine ourselves, gain a knowledge of our sins, humble ourselves before God, seek his grace for the renewal of our hearts, and devote ourselves to him to serve him in newness of life.

This repentance must be accompanied with faith and hope in the mercy and promise of God, and the atonement and intercession of the Redeemer. "For we are redeemed from our vain conversation, not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times for us, that by him we might believe in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

That we may be in constant readiness for death, we must daily maintain the spirit and practice of religion. The servant who, when his Lord comes, is found ready, is one who watches always, keeps his loins girded and his lights burning, attends to the orders he has received, and when his Lord comes, is still found so doing. Serious christians, in the contemplation of death, sometimes feel an anxiety, lest they should not be able to possess that comfort, and manifest that resignation, which are most to be desired in the closing scene. But, my brethren, we ought rather to be careful how we live, than anxious how we shall die. Let us live every day as we ought, and then we shall die, at last, as we wish.

We must accustom ourselves to spiritual meditations and exercises; raise our thoughts and affections to the heavenly world; cultivate the temper of that world; live in peace and charity with

one another, and in piety and devotion toward God; mortify our earthly members; watch against temptations; examine ourselves with care; daily renew our repentance; seek pardon for our daily failures, and grace to help our remaining infirmities. Thus we must give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end, and by improvements in the christian temper, make our calling and election sure.

5. Our subject teaches us the vanity of all worldly interests.

Beings, who have so short an abode, and so uncertain a continuance on earth, can here possess no great and important interests. All that we have is changing and precarious; and we are as precarious and changing as the world. What we call our own to-day, may be claimed by another to-morrow. He too, in his turn, must retire and give place to a successor. Worldly property, like a ball, is tossed from man to man. The hand which holds it now, will not retain it long, but cast it to another. Yea, it often deceives the person to whom it falls. It proves a bubble, which, as he attempts to grasp it, bursts in his hand. Many who labour all their days to be rich, die in poverty at last.

Let a man realize, how soon he shall lie down in the grave, and how poor he shall be when he is there, and he will see, that the interests of the world are but trifles to him. When he is gone to his long home, what is it to him, whether once he was rich, or poor, and whether he has left behind him much, or little? "We brought nothing into the world, and we shall carry nothing out of it; having, therefore, food and raiment, let us be content." There is one thing needful. He who chooses the better part, will die rich indeed: He will die an heir of the glory and riches of a heavenly inheritance.

6. The uncertainty of life teaches us the reasonableness of daily prayer.

Our obligation to prayer arises from our dependence on God, and the spirit of prayer will be enlivened by an habitual sense of this dependence. That rational creatures ought daily to acknowledge and address that great and good Being, on whom they continually depend, is a truth obvious to every man's understanding, and to every pious man's feeling. Our dependence is visible in

every thing ; but nothing gives us such striking demonstration of it, as our mortality. We see mankind going down to the grave : we feel ourselves subject to pain and sorrow, infirmity and death. We know, that no man hath power to retain his own spirit, or to redeem his brother from corruption. Ought not such creatures to live in prayer to that almighty and eternal Being in whose hands is the breath of all ? If we are daily exposed to death, prayer should be our daily exercise. Would the man, who rose with an expectation of sleeping no more, until he closed his eyes in death, pass the last morning of his life without prayer ? The man who realizes that each day, or each night may be his last, will devote to this holy exercise a portion of every morning and every evening.

Finally : The aged and infirm, who with special propriety may say, “The graves are ready for us,” ought, with great care, to examine their state, and with daily concern to look into the future world ; and, in the religious improvement of their few remaining days, to keep themselves in readiness for a change, which they may daily expect. Happy, the aged saint, who, in a review of life, can say, “I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give unto me in that day, and unto all who love his appearing.”

SERMON XVII.

THE NATURE AND PROPERTIES OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

HEBREWS XIII. 18.

We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

THE profession which the apostle here makes, is such as every man should be *able* to make.

As the conscience is the immediate principle of moral conduct, no man, without a good conscience, disposing him in all things to live honestly, can justly be denominated a christian. Sensible of this plain truth, many use the sacred name and authority of *conscience* to justify themselves in things palpably contrary to the spirit of the gospel; and where real conscience is wanting, they substitute passion, interest, obstinacy and prejudice in its place. And, perhaps, some may really impose upon themselves, and mistake the latter for the former. I shall, therefore, from these words, explain that moral principle, which is often recurred to, but not always well understood. And I shall shew, what *conscience* is—the properties of a *good* conscience—how far an *error* of conscience may *excuse* a wrong conduct—the *causes* and *springs* of an *erroneous* conscience—the *rules* necessary to be observed,

that we may *preserve* a good conscience—and the *importance* of such a conscience in all things.

I. We are, first, to consider, what the *conscience* is. *This*, in the common acceptation of the word, is our *judgment, discernment* and *reflection*, in regard of our moral obligations and conduct. The difference between the judgment and conscience is chiefly this; the former is more *general*, and extends to every thing concerning which we form an opinion; the latter is *personal* and *moral*, and is the judgment which we form, and the sense which we feel of *our own* obligations and actions. It is that principle, or faculty, by which we judge of right and wrong, and determine what, as moral and accountable beings, we ought to choose and refuse, to pursue and avoid.

The office of conscience consists of two branches; the first is to point out our obligations and direct our conduct; the second is to reflect upon our past conduct, and approve, or disapprove it, as it has been right, or wrong.

The first office of conscience is, to stand as a guide of our actions, and to dictate what ought, and what ought not, to be done, in *our* relations and circumstances. We must not imagine, that this is the *law* which *determines* our actions to be good, or evil. If it was the law, then every action would be good, which we *thought* to be so, and there could be no such thing as an erroneous conscience. The supreme law of our actions is the *will* of God, in some way, or other, made known to us; and conscience is the principle within us, which, by this law, determines what things are agreeable to the will of God, and by his authority binding upon us; and what things are contrary to his will, and to be avoided by us. This office of conscience is described by St. Paul; “The Gentiles, who have not the law, do, by nature, the things contained in the law. These, having not the law, are a law to themselves, which shew the work of the law written on their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.” The apostle here asserts, that conscience is a natural principle in men, and that, without an external, written law, it is able, by such discoveries and communications as God has otherwise made, to judge, in many cases, what is right, and what is wrong. It is represented

as having the *force* of a law, because the *works* of the law are *written* upon it; and hence it bears witness to men concerning their duty. Had human nature retained its primitive perfection, men, probably, would not have needed a standing, written revelation to guide them; but, the law, written on the conscience, and strengthened by occasional communications, would have been sufficient. But, by the prevalence of the flesh, and the subjection of the mind to it, the light of conscience is so obscured, and its power so debilitated, that it is *no* longer sufficient to guide us into the knowledge of duty, or to engage our compliance with duty, where it *is* known. Hence it needs a written law, enforced by solemn sanctions, to give it both *light* and *power*; and its business now is, to judge of our moral obligations by those rules which God, in his word, has prescribed.

Secondly, the other office of conscience is, to review our past conduct, and justify, or condemn it, as it is agreeable, or contrary to the rules divinely prescribed. It is to judge, not only what we *ought* to do, but what we *have* done. Having pointed out our obligations, it is, next, to enquire whether we have complied with them. It is to reflect and pass sentence on our conduct and the principles and motives which have influenced us—to check, admonish, upbraid and condemn us, when we do evil—to acquit, approve, justify and applaud us, when we do well. This office of conscience the apostle mentions in the passage before referred to. “The Gentiles shew the work of the law written on their hearts, and their conscience also beareth witness, their thoughts, the mean-while,” or by turns, “accusing, or excusing within themselves.”

The necessity of such a principle, in human nature, is obvious. Without it, no law, however promulged, could have any force; we could neither understand its meaning, nor feel its authority. God’s giving us a rule of conduct, supposes a principle within us, which constitutes us moral agents—a principle capable of discerning between good and evil, and of feeling an obligation to choose the one, and reject the other.

II. We are to consider the *properties* of a *good* conscience, in distinction from an *evil* one; for the scripture speaks of both.

Though natural conscience is a principle common to mankind, yet in some it operates as an evil, in others as a good principle. It will, therefore, be necessary to consider the qualifications of a good conscience—such an one as the apostle was confident he had. These may all be comprised in such a disposition as the apostle professed, a willingness, or purpose, in all things to live honestly.

1. The first and leading property of a good conscience is *light*, or *right information*. This distinguishes it from a blind and deceived heart, which turns men aside. The Jews, having a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge, crucified the Lord of glory. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own. Paul once *did*, and thought that he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; and though he acted in this persecuting business, with what he then called a *good* conscience, yet, as this conscience was deceived, it involved him in guilt. He afterward condemned himself as a blasphemer and injurious for doing that which he before had approved.

If conscience is to be the immediate guide of our actions, it must be well informed; for, otherwise, it will lead us astray. If it makes false reports concerning the will of God, it ceases to be his voice; its authority is usurpation, and obedience to it is presumption.

A well informed conscience is free, both from *ignorance* and *error*. If it be *uninformed*, it cannot direct us at all; and the consequence will be, that doubt and uncertainty will always attend us, or passion, lust and prejudice will assume the full command of us. And as our wrong actions will involve us in guilt, because they are evil in themselves, and we might have known them to be such; so our right actions, if we happen to perform any that are materially right, will be unacceptable to God, because they proceed not from a good principle in the heart. And so far as the conscience is *misinformed*, it will call evil, good, and good, evil; it will frame iniquity as by a law, and will harden us against repentance. It will repel, as impertinent, every Divine warning.

and when we are admonished to return to God, it will embolden us to demand, "Wherein shall we return?"

2. Another qualification of a good conscience is *integrity*, or a universal regard to rectitude and virtue, in distinction from a conscience which respects only particular *branches* of duty.

The apostle had a good conscience in all things: he exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men. You may see some men who are extremely nice and scrupulous in particular branches of religion—in things of little importance—in matters which have but a remote relation, and perhaps no relation to true godliness; but in duties of real consequence and solid weight, they are as easy and indifferent, as those who make no pretensions at all, to religion. Their stomachs, like those of the Pharisees, will be disgusted at a gnat, but can absorb and digest a camel. They are exact and critical about mint, anise and cummin; but regardless of mercy, justice, truth and the love of God. Balaam's conscience forbid him to assist the destruction of the Israelites by the formal ceremony of execration. In this he would not go beyond the word of the Lord to do less, or more. But he seems to have had no hesitancy in advising Balack to seduce them into fornication and idolatry, which he knew would provoke God to destroy them. Herod was afraid to violate a rash oath; but he would venture to commit deliberate murder. There are some, who plead in excuse for their neglect of stated prayer, or sacramental communion, that they apprehend themselves to be unregenerate men, and that the sacrifices of such are abomination; and yet they seem to have no concern to obtain deliverance from their supposed state, as if they thought, that no wickedness was abomination to God, but what they call sacrifice. They are afraid to attend on two, or three particular duties, lest these duties should, in them, become sins; but are very little afraid of retaining that inward corruption, which, they suppose, will turn these duties into sins. And, I cannot say, but that some think they are really conscientious in their fears and scruples. But the truth is, the authority of God enjoins every duty, and forbids every sin, one as well as another; and that is

not an honest and upright conscience, which remonstrates against this, or that sin, only, and tolerates others; or which urges to a few particular duties, and allows the omission of all the rest which are required. Such a conscience is not subject to the Divine law, but claims an impious superiority. And to them, whose conscience is thus defiled, is nothing pure.

3. An essential property of a good conscience is *impartiality* in opposition to *selfishness*.

Under the influence of such a conscience, we shall view our own sins, and our own obligations, in the same light, as we view those of other men: we shall not excuse a sin, because *we* have done it, nor diminish an obligation, because it relates to us; but shall judge of the latter by the authority of God's law, and of the former by its opposition to this authority. It is too common a defect of conscience, that it indulges a partial respect to self, admits excuses for its own faults, which it would reject in the case of another, and is swayed in the representations of duty, by personal inclination and interest. David's conscience, for a time, seems to have made no remonstrance against his injustice and cruelty in slaying Uriah and taking his wife; but at the recital of the story of a rich man, who had taken a poor neighbor's only lamb, to make an entertainment for a friend, it rose in high indignation. There was a great disparity in the crimes; but one was his own. This could be excused; the other could not.

4. A good conscience is *deliberate* and *faithful*—not rash and heedless.

Paul says, that while he was a Pharisee, he had lived in all good conscience, and, as touching the righteousness in the law, had been blameless. According to the ceremonial strictness, but lax morality of the day, he exhibited an uncensurable behaviour, and possessed an unupbraiding conscience. He was alive without the law. But when the commandment came—when it was applied to his conscience in its purity and spirituality, then sin revived, and he died. He saw himself to be a transgressor and under condemnation. There are many who acquire a general knowledge of religion, observe the external forms of devotion, and

maintain a decent morality, and yet have never felt the real power of godliness in their hearts. These, like Paul, the Pharisee, may seem to themselves to live in all good conscience, because their conscience is indolent and unfaithful; it is content with the exterior and formal garb of religion, and never looks deep into the heart, to learn and report what is there. A conscience really good is humble and inquisitive; solicitous to know the truth; attentive to the whole man, especially to the hidden man of the heart; observant of the secret springs of action; faithful to register what it finds, and honest to report the discoveries which it makes. Its aim is not to flatter, but inform—not to soothe and pacify, but to correct and amend.

5. *Tenderness* belongs to a good conscience. This the scripture expresses by a heart of *flesh*, in opposition to a heart of *stone*.

Paul speaks of some, “who depart from the faith, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” One whose conscience is *erroneous*, does evil, thinking it to be right. But he whose conscience is *seared*, does evil, knowing it to be evil, and with little remorse for what he has done. He holds the truth in unrighteousness. He speaks lies in hypocrisy. He is not ashamed when he commits abomination, but rather glories in his shame. The apostle says, “To those who are unbelieving and defiled, is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled. Hence they are abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” A good conscience is the reverse of this: it is tender and sensible; it is easily touched and affected; it is shocked with the deformity of vice, charmed with the beauty of holiness; and by the authority, alarmed at the threatenings and enlivened with the promises of God; jealous of itself; fearful of offending, and cautious in matters of doubt and uncertainty. The good man esteems it an important point in religion, always to prefer, in a doubtful case, the side which is certainly innocent.

He, who can, without remorse, deliberately do an action, which he suspects to be wrong, is already hardened in a degree. If he does the action in opposition to his conscience, he prepares him-

self to oppose it in plainer instances; and repeated opposition will terminate in absolute hardness.

A tender conscience checks men's first approaches to evil; it forbids suspicious actions; it feels a quick remorse at the remembrance of sin, and a deep concern to recover the favor of God. Peter, though his conscience neglected its office, when he was tempted to deny his Lord, felt its rebukes in the recollection of his conduct. When his Lord turned and looked upon him, struck with a sense of his baseness, he went out and wept bitterly.

6. A good conscience has a *powerful* and *commanding* influence, in distinction from one that is impotent, and subject to fleshly control.

A conscience which dictates only what pleases the corrupt inclinations, and which is studious to invent, or ready to admit, excuses for every evil action, is perverted and enslaved; it has lost, if not its discernment, yet, at least, its dominion. A good conscience acts with dignity, and asserts its power; it controls all subordinate principles, and will, itself, be controlled by none of them; it will be revered and obeyed in its place, and not dethroned and trampled down, by passion and lust. A blind conscience can neither direct the conduct, nor give peace to the mind. An impotent conscience, prescribing duty, without ensuring compliance, may produce remorse; but, still, it leaves the soul under guilt. It leads men to see what is good, but allows them to follow what is evil; and, though it has not power to command obedience, it has the justice to condemn transgression. Hence there is no peace to the wicked, but they are as a troubled sea which cannot rest. Borne away by the lusts and passions, it goes over to their interest, and pleads in their excuse: but, when these subside, it rises in sharp reproaches, which give pain, but effect no repentance. It was thus with Herod: when his false sense of honor urged him to behead the baptist, his conscience, though it feebly remonstrated at first, was soon bribed to justify the action under pretence of the religious obligation of a previous oath. But his conscience could not leave him quiet under this pretext.

Some time after, when his passions were cooled down, hearing of the miracles which Jesus was working in the country, his conscience rose from its slumbers, and goaded him with the terrors of guilt. He said, "This is John whom I have beheaded. He is risen from the dead."

7. From these properties of a good conscience, will result *peace* and *self-approbation*. Great peace have they who love God's law. The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever. The rejoicing of the good christian is the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has had his conversation in the world.

We proceed, as was proposed,

III. To enquire, whether, and, if at all, how far an error of conscience excuses a wrong conduct.

That an error, in some cases, may mitigate, and yet not wholly excuse the evil conduct, which proceeds from it, is manifest from scripture.

Our Lord prays for his crucifiers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is here implied, that their conscience was misguided; "They knew not what they did." But still they were guilty, for they needed forgiveness—"Father, forgive them." But their error, or ignorance, was some extenuation of their guilt: it was not so highly aggravated, as if they had crucified the Saviour directly in the face of conscience. Hence their ignorance is pleaded as a reason for their obtaining forgiveness. Paul says of himself, "He verily thought, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus"—and, in pursuance of this false persuasion, "he persecuted, imprisoned, and gave his voice to murder the saints." But, though he acted according to a real persuasion of mind, still he was guilty before God. He calls himself, "a persecuter, a blasphemer, injurious, the chief of sinners, less than the least of all saints, not worthy of the name of an apostle;" because he vexed the saints and was mad against them. His error, however, was a mitigation of his guilt, "for he obtained mercy, because he did this ignorantly in

unbelief." The Jews were deemed *murderers*, because they crucified the Lord of glory : but the apostles bear them witness, that "they did this through ignorance;" and that "they had a zeal of God, though not according to knowledge;" and, therefore, they exhort them to a repentance of this awful conduct. The exhortation, being grounded on a concession, that they did it through an ignorant and mistaken zeal, imports, that their hope of forgiveness was greater, than it could have been, if they had adopted the same conduct in opposition to knowledge then existing in their minds. The reason of the case is obvious. To do a wrong action, under the influence of an erroneous persuasion, does not discover the same obstinacy and perverseness, as to do the same against the existing light of the mind, and the actual remonstrance of the conscience : but, that this error, or misconception, should wholly excuse is unreasonable ; because an error of judgment, in an important point of duty, supposes some fault, defect, or obliquity in the will ; such as prejudice, lust, negligence, or want of enquiry.

The guilt in following, or, rather, perhaps, in *having* an erroneous conscience, will be proportionable to the faultiness of the cause, from which it proceeds. If it proceeds from mere obstinacy and perverseness, in rejecting the means of information, it can hardly be supposed to abate the guilt at all ; for a wilful rejection of the known means of information, is much the same thing as opposition to duty after information. Total incapacity to obtain, or to apply the means, will, doubtless, wholly excuse.

They, to whom Christ has not spoken, have not the sin of unbelief. For external disadvantages, proportionable allowance, in the Divine estimation of guilt, will, undoubtedly, be made. Of men it is required according to what they have. As there is much, or little, given to them, much, or little, must be accounted for. The ignorance, or error, which proceeds from negligence, inattention, and the prejudice of custom, is certainly criminal, for the causes of it are so ; but, it is not so criminal as if it arose from direct obstinacy ; for the former do not indicate so criminal a temper, or incurable a state, as the latter. The conduct, there-

fore, proceeding from the latter, stands in the most heinous light. This seems to be the case stated and decided by our Saviour, when he says, "The servant, who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he who knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For, to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

The farther prosecution of our subject will be deferred to another season.

SERMON XVIII.

THE CAUSES OF AN EVIL, AND THE MEANS OF OBTAINING A GOOD
CONSCIENCE.

HEBREWS XI. 18.

*We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live
honestly.*

WE have stated the general *nature* and *office* of *conscience*—shewn the qualifications of a *good* conscience—and examined whether, and how far an *error* of conscience can *excuse* a wrong conduct.

We proceed,

IV. To enquire into the *causes* and *springs* of an *erroneous* and *evil* conscience. In this enquiry will more fully appear the insufficiency of the plea of a deceived conscience, in ordinary cases, to excuse men's vices.

Even the heathens could not avail themselves of this plea, so far as to be guiltless in the sight of God. They could not allege the want of capacity to discern, or the absolute want of means to learn the great lines of their duty, and the reasonableness of a future judgment. In regard of natural capacity they were equal to other men. In arts and sciences they discovered ingenuity and invention, which few moderns can boast of, and which, if

applied to religion, might there have made considerable improvements. They were endowed with the principle of conscience as well as the faculty of reason. Though they had not the *written* law, yet, the apostle says, "They were a law to themselves, and shewed the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also witnessing with them." And of the means of knowledge they were not wholly destitute. The apostle says, "That which might be known of God was manifest to them, for God had shewed it to them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they were without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened, and they changed the truth of God into a lie, and gave themselves up to all kinds of iniquity." And besides this natural light, they certainly might have had, and many of them really had some assistance from the revelations which God, at sundry times, and in divers manners, made to the world. These revelations, though first made to particular persons, families, or nations, were by tradition, or communication conveyed to many others. And the noble sentiments, which some of the heathen philosophers have expressed concerning the character of God and the nature and obligations of virtue, may probably be ascribed, in some measure, to information obtained from this source. Though the light of nature has, in fact, proved insufficient to lead men to the knowledge of all the important parts of duty, and must be insufficient to instruct them in those truths, which relate to the redemption of sinners, yet, with such aids as have attended it, it has taught men the existence of a Deity, and given them some apprehensions of his character and their own accountableness to him, and of their obligation to practise virtue and abstain from vice. Hence the apostle says, "They were without excuse." They had sinned without *law*, but against their conscience. Such was the state of the heathens.

Now since God has given to *us* a written revelation, which has not only stated our duty in all its branches, but enforced it by the

most solemn sanctions—since this revelation is in our hands and open to our inspection and examination, and since we have the common principles of reason and conscience, and these greatly improved by an education under the advantages of superior light; our errors and misapprehensions concerning religious truth and moral obligation must, in a much higher sense, be without excuse. If we plead ignorance, or mistake in excuse for our sins, it can be only such ignorance, or mistake, as is criminal in itself, and therefore will not exculpate us in a criminal conduct.

There are, it is true, some less important cases, which seem doubtful in their nature. And new cases may occur, which we have never had occasion to examine, and in which we must act before we have time for much deliberation. In such cases, if we gain the best information, and form the best judgment we can, and, divesting ourselves of passion and prejudice, act agreeably to this judgment, no doubt the honest intention will be accepted; for if we err, it is not for want of integrity to choose right; but for want of capacity to judge right. In these cases, however, there is generally a safe and unsuspected side. This we may take without fear of guilt, and this a good conscience will prefer. But if we cannot determine, which is the safer side, the intention to act right will be approved, though the act should be different from that, which, on better information, we might have chosen. An object, for instance, presents himself to us in the appearance of misery and impotence, and solicits our beneficence: we pity him, and, on such information as we have, we feel an obligation to relieve him, and we act accordingly. It afterward appears, that his pretensions were deceitful, and our charity was misapplied. Still our charity is approved in heaven, because the intention was pious, and the information all we could then obtain. Our Saviour, sending forth his seventy disciples to preach in the cities of Judea, told them, when they entered into any city, to enquire, who in it was worthy—who was friendly and hospitable, and in this respect worthy of their company and blessing, and going into his house, to say, “Peace be to this house.” “If the house *be* worthy,” says he, “your peace shall rest upon it;” or the blessing which you wish to it shall be bestowed upon it.

“But if it be *not* worthy, your peace shall return to *you*.” Though the house should prove unworthy of the blessing, yet *you* shall receive the reward of your benevolence. But cases of this nature, which respect only occasional, or *single* actions, are very different from those which respect a *course* of actions, or an *habitual* conduct. We may, in certain instances, be in doubt, and finally misjudge, what truth, justice, charity, or prudence requires; but no honest man can ever be at a loss, whether truth, justice, charity and prudence are duties; and the contrary are vices. One may, through temptation, or mistake, do an *action* which is not conformable to one, or other of these virtues, and yet be a virtuous man; but a *course* of actions contrary to these virtues, shews one to be in his heart a vicious man. His conduct proceeds not from an error of judgment, but from a love of wickedness.

Since then it may be presumed, that those errors of conscience, which men, under the light of revelation, frequently plead in defence of their wrong conduct, usually proceed from some faulty disposition of heart, it is important to enquire, what the causes of these errors may be.

1. Some are led to mistake the truth by their *manner* of examining it. They are not wholly void of thought; but they think superficially, and conclude hastily. They judge according to the first appearance, without taking a full view of their subject. They enquire a little, and presume much, and thus work themselves into a persuasion false in its nature, and vicious in its tendency. They conclude, that such an action may in them be innocent, because they see no ill consequences which will probably ensue from it; but never contemplate the consequences of a *general* allowance of similar actions. They never stop to consider, that every other man has the same right which they have, to claim this liberty of acting; that this liberty every where indulged, would throw the world into confusion; and that a principle, which, carried into general operation, would produce misery and vice, must be false and immoral. They think only for themselves, and therefore think partially, which is little better—sometimes worse than not to think at all; because their chief object in think-

ing is to obtain for themselves a greater liberty of acting. This superficial enquiry is unbecoming the dignity of rational beings, who, in all matters of importance—in matters which concern their highest interest, ought to proceed with caution and deliberation—not with rashness and presumption. And the man who embraces error, only because he has not diligently sought for truth, can never avail himself of that error as an excuse for his sins.

2. *Indifference and carelessness* is another cause of error.

A great part of mankind have little sense of the importance of religion, and little concern to understand what it is, or to learn whether there be any such thing. Hence they are inattentive to the means and negligent of the opportunities of gaining a right knowledge in the case. In this indolent and easy state of mind, they suffer their judgments to be wholly swayed by their inclinations, or by the opinions of others, and especially by the reasoning of the licentious and profane. And instead of subduing their passions into obedience to their conscience, they yield up conscience to the direction of passion. Instead of judging for themselves what is right, they are content, that any man should judge for them, if he will only give them an agreeable latitude, and not impose any uneasy restraints.

3. *Pride* is another spring of error. This leads men into error in various ways, according to the various forms which it assumes.

It sometimes gives men an affectation of singularity, and excites in them an ambition to be thought wiser than their neighbors. Under the influence of this foolish vanity, they disdain to think with the vulgar and adopt common opinions; and they run blind and headlong into error only for the sake of appearing independent and being thought very knowing. When we see the learned thus turning infidels, or hereticks, in mere ostentation, we lament, that their pride should pervert their talents. But when we see those who have read little and thought less—have read perhaps a wicked pamphlet, but not the serious answer, aping the pride and self-importance of the infidel, with all our pity, we cannot withhold our contempt.

Some persist in their ignorance, or error, because they despise instruction, and think it humiliating to submit to correction from

those whom they deem their inferiors, though wiser and better men than themselves.

There are those, who, in a vain conceit of their own abilities, will never suspect themselves to be in the wrong. Their first opinions they receive for indubitable truths, and admit the slightest appearance of proof for full demonstration. And settled in their first judgment, they seek no farther information, and accept none that is offered to them.

Pride makes some averse to confess a fault, or even to see an error. Hence having once embraced an opinion and practised upon it, they are blind to the light, which would discover, and deaf to the arguments which might evince their mistake. They had rather continue in the wrong, than by amendment confess their wrong. Their whole aim is to justify themselves; and they persist in their course, to let the world see, they are sincere and constant. Viewing things only in the light in which they wish them to appear, they fix their mind more and more in their false opinions.

4. Conscience is often blinded by *worldly interest* and *sensual affection*.

Men easily persuade themselves, that they may do that, which it is their interest, or inclination to do. The ruling passion, the predominant lust gives a bias to the reason itself. The man under the influence of avarice finds many arguments to justify those methods of gain, which an impartial observer will utterly condemn. Malice and envy suggest a thousand excuses for slander and revenge, which, in the absence of those passions, appear perfectly trifling.

He who has pursued, and is resolved still to pursue any vicious course, can silence the rebukes of conscience in ways which would never occur to the thoughts of a virtuous man. Sin is inventive and deceitful. It has arts to pacify the conscience, which virtue would never have imagined. Paul confesses that sin had deceived and thus slain him. He cautions others to beware, lest they be hardened through this deceitfulness of sin. "He that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to it, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." And by inventing and magnifying argu-

ments in favor of his deeds, and by rejecting and explaining away every argument against them, he brings himself by degrees to call evil, good, and good, evil, and to put darkness for light, and light for darkness.

5. Education, custom, and the judgment of acknowledged superiors have great influence in forming men's opinions. Hence parents are directed to train up their children in the way in which they should go; for in the way, in which they are trained up, they will be likely to continue. Hence also we are cautioned not to follow a multitude in doing evil—not to be conformed to the world; and are directed, on the contrary, to prove what is the acceptable will of God. Hence again we are exhorted, instead of calling any man master, or glorying in man, to prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

6. Men often deceive themselves and silence their consciences, by casting the blame of their misconduct on others. Thus did Adam—thus did Eve—and thus do their children. The advice they received; the examples they saw, and the temptations they met with, led them astray. The influence of satan on the minds of men is often mentioned in scripture; but it is always mentioned as an aggravation, not as an extenuation of the guilt of known and deliberate sin. Men often entice one another to evil. But enticements seldom prevail, where there is not a previous disposition to the evil. To prevent this danger, men are cautioned not to have any fellowship with the wicked—not to go in the way of evil men. There are those who will do that in company with others, which they would not venture to do alone; because in company the guilt seems to be diffused among a number, and each one's single share to be very small. And hence, it has been observed, that societies seldom act with that strict regard to equity and justice, which we usually find in the private negotiations of honest men, because in society no member feels himself distinctly responsible for the wrong. But we ought to consider, that every man who consents to and acquiesces in a wrong action, whether singly, or in company, is completely guilty of that wrong action; and there is no way to exculpate himself from the wrong, but by doing right himself, according to his ability. Whatever others

may do, each one must do justice for himself. The resolution of a member to do wrong can justify no man in partaking of that wrong.

Having considered the causes of an evil conscience, we will now,

V. Attend to the *rules* necessary for preserving a good one.

1. The first rule will naturally be, to avoid the causes of an evil conscience; such as presumption, indifference, implicit credulity, pride, self-conceit, sensual lusts and passions, evil society, and licentious communication.

2. We must take pains and use means to be rightly informed. Since the persuasion of conscience, that an action is right, will not justify us in doing it, if we might have known it to be wrong, it concerns us to prove the acceptable will of God and guard against all misconceptions of it. The apostle prays for christians, that they may more and more abound in knowledge and judgment, may discern things that differ—approve things that are excellent—and may be sincere and without offence. If a persuasion of conscience would universally justify the conduct, there would be no occasion for enquiry;—we should need only to form an opinion, and act agreeably to it. But since we may sin by a persuasion contrary to the truth, as well as by a conduct contrary to our persuasion, it concerns us to examine carefully what is truth, and what is right, and in our examinations to guard against the blinding influence of prejudice and passion.

3. Let our minds be always impressed with a sense of the importance of duty. Without this sense, we shall neither be concerned to know what our duty is, nor to do it when we do know it. If an aim to do God's will guides us in our enquiries, we shall seldom judge wrong. The meek God will guide in judgment and teach his way. If we desire to do his will, we shall easily know of every doctrine, whether it be of him.

4. Let us never act contrary to the present conviction of the mind; for to oppose this conviction, not only awakens a sense of guilt, and disturbs the inward peace, but hardens the conscience to more flagrant vices, and subjects it to the absolute dominion of passion and lust.

5. In all cases of doubt, we must consider which side our interest, or inclination favors. If we wish to have the case resolved in one way, rather than in the other, and sit down to examine under this prepossession it is probable, that inclination, and not evidence will make the decision. When we perceive our mind to be in such a state, we must examine with a jealousy, and judge with a distrust of our own hearts. In such cases, it is prudent to enquire, what has been our opinion when we were in a different situation—what would be our opinion, if it respected another person—what advice we would give to a friend—what we would condemn in an enemy. Great confidence in matters generally doubtful, censoriousness, contempt of others, a high conceit of ourselves, resentment of advice and reproof, are broad signs, that prejudice and bigotry have taken the place of conscience. “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. The simple believeth every word, but the prudent looketh well to his goings. A wise man feareth and departeth from evil, but the fool rageth and is confident.”

6. Frequent self-examination is necessary to a good conscience. The careless man may have a lethargic ease—the quietness of death : the attentive only can enjoy a heart-felt satisfaction—the joy of salvation. The most that can be said of the former is, that his conscience does not reproach him. It is the latter only who can feel real peace and approbation of conscience.

Finally. There must be a constant and unreserved regard to religion. As it is the testimony of our conscience to the simplicity and godly sincerity of our conversation, that gives us rejoicing in ourselves, so the more steady and intire this testimony is, the more full will be our joy.

VI. We will briefly consider the *advantages* of a good conscience.

A conscience enlightened by truth, unbribed by interest and unbiassed by passion, is necessary to our leading a holy and inoffensive life. Such a conscience is as important as a life of obedience to God. This is necessary to our inward peace. An evil conscience may become past feeling ; it is a good one only that is a spring of substantial joy.

Peace of mind is our highest comfort in life. It is a cheerful excitement to virtue. It is the sweetest solace in affliction; the firmest support under injuries and reproaches, and the best improvement of the common enjoyments of life. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? There is no peace equal to the testimony of a good conscience—no torment equal to self-reproach. This makes a great part of the wretchedness of the damned. Their worm dieth not. It was this which haunted Cain, and made him fear, that every one who found him would slay him. It was this that made Herod start, when he heard of Jesus' working miracles, and suspect that John whom he had beheaded was risen from the dead. It was this which hurried Judas to commit violence on himself.

A good conscience is a satisfaction, which nothing can take from us, but sin: an evil conscience is a torment, which nothing can relieve, but repentance. This is a witness and judge within us; and it concerns us to keep it our friend.

This will be our best comfort in death. A guilty conscience fills the dying sinner with horror, and anticipates his approaching torment: an approving conscience gives exultation to the departing soul, by laying hold on eternal life. The latter will bring us with exceeding joy into the presence of our Judge and give us assurance before him, while the former vainly seeks to hide itself from his all-piercing eye. According as we have a good, or an evil conscience, we shall enter into eternal life, or go away into everlasting punishment.

That we may acquire and preserve peace in life, and may enjoy hope and comfort in death, let us maintain a faithful conformity to that religion, which the gospel has taught us. All other means will fail us. We may attempt to relax the strictness of this religion, and may flatter ourselves that a partial, or external conformity will be accepted; or we may endeavor to persuade ourselves, that some more easy way to happiness will be found than that which the gospel has marked. But none of these artifices can fully satisfy us. They will all leave the mind suspicious, fearful and uneasy; and will doubtless disappoint us at last. It is a firm faith in the truth of the gospel, accompanied with an unre-

served subjection of soul to its holy precepts, which brings home-felt peace, and ensures the joys of immortality. And while we obey this gospel, we shall have no temptation to renounce the belief of it; for we shall have nothing to fear from its threatnings, but every thing to hope from its promises. That we may hold the faith, let us hold a good conscience; for many having put away this, concerning the faith have made shipwreck.

If sceptical thoughts arise, there is one sure way to remove them—if objections are started there is one effectual method to answer them; it is that which the apostle recommends, “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.”

SERMON XIX.

THE BELIEVER PRAYING FOR AN INCREASE OF HIS FAITH.

MARK IX. 24.

*And straitway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears,
Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.*

THE beginning of this chapter relates Christ's transfiguration on the mountain in the presence of three of his disciples. While he was there, a man sought him to obtain a cure for his only son, who was afflicted with a grievous distemper, and possessed with an evil spirit. Disappointed in not finding Jesus himself, the man applied to the nine disciples there present, who attempted to heal the lad, but without success. When Jesus came down into the plain, he saw his disciples surrounded by a multitude, and engaged in a dispute with the scribes ; and he demanded of the latter what was the subject of their debate. " Then one of the multitude said to him, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, who hath a dumb spirit ; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him, so that he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth and pineth away ; and I spake to thy disciples, that they should cast him out, and they could not." It hence appears, that the scribes had been disputing with the disciples about the cure of this youth, which had been attempted in vain. They probably insulted the

disciples on their failure, and alleged that here was a spirit too stubborn for them, or their master to conquer. The disciples, on the contrary, doubtless affirmed, that, though *they* had failed, yet their *Lord* would not fail to cast him out. As Christ had often given plain demonstrations of his Divine power, the cavils of the scribes led him to reprove them and expostulate with them in the following words, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" Have you not seen my power over evil spirits in times past? How long must I work miracles in your presence, before you will be convinced? How long must I endure your perverseness and incredulity?—To give fresh demonstration of his power, Christ now commanded the youth to be brought to him. At this instant the lad was afflicted with most violent convulsions. Jesus enquired of the father, how long his son had been in this unhappy condition; and was informed, that this disorder had attended him from his childhood. "But," says the father, "if *thou canst* do any thing, have compassion on us and help us." The continuance of his son's disorder; the dreadful symptoms attending it, and the unsuccessful attempt of the disciples made him much afraid, that no help *could* be found. He therefore expressed his hope in terms which imparted a mixture of diffidence. "If *thou canst* do it." In allusion to his diffident manner of speaking, Christ says, "If *thou canst* believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." It is as if he had said, "I exert my miraculous power in behalf of them who apply to me in faith. If thou believest that I am able to do this, thou shalt see it done." The father, hearing these comfortable words, exclaimed with tears in his eyes, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Jesus then cast out the foul spirit, and delivered the lad sound to his father. The disciples, seeing what their master had done, asked, why they had not been able to do the same. He told them, this was owing to the weakness of their faith, which they must endeavor to strengthen by fasting and prayer.

Having taken a general view of this story, we will now attend to the particular observations contained in it.

I. We may take notice of the great *power* which *evil spirits* had over men, before the introduction of the gospel.

This youth is said to have a *dumb*, a *foul* and *unclean* spirit, which by other evangelists, in their relation of this story, is expressly called *the devil*. Many other cases of a like kind occur in reading the gospel history. It hence appears, that the devil, in those days, had great power to afflict and torment men's bodies.

It has been a question, why *possessions* and diabolical operations were so frequent among the Jews in Christ's day, when so little is heard of them among other nations, and among the Jews at other times. But the truth is, profane history sometimes mentions such supposed cases among other nations; and therefore we have no reason to imagine they were confined to Judea. And sacred history mentions such a case in Arabia. It ascribes the bodily afflictions of Job to the agency of an evil spirit. Nor were possessions wholly unknown among the Jews in the times preceding our Saviour; for king Saul was afflicted with an evil spirit. Though such possessions are seldom mentioned in the Jewish history, yet we cannot hence conclude, that few or none existed; for even those which appeared in our Saviour's time, would doubtless have been unnoticed, had not the miraculous cures performed by him, introduced them into the sacred history.

It is not improbable, however, that possessions might now be more frequent, than they had formerly been. The Jews, at this period, were much addicted to magical arts; and hence satan, by the just permission of God, might gain an unusual power over them. The devil might now come forth with great wrath, knowing that he had but a short time. God might give him a more than ordinary latitude as an occasion for the greater display of Christ's superior power.

The design of the gospel is to destroy the works of the devil. Where this prevails, the power of evil spirits is restrained. The prince of darkness flies before the beams of the sun of righteousness. The place where ignorance, error, and infidelity abound, is the place where satan's seat is. The god of this world blinds the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine into them.

Where the gospel comes, his power is diminished ; but not wholly destroyed. If he does not torment men's bodies with diseases, yet he seduces their souls into sin. He *tempts good* men. He *works* in the children of *disobedience*. But the power which he maintains is supported by men's lusts. If he enters into them, it is because they give place to him. The gospel furnishes us with an armour by which we may withstand the wiles of the adversary ; and it encourages us with this promise, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

II. We will take notice of the great *concern* and *distress* of the man here mentioned, on account of the dreadful disorder which attended his *son*.

He presents to Jesus his child, deprived of speech and convulsed with agonies, and says, "I beseech thee, look upon my son, for he is mine only child. Have compassion on us and help us." He felt for his son—his only child. He shared in his son's affliction. Help us. To help the *child* was to help the *father*.

There were two circumstances in his son's case, which were very affecting. He was *possessed* of an *evil spirit* ; and he was *dumb*.

1. He was under the power of an *evil spirit*, which grievously tormented his body.

Every parent is sensibly touched with the diseases of his children. If their diseases are attended with severe torments, he is affected more deeply. If he should view their torments as proceeding from the agency of evil spirits, this would be a very aggravating circumstance. Such was the case of this youth ; and who can wonder at the father's solicitude ?

But how much greater concern ought a parent to feel, when he sees his children led captive by satan into the path of vice and destruction ; and with how much greater earnestness should he pray for their recovery ? You are distressed, when you see your children dangerously sick, and under symptoms of bodily death. Can you look upon them without concern, when they are running headlong in the way to eternal death ? Their *bodily* pains are *affecting* to you. Are you unaffected at the thought of those endless torments which they are bringing on their souls ? If the evil

spirit has no power to inflict diseases on their bodies, yet he undoubtedly has some influence to infuse into their souls the poison of sin, which is the most fatal of all diseases. If they live regardless of God and religion—if they commit iniquity with greediness—if they indulge the lusts of the flesh—if they are vain, proud, obstinate and self-willed, they are under the power of a foul spirit, in a more awful sense than was this youth who was brought to Christ for a cure. And you have much more reason to be solicitous for the removal of this moral distemper, than the father had to seek a cure of his son's bodily disorders. Christ often healed men's bodies. But this was not his main business in the world. He came principally to heal their souls. If this parent applied to him as a physician, do you go and apply to him as a Saviour—implore his grace to rescue your children from the power, and to deliver them from the guilt of their sins.

2. This evil spirit is called a *dumb* spirit.

The lad's disorders had so injured his organs, that he *could* not, or so affected his mind, that he *would* not speak. This was an aggravating circumstance. There is no parent, but who would be much afflicted in the *dumbness* of a child. But surely to a serious and wise parent it is a greater affliction to see a child pervert and abuse his speaking faculty. If your son should lose the use of his speech, you would spare no cost and pains to have it restored: but are you as solicitous to have him use his speech well while he has it? A youth who is dumb is a sorrowful sight. But a more affecting spectacle is the young man who prostitutes his speech to profaneness, obscenity, slander and falsehood. A parent has more reason to be concerned for the recovery of such a son to the right use of speech, than for the recovery of one to the faculty of speech after he had lost it.

If a child is removed by death, the parent often feels great distress about his condition in a future world. He thinks he could easily submit to his own loss, if he knew his child were in glory. But why are you not concerned, while your child is in health, to train him up in virtue, and assist him in his preparation for glory? This provident care may do him and you some real good. But

your preposterous anxiety is useless to you both, for it comes too late.

III. We will consider the *faith* with which this father applied to Jesus in behalf of his son. Though his faith was weak, yet there were several things which shewed it to be real and sincere.

The weakness of his faith especially appeared in his *doubting* of Christ's power to help him. "If thou *canst* do any thing, have compassion and help us." They who *doubt* are said to be of *little faith*. A strong faith rests on the power, wisdom, goodness and faithfulness of God without jealousy, or distrust. A christian, in the full exercise of faith, may doubt whether he shall *actually receive* this, or that particular blessing which he asks : but his doubt arises not from any suspicion of the want of goodness, or power in God to grant the blessing ; but wholly from an apprehension, that he is himself unqualified to receive it, and that the wisdom of God may not see best to bestow it. All distrust of God implies a weakness, or want of faith. Distrust of ourselves is a different thing. This is often a reasonable humility—at the worst, it is a pardonable infirmity. Had this father thus addressed the Saviour, "If thou seest it to be best, help us," here would have been no indication of a weak faith ; because such a petition would have implied no distrust of Christ's power, or mercy, but only a doubt whether he, in his wisdom, would see fit to exercise his power and mercy in that particular way. But, by saying, "If thou *canst* do any thing, help us," he expressed a doubt of Christ's *ability* in the case, and thus shewed a weakness of faith.

But though his faith was weak, yet it was real. Doubting, though inconsistent with the strength, is not incompatible with the sincerity of faith. His faith appeared in several things.

1. In *bringing* his son to Christ to be healed.

He did not come with an insidious intention to insnare Christ, or to get an advantage against him ; but with an honest desire to obtain a favor from him—a favor which, he trusted, Christ was able and ready to grant, and which he could not obtain elsewhere.

A spirit of faith will lead us to God in prayer for such things as we want. He who believes in God, will make known his requests to him. If you were under the pressure of any difficulty,

and saw a friend near, who, you really believed, was able and ready to help you, on proper application; in this case you would not be silent—you would request his attention and aid. Much more, if you believe in the power and goodness of God, will you spread your troubles before *him*. The neglect of prayer is an evidence of the want of faith.

This good man's faith farther appeared,

2. In his *perseverance* under discouragements.

He came to the place in expectation of finding Jesus. Perceiving that Jesus was absent, he applied to the disciples, who had often cast out devils in their master's name, and who, he hoped, could do the same now. They made the attempt, but without success. The scribes hence took occasion to dispute Christ's Divine power, and to insinuate that here was an evil spirit which neither the disciples nor their master could manage. These things staggered the poor man's hope; but did not reduce him to despair. As soon as Jesus came, he presented the lad to him, told him the case, and begged his compassion.

True faith is persevering; it neither yields to discouragements, nor faints under disappointments, nor is confounded by the scoffs of infidelity. The believer, though his prayers meet not with expected success, still continues in them, knowing that he ought always to pray and not to faint—always to wait on God, and not to be cast down and disquieted.

This man shewed the honesty of his faith,

3. By *acting* on such *probability* as he had.

Several things happened, which created a doubt whether his high opinion of Jesus were well founded. But still he would not give it up without farther trial. Let the scribes say what they would, he could not but believe, this was the Saviour—he hoped, he should find him so—he would apply to him. The case was extreme—he knew not where else to go. He prays, “If thou *canst* do any thing, have compassion on us.”

The sincere believer may have doubts; but he will not allow his doubts to draw him into the neglect of his duty. He may have fears; but he will not let go his confidence.

In cases of immediate importance, where we cannot have certainty of success, we think it reasonable to act on probability. If a child is sick, we use means for his recovery, though we have no assurance, that the means will avail. Why will we not act with as much wisdom in our spiritual concerns? What can be of such moment as our eternal salvation? Ought we not, even upon the most doubtful prospect, to engage in seeking it? How much more, when the best encouragements are set before us?

We proceed to observe,

IV. The *gracious notice* which Christ took of this man's sincere, though feeble faith.

"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." It is as if Christ had said, "There is no want of power in me; but I require faith as the condition of my favors. I never work miracles to gratify a vain curiosity, or to answer a captious demand. But if any apply to me in humility and sincerity, and with an honest disposition to receive evidence of the truth; for them I am ready to employ my power. All things which are proper to be done, are possible to be done for them who believe."

You see, that Christ despises not the day of small things; he rejects not the weakest believer. He regards the feeblest motions of faith toward him. He smiles on the smallest beginnings of grace in the heart. He accepts the least acts of true faith and real piety. A cup of cold water given to a disciple in his name will not lose its reward. What mighty encouragement is here to tender souls—to young christians—to new converts—to the weak in faith. Their Saviour is one, who gathers the lambs with his arms, and carries them in his bosom. He is one who strengthens the weak and supports the falling. He is one who meets with his grace them who seek him with their hearts, and wait for him in his way. Let the feeble christian, under his fears and doubts, look to this Saviour, who is so full of power, goodness and condescension; and remember, that he will in no wise cast out them who come to him, nor disappoint those who wait for him. He says to the afflicted father, "All things are possible to him that believeth." To the woman who besought him for her daughter, he says, "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

Christians; do you hear your Saviour speaking thus unto you? Let your pious desires rise up with new vigour on the wings of faith, and stretch away to seize and enjoy the promised good.

This leads us to observe,

V. How this believer was affected with Christ's gracious declaration. "Straitway he cried out with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

He readily believed Christ's word, that he was able to do whatever he should ask. And he received this word with great affection. O, what a joyful word must this be to a father afflicted by the danger and distress of his only child? Here is a physician able to heal him. But how much greater joy must it give to an awakened and enquiring sinner to hear and believe, that there is a Saviour able to redeem him from guilt and hell? To such a sinner the word of salvation comes as tidings of great joy. When Peter's hearers, pricked in their heart, and enquiring what they must do to be saved, were told, that through Jesus Christ there was a promise of pardon to all; as many as should repent; they gladly received the word, and embraced the promise.

Many hear of salvation by Christ without any emotion of gratitude, or joy for the blessing, and without any concern to obtain a share in it. The reason is, they have no sense of their guilt, and of their desert of the wrath to come. Tell a sick man, that there is a physician at hand, who has a sure remedy for his disease, and that he may have it for asking, your information, if he believes it, will give him great joy. Were you as sensible of your danger from sin, as the sick man is of his danger from sickness, the word of salvation would give you still greater joy.

This believer had a humble sense of his remaining unbelief. "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief."

The true believer knows himself; he feels and laments the unbelief of his heart. Faith is imperfect in the most improved christian: it is especially so in new converts. They are babes in Christ. They must aspire to the stature of perfect men.

The unbelief of christians discovers itself in various ways. They should watch to observe and rebuke its workings. Do you not sometimes feel great impatience under your afflictions; espe-

cially if they have continued long; and deliverance has not come when you expected it? Are you never tempted to question the mercy and faithfulness of God under your troubles? The Psalmist found this symptom of unbelief. He expostulated with God, Is thy mercy clean gone? "But," says he, "this is mine infirmity." It is owing to your unbelief, that you cannot quietly trust God in all conditions, and rejoice in him, though the fig-tree should not blossom. Have you never taken indirect methods to extricate yourselves from worldly embarrassments? Do you never feel discontented with the allotments of Providence, or anxious about the events which are before you? These feelings are the fruits of unbelief. If you had a lively view of the providence, promises and perfections of God, you would be careful for nothing, but to know and do his will—to secure and enjoy his favor; you would commit your souls to him in well-doing as to a faithful Creator. Are you never distracted in religious duties? Do not your thoughts wander, and your affections flag? What is the reason, but because your faith is weak? Would not a lively faith in God collect your thoughts, and fix your attention? Do you live under a slavish fear of death? It is because faith has not so purified your hearts, as to give you decisive evidence of your title to heaven; or has not so raised you above this world as to make you willing to leave it for another.

Do you find any of these signs of unbelief in you? They call for humiliation: and if you are true believers, they will work humiliation. Humility was the temper of this weak believer who came with his son to Jesus for a cure of his maladies. For himself he prayed, that his faith might be strengthened. When he fully believed Christ's Divine power, the first thing he requested was, that this power might be employed in removing the unbelief which he felt within him.

The true christian often applies to Christ for the increase of faith. Where a principle of faith and holiness exists, there will be earnest desires of deliverance from sin and unbelief. These are a burden to the renewed soul. "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

After the man had professed the reality, and prayed for the increase of his faith, Christ granted his first request and healed his son. This in some measure answered his other request; it confirmed his faith.

The disciples, seeing their master cast out the evil spirit, enquire, "Why could not *we* cast him out?" Christ tells them, "It was because of their unbelief." They had attempted the miracle without a due persuasion of the presence and co-operation of Christ's power to give efficacy to their word. Now, in order to improve their faith, he directs them to *prayer* and *fasting*, as the proper means. "This kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting." These had no relation to the ejection of an evil spirit, or to the performance of any miracle, otherwise than as they were the means of increasing the principle and enlivening the operation of faith.

Christ here teaches us the proper use of prayer, fasting and other external acts of devotion; it is to increase our faith, invigorate our pious sentiments, and thus excite us to every good work. If we think that prayer, fasting, hearing the word, or any devotional exercise, is acceptable to God for itself, and by itself alone, we entirely mistake the matter. The design of all the devotional parts of religion is to make us better in heart and life—to improve a holy temper in us—to impress us with a more intimate sense of God—to raise our thoughts and affections to him—to give us more exalted and influential views of him—to make us more like him in purity and goodness—to subdue worldly affections—to free us from earthly passions, and fit us for the practice of every duty.

Prayer is a greater thing, than we, perhaps, are apt to imagine. We pray to little purpose, if prayer has no effect to make us better men. Prayer is a mean of faith, and faith is the principle of holiness and good works. Let us live much in prayer, that we may live more by faith. Under the influence of faith, let us walk in holiness; and by abounding in holiness secure to ourselves an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON XX.

THE DREADFUL SOUND.

JOB xv. 21.

A dreadful sound is in his ears.

ELIPHAZ describes to Job the miserable condition of a wicked man. He demands Job's particular attention to what he was going to say; for he assures him, it was founded in his own personal knowledge, and in the observation of wise men, and in the instructions of the fathers who had in their day seen the same and told it to their children. "I will shew thee; hear me, and that which I have seen will I declare; which wise men have told from their fathers, and have not hid it; to whom alone the earth was given, and no strangers passed among them. The wicked man travelleth with pain all his days, and the number of his years is hidden, or secretly exposed to the oppressor. A dreadful sound is in his ears. In prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him. He believeth not, that he shall return out of darkness—he is waited for of the sword. Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid. For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the almighty."

These and several circumstances of terror and wretchedness Eliphaz enumerates, as attending the condition of a wicked and

ungodly man—one who stretches out his hand against God, and by a wicked life contemns his supreme authority. All wilful disobedience, all determined iniquity is stretching the hand against God. It is treating him with insolence and defiance.

But that circumstance of his misery, to which we shall now particularly attend, is the dreadful sound that is in his ears. In the margin it is rendered, *a sound of fears in his ears*. A sound which awakens painful and terrifying apprehensions—a sound that disturbs his rest, and destroys his peace and embitters his enjoyments.

We will consider what this sound is—how the wicked man usually treats it—and what is the use which he ought to make of it.

I. We will consider, first, what is that fearful sound, which is often in the ears of the wicked man.

1. The first sound, which Eliphaz mentions as dreadful to a wicked man, is the sound of worldly adversity.

In the day of prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him. The day of darkness is ready at hand. Trouble and anguish make him afraid.

The wicked man's heart is wholly in the world. His hope and happiness—his enjoyments and prospects are here. He knows nothing—seeks nothing, and looks for nothing beyond. Deprive him of his earthly treasures and expectations, you take away his gods; and what has he more? Go to him in the day of his prosperity, and tell him of the vanity and mutability of the world, the uncertainty of every thing he possesses—how soon the frowns of Providence, or the injustice of men—his own incaution, or the pride and profligacy of his sons, may reduce him to a condition the reverse of the present; he will hear you with a cold, reluctant assent; but he does not at all like your subject. The sound is unpleasant. If you would speak in flattering terms of his worldly wisdom, successes and prospects, you would please him much better. But does he not believe the mutability of the world? Yes; and for that reason he hates to hear of it; and hates to think about it; and when adversity comes, it always finds him unprepared to meet it.

The temper of the good man is the reverse. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; and he is not afraid of evil tidings. He has in heaven an enduring substance, and he can spare his earthly goods. He knows that Divine wisdom orders his condition, and he acquiesces in its allotments. He feels a consciousness of his love to God, and rests secure in the promise, that all things shall work together for his good.

The world brings the wicked man more trouble in proportion as his heart is more set upon it. And what is an additional unhappiness, he can draw no comfort from religion. For,

2. To him the *law* is a dreadful sound. I do not mean human law; though indeed this may sound terribly to a man, who by atrocious crimes has exposed himself to its penalties.

This however will give him no disquietude, as long as he thinks his crimes are concealed from the eyes of men. And if iniquity is so framed by law, that under its protection he can acquire property by trampling on the rights of other men, it gives a pleasant sound to his ears.

But it is Divine law of which I now speak—that law which was delivered in thunder from Sinai. From this he hears a dreadful sound—more dreadful than the thunder of the mount. “Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” The law of God is perfect. It is exceeding broad. It forbids all sin both of action and neglect—both open and secret.

And God who has given the law knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart, as well as the outward acts of the life. He remembers sins that are past, as well as sees those which are present. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves. This law denounces a curse against every transgressor. Every wicked man, who is, in the least, acquainted with himself, must see that he falls under its dreadful sentence. This sentence he hates to hear. It is to him a dreadful sound—and the more dreadful because it is just. It comes from the mouth of God. It is uttered by his voice. Conscience is awakened by its terror, and repeats the sound. If

the man would speak out his inward conviction, his own mouth would condemn him, and his lips would testify against him.

3. To the wicked man *death* is a dreadful sound. Death has a painful sting.

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. There are those, who through fear of death, are all their life-time subject to bondage. Death is called the king of terrors. It is a terror to nature, and eminently so to the corrupt nature of the wicked man. It strips him of all the possessions for which he has labored. It separates him from every thing, on which his heart is placed. It puts an end to all the enjoyments with which he is acquainted. It breaks all the purposes, which he has been pursuing. It lays his body in the dust, there to lie unregarded and forgotten. It sends his immortal spirit into unknown regions, there to exist in a new manner, and to mingle with beings with whom he has never been conversant—but beings too much like himself to afford him any satisfaction.

Such harsh sounds as these grate upon his ear, if death ever is the subject of his meditation—and, alas! poor man, he has nothing in hand, or in hope, which can give a new, a soft, or a pleasing tone to these ungrateful sounds. He has laid up no treasures in another world to compensate his losses in this. He has formed no friendships there to come in the place of those, which must cease forever here. Nothing remains for him, but a fearful expectation of a state once so dreadful to him, that he would not even indulge the thought of it. Death must be a fearful sound to the man who has every thing to lose, and nothing to gain by it.

4. *Judgment* is a dreadful sound in the ears of the wicked man.

As God has appointed to men once to die, so after this the judgment. Hence the principal terror of death. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive according to the things done in the body. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, says the apostle, we persuade men.

Death is a solemn change. Judgment is more solemn. This will determine every man's condition for eternity. God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing—not only the outward actions, but the imaginations of the heart. These are

all written before him, and the book of remembrance will be opened; and the dead will be judged out of the things written in it, according to their works. They who have sinned and have not repented will be sentenced to everlasting punishment—to that punishment which was prepared for the devil and his angels. This punishment, to give us some impression of its horrors, is metaphorically called a lake of fire, burning with brimstone, where the worm, the miserable sinner, dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

To the wicked man, if at any time he will hear and attend, this must be a dreadful sound. God's word condemns him—his own heart condemns him—God is greater than his heart and knoweth all things—death is near—judgment will follow. Well may he tremble at the dismal prospect before him. Will he be able to contend with God, and stretch out his hand against the Almighty? Can he harden himself and prosper? Can his heart endure, or his hands be strong in the day when God shall deal with him according to his deserts, and judge him for all his sins?—Sinners in Zion are afraid—fearfulness surprizeth the hypocrites—who can dwell with devouring fire—who can dwell with everlasting burnings?

5. *Hell* is a dreadful sound; but a sound, which, if we attend, we shall often hear from the scripture.

Though we should turn away, or even stop our ears, yet the sound is there. If we will exclude it from our ears, yet we cannot suppress it in the book of God. Though the king of Judah burnt the prophet's roll, because it contained threatenings against him and his people; yet he did not defeat the threatenings denounced. These still remained, when the book was burnt. And another book was written, which contained the same threatenings; and there were added besides many like words.

If God is a moral governor, he has a right to punish sinners. That he will punish those who die impenitent in their sins, he has expressly declared in his word. This punishment is described in terms of awful import. But awful as it is, none have any cause to be afraid, but the wicked and impenitent. All but such will be delivered from the wrath to come. But for such there is no

deliverance—the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. A remembrance of their sins—a consciousness of guilt—corrupt and turbulent passions—the company of malignant spirits like themselves—the anger of a dishonored and offended God, and despair of a mitigation, or termination of their woful condition, will all conspire to accumulate their misery.

How dreadful the sound. Let the wicked, awakened by it, flee from the wrath to come.

We have shewn what is that dreadful sound, which is in the ears of wicked men.

We will now,

II. Shew how it is regarded and treated by many who hear it.

Some regard it as an *empty* sound, a mere imaginary noise without any real, or substantial cause. God says by the prophet Habakkuk, and again by the apostle Paul, Behold ye despisers; and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though a man declare it to you.

Death is an event, which is made certain to every man by the course of God's providence. No man therefore pretends to call in question his own mortality. But many attempt to extract, or blunt the sting of death, by denying the truth of those things which chiefly render it terrible; such as the perfection of the law, the certainty of judgment, and the punishment of the world to come. The apostle says, There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of Christ's coming to judgment; for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning.

Many, though they will not *deny* a future judgment, and the punishment of the wicked, yet choose to view them as doubtful—or rather to think little about them. As against other disagreeable sounds, so against this, they stop their ears and will not hear it.

Thus the prophet Jeremiah complains; “To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold their ear is uncircumcised and they cannot hearken. The word of the Lord is to them a reproach; and they have no delight in it.” The like complaint is made by another prophet; “They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears,

that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant-stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord sent in his Spirit by the prophets. Therefore came great wrath from the Lord of hosts."

Some, if they hear the sound, flatter themselves that they are not concerned in it. It may respect others, but not them; or it relates to times afar off, so that they may hereafter prevent the evil threatened.

Moses speaks of those, who, when they hear the words of God's curse, bless themselves in their hearts, saying, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our own hearts. But he says, the anger of the Lord will smoke against such contemners of his warnings, and the curses written in his law shall lie upon them.

The dreadful sound is of salutary tendency when it is suitably regarded. But if men stop their ears against it and refuse to hear, it will be to them of tremendous issue. However dreadful the sound, a contempt of it, or inattention to it, will be far more dreadful.

It is proper then, that we consider, in the *third* place, what use wicked men ought to make of this dreadful sound, when it enters into their ears.

Their duty is plain. Let them turn their ears to the pleasant and delightful sound, which they may hear from the gospel. Let them not stifle the dreadful sound, but take warning by it; for if they take no warning, they shall perish in their guilt, and their blood will be upon them; but if they take warning, they shall deliver their souls; for, as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye therefore from your evil ways, for why will ye die?

The sound of the law—of judgment and of wrath to come is designed, not for destruction, but for the salvation of sinners. It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners.

The law of God condemns every transgressor. But Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe. He has

redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He has borne our sins in his own body on the cross, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness. By his stripes we are healed. The law teaches us, what we deserve for our disobedience, and what we are to expect, if justice takes place. It points out no way of deliverance. It promises no pardon. It prescribes no method in which we can satisfy the demands of justice. It leaves us to deserved punishment. But the gospel comes to us with a pleasing and encouraging sound. It declares the mercy of God to forgive—the death of the Son of God to atone for sin—the acceptableness of repentance as the condition of pardon—the grace of the Divine Spirit to renew us to repentance and prepare us for pardon.

What delightful sounds must these be to souls awakened by the terrors of the law. Let such as are terrified by its dreadful sound, hear the inviting voice of the Saviour, Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Do any tremble at the sound of death? Let them look to Jesus and take courage.

The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But Christ came to deliver, by his own death, them, who through fear of death, are subject to bondage. Faith in him will give them the victory over death. Have you believed in Jesus? Have you submitted yourselves to his gospel? Have you taken him for your Lord and Saviour? Death need not make you afraid. There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ, and who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Death will, indeed, remove you from all the interests and pleasures of this world. But if this be a loss, it will make you ample amends for the loss. It will bring you to Christ—and the presence of Christ will be a great part of the happiness of heaven. For this happiness Paul was willing to be absent from the world, and absent from the body. Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. They shall rest from their labors, and their works will follow them.

Death cannot be avoided; but it may be conquered—yea, it has been conquered. Jesus has conquered it. Believers may meet it as a vanquished enemy. They may, they will acquire

gain by it. For me to live in Christ, says the apostle, and to die is gain. This will separate the believer from the world, but it will never separate him from the love of God in Christ; no, it will bring him to a more full enjoyment of this love, than ever he experienced before, or ever could have experienced, had he remained in this world.

Judgment will be a solemn scene. It will be dreadful to the wicked. They are offended at the distant sound of it. But there is a delightful sound which issues from the judgment seat. Let them hear this. To some the Judge will say, come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. These shall enter into eternal life. And who are these? They are such as receive and obey his gospel. Unbelieving sinners will be judged by the law according to its strictest tenor—they will be condemned for every transgression of the law. But in regard to believers Christ has fulfilled the law; and they will be judged according to the gracious tenor of the gospel. Their repentance of sin, and faith in the Saviour, interest them in that perfect righteousness which he has wrought out, so that to them who are in him there will be no condemnation. They will be accepted in the beloved, and will be rewarded according to those works of faith and labors of love which by the grace of God they have been enabled to perform.

When Christ shall come in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son, he will be glorified in the saints, and they glorified in him, and he will be admired in all them who believe. Guilty, impenitent, unpardoned sinners will tremble and be dismayed in the presence of the Judge. But saints will have boldness in the day of judgment, and rejoice in the presence of the Lord at his coming.

Is judgment a dreadful sound? Be awakened by it to repentance—resort to Jesus by faith—cleave to him by obedience. Then it will become a delightful sound. In that day you will receive from the dust your bodies, new raised, refined and immortal. You will meet the glorified saints and mingle with the joyful throng of those who have been redeemed from the earth—you will be admitted to sit with Christ on his throne, and to share

with him the glories of his kingdom—you will be ever with the Lord.

Hell is a dreadful sound. But if this sound awakens you to flee from the wrath to come, it will to you be a happy sound. Life and death—heaven and hell are set before you. Death is set before you that you may choose life—hell, that you choose heaven. Make a right choice, and you have nothing to fear, but every thing to hope. Entertain no prejudice against the gospel on account of its threatenings. These do not create your danger—they only warn you of it. Your *sins* create your danger. The warnings are sent, that you may flee from the danger which threatens you. If the gospel had never said a word about future punishment, still it would be as true as it is now, that a sinful course and impenitent death must terminate in misery. Hell though a terrible, is a necessary sound. The design of it is to alarm the sinner and excite him to seek safety by repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. If the misery of hell is the fruit and result of sin indulged in the heart and practised in the life, then the sound which seems so dreadful is from yourselves. Let your fear come home to yourselves. Let it operate where it ought to operate, against your own iniquities. There is your danger. It is not from the character, or from the threatenings of God—but from your opposition to his character, and disregard of his threatenings. His word sets hope before you; lay hold on it and live. He is long-suffering to sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. They shall walk in the light of God's countenance. In his name shall they rejoice all the day. In his righteousness shall they be exalted.

Let none despise the awful sound which they hear from the law, the judgment and the threatenings of God—but all hear and take warning. They are words of truth and soberness. Awakened by these sounds, let them dread the consequence of impenitence and unbelief; and hear and obey the joyful sound, which

calls to repentance, promises pardon and offers grace to help in time of need.

There is an accepted time—there is a day of salvation. The salvation offered was purchased by the blood of Christ. It is promised by the faithfulness of God. It is proclaimed in your hearing by a voice speaking from heaven. You may obtain it by a seasonable and diligent application. But how will you escape, if you neglect so great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord himself and was confirmed by them who heard.

If you finally neglect this salvation, which is proclaimed in such encouraging sounds, you will sink into regions of darkness and despair, where these delightful sounds will be reverberated in dismal echoes.

It will be no small part of the misery of condemned sinners, that they neglected the day of grace—despised a dying Saviour—trampled on the warnings of God's word, and resisted the energies of a striving spirit.

If the dreadful sound now in your ears, makes no impression on your hearts, nor calls their attention to the offers of deliverance and safety; they must one day hear a sound more dreadful from the final sentence of the Judge—Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Know in this your day the things which belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes.

SERMON XXI.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHARACTER OF PETER.

JOHN XXI. 7, 8.

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved, saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits) dragging the net with fishes.

OUR blessed Lord, after his resurrection, seems not to have been constantly with his disciples, as he was before his crucifixion; for they were now dispersed to follow their several occupations, only meeting at proper times for friendly conversation and social devotion. But he visited them occasionally to give them evidence of his resurrection, and to impart to them such instructions, as their present circumstances and future employments might require. These visits were made sometimes to two or three of them, and sometimes to a greater number, when they happened to be together.

John, in this chapter, relates the appearance of Jesus to seven of his disciples at the sea of Tiberias. He says, "This is the

third time, that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead." He means, that this was the third time of his shewing himself to them in a body; for the evangelists mention five or six other times before this, when he shewed himself to some, or all of them.

Seven of the disciples being now together in a house near the sea of Tiberias, Peter proposed to his brethren to go a fishing; to which they agreed, and immediately took a boat, went out with a net on the water, and labored through the following night without success. In the morning Jesus came and stood on the shore. They saw a person, but knew not who he was. It is probable that day-light was not yet perfect. He might appear in a dress, in which they had not been accustomed to see him. They had no expectation of meeting with him at this time and in this place. It therefore is not strange, that they did not immediately recognize him. Probably they supposed him to be some man, who came to buy fish of them. They were within call from the shore. The stranger asked them if they had any meat. They answered, that they had none, for they had caught nothing through the night. He directed them to cast their net on the right side of the ship, which they did, and caught such a number of fishes, that they were hardly able to draw the net toward the shore.

John, who is here and elsewhere called the disciple whom Jesus loved, astonished at this wonderful draught of fishes, thought of Jesus, and looking more attentively, as it grew lighter, perceived that it was certainly He. And he said to Peter, *It is the Lord*. Peter, hearing that it was the Lord, was in haste to be with him; and impatient to wait the slow progress of the boat, put on the loose garment which he had thrown off for labor, stepped into the sea and waded to the shore. The water so near the shore was shallow enough for a man to wade. Had he intended to swim, he would not have put on his outward garment. He hastened to land, and left his brethren to drag along the rich booty, which they had taken.

We will make some remarks on John's information to Peter; and on Peter's behavior in consequence of it.

John says, *It is the Lord.*

This is an expression of *surprize*, and of *joy*.

It is an expression of *surprize*. The personal presence of Christ, at this time, was wholly unexpected.

He had before appeared to his disciples, once and again, when they were met together for devotion; but now they were on the lake employed in a secular calling. Their minds were occupied in their labor, and exercised with their ill success. An interview with their Lord was little thought of. His appearance so near them, and his advice so friendly and seasonable in their business, was matter of surprize.

Pious souls may enjoy the presence of Christ in their secular occupations, as well as in their sacred devotions. No real duty will separate between him and them. It was the duty of these disciples to attend to their secular employment at proper times, no less than to engage in devotional exercises at other times. And when they were in the place, and at the work, to which providence called them, they might enjoy communication with their Lord, whether the place were an oratory, or a fishing boat, and whether the work were mental, or manual.

God requires us to spend a portion of time in his worship. There are certain seasons sequestered for *social* worship. These we must stately observe without unnecessary omissions. We are required to pay our morning and evening sacrifices in our *families* and *closets*. These stated religious exercises are adapted to form in our minds an habitual reverence of God and constant sense of his presence. That our devotions, whether secret, or social, may be useful to ourselves and acceptable to God, we are to banish from our minds all inordinate worldly affections, and all malevolent and unfriendly passions, and to come before God with reverence toward him, and with good will toward all men; we are to engage our hearts to seek unto him and to attend upon him without distraction. The reason why we are to perform devotional duties with a pious and benevolent spirit, is that we may carry this spirit with us into all the duties of common life. Every one sees, that it would be absurd only to make our *prayers* with reverence to God and benevolence to men; and then imme-

diately to return to the world with impiety and malice in our hearts. We are to be devout, humble and charitable, when we stand before God, that we may be the same at all times, and that, whatever we do, we may do all to his glory.

These disciples, having been conversant with Christ, and having imbibed much of his spirit, were prepared to receive a visit from him, when they were fishing, as well as when they were praying. Let us so conduct the devotional parts of religion, as to maintain the temper of religion in all that we do. Then our secular labors, as well as our devout exercises, will be works of piety and charity; all that we do will belong to religion; and wherever we go, we shall be near to Christ; he will be attentive to our calls, and will communicate his grace as our necessities require.

The words of John, *It is the Lord*, expressed his joy. And his joy was the joy of them all.

John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who was distinguished by his love to Jesus. None of them could be more transported, than he was, at seeing the risen Lord.

We naturally rejoice in meeting with a beloved friend after a temporary absence. Jesus had not been long absent from his disciples; but the cause of his absence had been such as must prepare their minds for the most lively sensations at his return. He had been slain and laid in the grave. They little thought of meeting him again on earth. Sorrow had filled their hearts. When they saw him risen from the dead, they believed not for joy. They were as men who dream. So happy and unexpected was the event, that they could hardly believe their own eyes.

In meeting with him, there were many circumstances to increase their joy. This was not a common friend, but a Saviour and Redeemer. They could not see him too often, nor be too much in his company. His resurrection confirmed their faith in him, and established their belief of all that he had before taught them. It opened to their understanding the ancient prophecies. It brought many pleasing interviews and instructions afresh to their remembrance. It revived past delightful scenes. While they felt themselves too unfurnished to go forth and preach his

religion, they rejoiced to meet him, that they might obtain more ample furniture. They hoped, in his company, to learn what work he had for them to do, and how they should do it.

We all think, that if we had been in their condition, we should have rejoiced, as they did, in seeing Jesus so near us. We cannot, at present, have a personal interview with him. But we may have a privilege equal to it. We may come to the place, where he has appointed to meet us by his word, his ordinances and his Spirit. John, who saw the Lord on the sea-shore at Tiberias, afterward had a more glorious view of him in the Island of Patmos. He saw him on the Lord's day walking among the churches, and he was then in the Spirit.

Jesus visits his churches still, and there we may see him by faith. *This, this* is the place, where he has appointed to meet us. Here he comes by his gospel. Here we may learn the precious doctrines and promises, which he gave to his disciples while he was with them. Here we may, at certain seasons, behold him set forth as crucified for our sins and risen for our justification. Here we may contemplate his grace and love exhibited in an ordinance, which was instituted to perpetuate among his disciples the delightful remembrance of him. Where he comes by his word, he comes with his good Spirit. This we may have for asking. "He gives the Spirit to them who ask him." As he is our high priest over the house of God, we may resort to it with boldness, and obtain grace to help in time of need.

Do we envy the disciples, who personally conversed with Christ after his resurrection? In what was their privilege superior to ours? What could they learn from his lips more than we may learn from his word? What promises could they hear from his mouth greater than those which we find in his gospel? What assistances did he afford them better adapted to their case, than the assistances offered to us are adapted to ours? If we could see him, as they did, we would ask many questions for the removal of our doubts; we would solicit many favors for relief in our troubles. But we may go to his word now, and there find an answer to reasonable enquiries; we may go to his throne, and there obtain the things which we really need. Do we think a sight of

him in the flesh would awaken lively affections? If we have pure affections to him, why may they not be awakened by a view of him in his word and ordinances? Let us meditate on his character, his doctrines, his works, his death, and his resurrection. Let us converse with him by prayer, and by reading and hearing his word. Thus let us strengthen our faith, and enliven our affections. And thus let us prepare for a more glorious interview with him in heaven, than his disciples ever enjoyed, while they were with him on earth.

Such an interview we may hereafter enjoy.

We cannot but remark, that John, when he saw and knew the Lord, gave information particularly to *Peter*. He said to *Peter*, "It is the Lord."

When there were seven of them in the boat, there must have been some special reason, why this information was directed to *Peter* only. There was a similar case a little before. The angel, who announced to the women, that Jesus was risen, said to them, "Go your way; tell his disciples and *Peter*, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him."

Peter, in the time of Christ's sufferings, had solemnly and repeatedly denied his relation to him, and knowledge of him. Our Lord, therefore, by his angel, sends a particular invitation to *Peter* to come and see him in Galilee. *Peter*, before the interview at Tiberias, had seen the Lord after his resurrection. But it does not appear, that Jesus had so far remitted his offence, as to reinstate him in his office. He might therefore feel some doubt and anxiety on the subject; and might have expressed his feelings to *John*, who used, on some occasions, to be his adviser and his spokesman. When Christ told his disciples, that one of them would betray him, *Peter*, curious to know who it was, beckoned to *John*, that he should ask Jesus, of whom he spake this. It is probable that *Peter*, humbled for his denial of Christ, and ashamed to request a restoration to his office, had desired *John* to speak a word in his behalf, or at least to ask the question, whether he was any more to be owned in his former relation. *Peter*, though from the warmth of his temper, liable often to offend, yet was a man of great humility. Surprized once at a miracle of Christ,

he was afraid to continue in his presence. He fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When he had denied Christ, remembering the warnings given him, "he went out and wept bitterly." John, knowing the anxious state of Peter's mind, might say to *him*, "The Lord is there on the shore, and now may be a proper time to learn what your standing is to be among the apostles." Accordingly we find that Peter's restoration was one principal object of Christ's present visit to his disciples.

When the other disciples had come to land with the boat, and they had all eaten with Jesus, the Lord entered into a free conversation with Peter in reference to his late apostacy. This, indeed, is not expressly mentioned, but it is evidently alluded to. As Peter had professed a superior love to Christ, and afterward had thrice denied him, Jesus asked him, what he thought of himself now; whether after this experience of himself, he could say, that he loved his Lord more than his brethren loved him, and though all should deny him, he would adhere to him. This question he put to Peter three times. Peter presumed not to say, that he loved Christ more than others did; but he affirmed, that he loved him, and appealed to Christ, who knew all hearts, that his profession was true. Christ accepted his profession, and said to him, "Feed my lambs—feed my sheep—feed my sheep." At the same time Jesus told him, that he would live to be an aged man, and would suffer martyrdom in his cause. "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This he spake, signifying by what death he should glorify God." Then he gave him this general direction, "Follow me."

Peter gained strength and fortitude by his experience of his own weakness. Though none of the disciples discovered so much timidity as he, at the time of Christ's crucifixion, yet after his restoration to his office, none appeared more bold and resolute in his master's cause. We soon see him standing forth without fear to preach the gospel of Christ. We soon hear him affirming, that Jesus had been approved of God by public miracles, and

charging the priests and rulers with the most impious murder in putting him to death. When they forbade him to speak any more in Christ's name, and added threatenings to the prohibition, he boldly answered, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you, more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

In Peter we see the genuine operation and solid fruit of true repentance. It was in him, as it is in all, followed with a general resolution against sin, and a particular care to avoid those sins, which have most frequently and easily prevailed. Peter probably was more bold in the cause of Christ, than he ever would have been, if he had never denied him. His fall taught him his weakness; and he watched most carefully where his danger was greatest. He no more trusted in himself, but placed his reliance on that grace, which alone was sufficient to keep him. As he had done great dishonor to Christ, by denying him, so he felt his obligation to labor more abundantly in the cause of Christ, that he might repair the past injury and strengthen his brethren by his example of fortitude and zeal. As he had seen the wonderful grace of Christ in pardoning his past offence, he felt himself under new obligations to him. Much had been forgiven him, and he loved much. Paul felt the force of the same motive. "By the grace of God I am what I am. His grace was exceeding abundant. And it was not in vain for I labored more abundantly."

Peter's tears were a hopeful indication of godly sorrow. But his future conduct was a more decisive evidence of it. In that he sorrowed after a godly sort; what carefulness, what zeal, what diligence it wrought in him.

We may here profitably remark the distinguished forwardness of Peter to be with Christ, when he perceived that he was on the shore. As soon as John said, "It is the Lord," Peter cast himself into the sea, and waded to land, leaving his brethren to come on slowly with the loaded boat.

There is a great difference in men's natural tempers; and this difference often manifests itself in their religious conduct. The bias of nature is sometimes mistaken for religious affection. To judge rightly of our moral character it is necessary that we should

know our constitutional disposition. Otherwise there will be danger, that we ascribe to grace that which properly belongs to nature.

Peter was naturally a man of a fervent and impetuous mind. Hence he often spake and acted suddenly in cases, in which men of more coolness would have taken time for deliberation. When Christ said to his disciples, "Ye all will be offended because of me this night," Peter answered without hesitation, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." When Christ added, "Before the cock crow this night, thou shalt deny me thrice;" he, without standing to examine himself, replied, "Though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee." When the soldiers came to apprehend Jesus, it was asked, "Lord shall we smite with the sword?" Peter, without waiting for permission, drew his sword, smote one of the officers and cut off his ear. When intelligence was received, that the Lord was risen, Peter and John started together and ran toward the sepulchre. John outran Peter and came first to the sepulchre. He stooped down and took a view of it, but went not into it. Peter soon arrived. He ran directly into the sepulchre to see and feel whether the body were there. Thus on the occasion mentioned in the text; when he was told, that Jesus stood on the shore of the lake, he tarried not for the boat to come to land, but plunged immediately into the water. So eager was he to be with his Lord, that he would not wait a moment for the boat.

This action was no evidence that Peter had more love to Christ than his brethren had. It was merely the effect of natural eagerness. The other disciples were as much in the way of their duty, while they were drawing their fishes to land, as Peter was while he was wading to the shore. By the goodness of Christ a bountiful supply had been given them. This might be of great use to them, not only for present consumption, but also for sale in the market. This draught of fishes was probably the means of their support for a considerable time. Had they all left the boat and lost what they had taken, they would have been guilty of great waste. Nor could they have justified the waste by pleading the ardor of their love to Christ. For certainly love to his person and gratitude for his goodness would induce them to save what he had so miracu-

lously put into their power. Peter and his brethren all loved their Lord and rejoiced to meet with him. If Peter showed the ardor of his affection in leaving the vessel, that he might be with Christ the sooner, they shewed the coolness of their prudence in waiting to bring the boat and the fishes along with them.

Let us never mistake the emotions of nature for the operations of grace. You feel perhaps a flow of affection in devotion, and an engagedness of mind in some other religious duties, and you think these to be indications of habitual piety. But enquire whether this fervor spreads through all your religion. If it does, it is, indeed, an amiable quality. But if it operates in particular cases only and leaves you indifferant in other matters equally important, it is not godly zeal, but natural temper occasionally excited into action. You feel an indignation against certain sins, which you see practised in the world, and you call this a zeal for God. But whose sins are they? If they are only the sins of your enemies—the sins of other sects—the sins of opposite partizans; and you are, at the same time, indifferent to the sins of your friends and adherents, your zeal is only spleen and ill nature. If you are zealous of good works in others, you will be zealous to repent of evil works in yourselves.

You have a great delight in the devotional duties of religion, and you are very constant in your attendance on them. Your piety is much to be commended. But see that your piety be uniform, and that it be an aid, not a hindrance to other duties—to the duties of industry, sobriety, justice and charity. You see some more attentive to their worldly interest, than you think they ought to be, or need to be. But perhaps they are the best judges. Do you know the exigencies of their families? Do you know how much they contribute to the relief of the poor? Do you know how much they give for the maintenance of religion? Do you know how much time they spend in the *private* exercises of piety? If they neglect the institutions of God and the worship of the sanctuary and the family for worldly ends, they, indeed, give too strong proof that the love of Christ dwells not in them. But if they observe all the duties of piety, in proper season, as well as you, and are only more frugal and industrious, you have

no more cause to censure them as strangers to the power of godliness, than Peter had to condemn his brethren as destitute of love to Christ, because they tarried with their boat to take care of their fishes and bring them to land, while he rushed through the water to the shore, leaving all behind.

The duties of religion are all consistent; and they ought to be so conducted, that they may be subservient to one another. Piety may assist us in our worldly labors; and these may assist us in our piety.

When the disciples saw what a number of fishes they had taken in the morning, after an unsuccessful night, their thoughts turned on Jesus, whose miraculous power and goodness they had often seen. When we see the success of our labors in our fields, and the bountiful supplies afforded to our wants, ought not our thoughts to rise in admiring gratitude to him, from whom comes every good and perfect gift? We are as much indebted to God for the common bounties of the field, as the disciples were for the special bounty of the sea. Unmindfulness of the Benefactor is as criminal in our case, as it would have been in their's.

If it becomes us thankfully to regard the bounties of Providence, much rather ought we to admire the blessings of grace. God has sent his Son into the world to procure salvation for sinners by his death on the cross. This salvation has been purchased; the price has been paid; the offer is made, and made freely; the terms are stated and stated plainly. The offer let us accept with gratitude and joy.

Had the disciples contemptuously cast away the fishes, which had been miraculously brought to their net, their guilt, though great in itself, would have been small in comparison with their's, who despise the salvation purchased by the Saviour's blood. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? We are not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, who verily was ordained before the foundation of the world, but has been manifested in these last times for us, that by him we might believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, and who will bring all humble believers to glory with him, that where he is, there may they be also.

SERMON XXII.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHARACTER OF JUDAS.

MATTHEW XXVII. 3, 4, 5.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, what is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and went and hanged himself.

WE have here the sad story of Judas's base treachery, fruitless repentance and dismal end. The story is attended with many affecting circumstances, and contains many useful instructions and warnings. It is affecting to see the vile ingratitude of a disciple, who, after he had been admitted to particular friendship with his Lord, deliberately betrayed him into the hands of his enemies for a trifling consideration. It is affecting to see how the poor creature, when he had perpetrated the villainy, was tormented by his guilty conscience. But it is most affecting of all to see the despairing wretch precipitating himself into the eternal world, for relief from the horrors which he felt in this.

My design is to open to you the story, with its several circumstances, and point out the instructions suggested in it.

In the *first* place, we will consider the crime of Judas in its various circumstances; and, *secondly*, the consequences to which it led, and the event in which it terminated.

Judas's crime was betraying, or rather attempting to betray his master into the hands of his enemies.

The chief priests, scribes and elders, being assembled in council, had resolved to take Jesus and put him to death. But as there were many who held him in high estimation, they feared, that a publick arrestation of him would occasion a popular tumult. They therefore deliberated, how they might take him by subtilty in the night, in the place of his retirement, when there would be none to resist their attempt.

Judas, knowing by some means or other, the subject of their deliberations, went to the chief priests and proposed, for a proper reward, to betray him into their hands. The bargain was closed; and from this time he sought opportunity to betray him. It was not long before one occurred. Jesus being retired into the garden of Gethsemane, his usual retreat for prayer, Judas brought a band of soldiers, conducted them into the garden, and by a perfidious salute, before agreed upon, betrayed him into their power.

We will consider the motives and aggravations of this sin.

1. Judas's ruling lust was *covetousness*. This was at the bottom of the crime under consideration. He went to the chief priests and said, "What will ye *give me*?" Give me a reward, "and I will betray him to you." This was not the only instance of his avarice. He was appointed by his Lord, as a domestic steward, to provide for him and his attendants, to keep their common stock and to give alms to the poor. This trust he often abused by secretly applying to his own use some of the family property. He is therefore called a *thief*.

When Mary honored Christ by pouring precious ointment on his head, Judas had indignation, and said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" "This he spake, not because he cared any thing for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." Had the ointment been sold, the proceeds would have

come into his hands; and he could have applied them to his own use.

His avarice, by long indulgence, had obtained such an entire command of him, that it prompted him to sell his Lord.

He might further be urged to this treacherous act, by a resentment of the rebuke which his master gave him for criminating the piety of Mary. For immediately on this rebuke, he went to the chief priests with his perfidious proposal, resolving, that as he could not have the profits of the ointment, he would make something by the sale of his Lord.

While avarice and passion concurred to urge him to this dreadful deed, satan by his suggestions seconded their influence. While the council were consulting how they might take Jesus, "then entered satan into Judas, and he went and communed with them, how he might betray him to them."

Probably he might at the same time, under satan's influence, endeavor to palliate the action, by entertaining a thought, that Christ, if he was the Son of God, could elude the designs of his enemies and extricate himself out of their hands; for it is said, "when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented" of what he had done.

But whatever view he might have of the event, the action was perfidious. He did all that was in his power to deliver his master into the hands of his enemies, and an imagination that Jesus could defeat their design did not palliate his guilt.

2. Judas was one of Christ's *disciples*. He had not only heard the doctrines and seen the miracles of his Lord; but had been himself ordained to preach the same doctrines and empowered to work the same miracles. It is said, "Jesus ordained *twelve*, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to heal diseases and cast out devils." Of these Judas, who betrayed him, was one. He must therefore have been convinced, that his Lord was the true Messiah. Accordingly he confessed, that he had betrayed *innocent* blood. Had he suspected Jesus to be an impostor, he would not have pronounced him *innocent*; especially at a time, when he had every motive to wish for an excuse of his own conduct

3. There had been a particular *confidence* placed in Judas. He had the care of the common property of Christ's family, and he knew the place to which his Lord resorted with his disciples for their family devotions. He was therefore guilty of profaning a sacred place, and of violating the obligations of intimate friendship. The Psalmist, speaking prophetically in the person of Christ concerning the treachery of Judas, aggravates it from these circumstances. "It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me, who did magnify himself against me, then I would have hid myself from him; but it was thou, a man, mine equal and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in company. Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, and who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."

4. He had been repeatedly *warned* of this crime in terms, which might lead him to suppose, that his intention was known to his master. After he had been with the Jewish rulers, Christ, in his presence, said to the disciples, "One of you shall betray me. The Son of man goeth indeed, as it is written of him; but wo to that man, by whom the Son of man is betrayed. Good were it for him, that he had never been born." Such a warning, one would think, should have struck him with conviction, and diverted him from his design. But far from this, when all the disciples, confounded at this general premonition, asked, one by one, "Lord, is it I?" Judas had the impudence to ask the same question, to whom Jesus replied, "Thou hast said." Immediately on this warning, he went out from Christ's presence to perpetrate the villainy.

5. This crime was committed *deliberately*. He went and consulted with the priests and elders concerning the time, place and manner of effecting it. He returned, and continued his attendance on his master. He was reminded once and again of the design which he had formed, and he was solemnly premonished of its dreadful consequence. His conscience had full time to rebuke him, and ample occasion to enter its remonstrance.

He was not drawn into this wickedness by the importunity of others, but he conceived it in his own heart and proposed it of

his own motion. And what was his temptation? He hoped to get thirty pieces of silver, or thirty shekels, the price of the meanest slave. That blood which is more precious than silver and gold, he betrayed for so contemptible a reward—and his own soul, the loss of which could not be compensated by the whole world, he sold for a thing of nought.

6. He betrayed his Lord too, at a *time* when, and *place* where he was engaged in the *solemnities of devotion*, and by the sorrows of his soul, and the fervor of his prayers, was seeking the salvation of a guilty race. Neither the sacredness of the place to which his master was retired, nor the solemnity of the duty in which he was employed, nor the sharpness of the distress with which his soul was wounded, could awe the hardened wretch from his premeditated crime. And,

7. With what detestable *dissimulation* he executed it? He betrayed his master by a solemn profession of love and respect. As he had before appointed to the soldiers a token, saying, “Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he; hold him fast;” so when he drew near, he forthwith came up to Jesus, and said, “Hail, master, and kissed him.” In the trepidation of haste, he went forward of the company, and gave the signal before they were near enough to discriminate the person in the night. Hence John tells us, that after the salute, Jesus went forth, and asked the soldiers, “Whom seek ye?” They said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I am he. If ye seek me, let these,” my disciples, “go their way.”

In this transaction of Judas, there was a complication of various sins, such as ingratitude, perfidy, hypocrisy, avarice, profaneness and malice, together with a settled resolution to do evil, which no advice, or warnings could controul.

The view we have taken of Judas' conduct will suggest to us several useful reflections, to which it will be proper for us here to attend.

1. We see, that some, under the *best means*, remain *impenitent* and finally *perish in their guilt*.

What excellent advantages Judas enjoyed! He lived in the company of the Son of God, daily conversed with him, beheld

his works, heard his instructions, saw his example and retired with him for devotion; and yet he retained his corruptions, and became more hardened in wickedness. How inexcusable must he have been? What an awful condemnation must he have deserved?

Are there not others, who will fall under the same condemnation? You enjoy great privileges. While you condemn him look well to yourselves.

You are not allowed, like him, to live in company with the Son of God; but perhaps your advantages may be equal to his. You have Christ's gospel in your hands, and may daily see what doctrines he taught, what works he performed, and in what manner he lived. You have repeated calls and admonitions, and the most powerful motives to a holy life. If Christ were personally with you, what could you learn from his mouth, more than you may now learn from his word?

Come then, enquire of yourselves how you have profited by these advantages. You are astonished at the impenitence of Judas. Have you repented of your own sins? Have you mortified every lust, and subdued every passion? Have you renounced satan and the world, and yielded yourselves servants to your divine Master? Does love to him reign in your hearts and influence your conduct? Do you grow in knowledge and goodness under the means you enjoy? You see, that there is such a case as men's continuing in wickedness under the best means. Be afraid, lest this, which is no uncommon case, should unhappily prove to be your's.

2. We see, that *great gifts* are no evidence of *saving grace*.

Judas possessed miraculous gifts in common with his brethren. He was one of the twelve, whom Christ ordained to preach the gospel, cast out devils and heal all manner of diseases; and yet he was a stranger to the temper of that gospel, which he preached, and in the confirmation of which he wrought miracles. Our Saviour says, Many of those, whom he will reject as workers of iniquity, will be able to plead, "We have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils and done many wonderful works." St. Paul supposes, that one may speak with the tongue

of angels, exercise the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, and have faith to remove mountains, and yet not have charity. If there was no connexion between these miraculous gifts and sanctifying grace, surely it is presumptuous to conclude ourselves in a state of grace, merely because we possess superior natural abilities, or acquired accomplishments; such as uncommon knowledge in religion, great skill in defending the truth, and a happy freedom of thought and pertinence of expression in prayer. These gifts are useful and much to be desired; but will not avail to men's salvation. The apostle says to the Corinthians, "Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet I shew unto you a more excellent way." The more excellent way is that charity, which suffers long and is kind; envies not and is not puffed up; rejoices not in iniquity, but in the truth; thinks no evil; but believes, endures and hopes all things. The meanest christian possessed of a meek, humble, peaceable temper, filled with love to God and benevolence to men, and acting under the influence of that faith which realizes invisible things, is far more excellent than the man, who, void of these dispositions, is distinguished by the most eminent and shining gifts.

Whatever gifts we may possess, let us not glory in them, but humbly and thankfully improve them to real holiness and extensive usefulness. Otherwise, instead of bringing us to heaven, they will only aggravate our final condemnation.

3. We see, that men may make a *fair show* of godliness, and yet be *corrupt in heart*.

Judas was a man of unapproached morals among the Jews, as well as of an unsuspected character among his brethren. Had his morals been notoriously vicious, the Jews, who often condemned Christ for conversing with publicans and sinners, would certainly have censured him for taking so bad a man into the number of his special friends. When Christ warned his disciples, that one of them would betray him, Judas was unsuspected. He was a man, not only of sober conversation, but of plausible address. He had great influence among his brethren. When he complained of a woman for pouring ointment on Christ's head, and urged the importance of applying it to the benefit of the poor,

they were carried away with his dissimulation. He was wont, not only to plead for the poor, but also to treat his Lord with tokens of great respect. When he betrayed Jesus with a kiss, had this been an unusual address, Peter would probably have suspected treachery, and drawn his sword on Judas rather than on Malchus.

But under all these disguises there lurked a wicked heart. Under the colour of piety to God, charity to the poor, and reverence for his master, he was carrying on the most vile and detestable purposes.

Who is there, but must abhor this character? The most vicious man living detests the designing wretch, who, under an affected show of sanctity, or benevolence, or friendship, or public spirit, sacrifices his religion, his conscience, his friend, or his country, to his own private interest.

When we see and loathe hypocrisy in another, let us take care to avoid it ourselves. Let us act, not as pleasing men, but as pleasing God, who searches the heart. Let us be the same men in reality, as we would appear to be in the view of the world.

4. We see the dangerous influence of *covetousness*. This led Judas on, from sin to sin, till it had completed his ruin. "The love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have indulged, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. They have fallen into temptations and snares and many foolish and pernicious lusts, which have drowned them in destruction." Important therefore is the caution given by our Saviour, "Take heed and beware of covetousness."

5. We see that *one sin* indulged naturally leads to *another*.

Judas made as good a profession as his brethren. But he was under the dominion of covetousness. He believed Jesus to be the Messiah, but expected he would erect a temporal kingdom; and he followed him with a view to the honors and riches, which, under that kingdom, he hoped to enjoy. Upon a particular occasion Christ explained the spiritual nature and design of his office in the hearing of the twelve, and of others who frequently attended on his preaching. On hearing that his kingdom was not of this world, many of his hearers left him in disgust. Judas, though

he did not join in the defection, was one of those, who were offended. Jesus asks the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter, in behalf of the rest, professes a resolution to continue with him. Jesus says, "I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." He spake of Judas, intimating, that though they still attended on him, yet one of them was a secret enemy to him on account of the contrariety of his doctrines to the worldly views of that disciple.

His covetousness not only took offence at Christ's preaching, but prompted him to rob the common treasury, which perhaps he thought he might innocently do, as he had the trouble of managing it. And yet he had no thought of selling his master. But by indulgence his lust gained strength, and finally urged him to this fatal step.

Beware then of the first beginnings of vice; resist the first temptation to evil; mortify every lust in its first appearance; "for lust, when it is conceived, brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death."

6. We learn that a *wicked heart* gives *satan* his greatest *advantage* to succeed in his temptations.

John says, "The devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ." Luke says, "satan entered into him, and he went and communed with the chief priests, how he might betray him." But covetousness is represented as having had a leading influence in the business. He went to the chief priests, and said, "What will ye give me? And they covenanted with him." The devil tempted him by stirring up the lust which he had conceived. What power satan has over men, they put into his hands by indulging their own wicked inclinations. Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie unto the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price, for which he had sold his estate. But then he is said "to have conceived this thing in his own heart, and to have agreed with his wife to tempt the Spirit of the Lord." The apostle speaks of some, in whom the prince of the power of the air works effectually. But these are called "children of disobedience, walking according to the course of the world, and according to the prince of the power of the air."

Men's chief danger is not from the devil, but from their own lusts. "They are tempted, when they are drawn away of their own lusts and enticed." The true way to defeat temptations, is to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. When the prince of darkness came to our Saviour, he found nothing in him, and his temptations had no effect.

Men often complain, that, though they are much in prayer, temptations beset them and prevail against them. But remember, you must watch as well as pray. It is vain to pray for grace to secure you from temptations, if you indulge the lusts, which of themselves draw you aside. If you would prevent, or repel temptations, begin with yourselves. Resist the enemy which is within you. Thus you may hope for grace to help in time of need.

We often read, in scripture, of men's acting under the power and influence of the devil; but this is never alleged in extenuation, but always in aggravation of their guilt, because it is by their own wickedness, that they fall under his influence.

7. We learn, that none are capable of doing so much injury to religion as the *professors* of it.

Judas, being one of the twelve, had it in his power to betray Jesus into the hands of his enemies, and satan used him as an instrument for this purpose.

Let professors beware, lest they become satan's tools to accomplish his infernal work. Let them beware, lest by a corrupt conversation, or evil example, or dangerous counsels, or by neglecting the ordinances of Christ, or acting contrary to their assumed character, they wound the credit of that religion, which they profess to believe. Having named the name of Christ, let them depart from iniquity, and so walk, that their good may not be evil spoken of, but that others, seeing their holy conversation may glorify God. Some will say, If professors may do so much injury to Christ, it is dangerous to make a profession. Rather say, dangerous to violate it.

Finally: We have marked it as an aggravation of Judas' crime, that he betrayed his Lord in the time and place of his devotions, and by a profession of affection and friendship. He not

only absented himself from the place, whither Christ, with some of his disciples, had resorted for prayer; but was all this time carrying on a design against him, and only came thither at last, to execute the wicked design.

Let us take heed, that we do not imitate this hypocritical and treacherous disciple. We profess to be the friends of Christ. In testimony of our regard to him, we come to his house, and often eat at his table. Here we are to renounce all guile, hypocrisy, envy, malice, and wickedness, and to bring hearts filled with pious regards to him and kind affections to one another. If we absent ourselves for worldly ends, or come with hearts disaffected to him, to his religion and his disciples—if we hear his word with prejudice and reject its influence—if we eat of his bread, and lift up our heel against him—if we give him a salutation expressive of affection, and go away acting in opposition to his honor and interest; what do we better than betray him with a kiss? While we profess to be his friends, let us testify our regard to him by a conformity to his example, by obedience to his commands and by an active zeal in promoting his cause. “Ye are my friends,” says he, “if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

I have finished the first branch of our subject. To the other we may attend at a future opportunity.

SERMON XXIII.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHARACTER OF JUDAS.

MATTHEW XXVII. 3, 4, 5.

Then Judas, which betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, &c.

IN a former discourse, we considered the crime of Judas, with the motives leading to it, and the aggravations attending it; and we pointed out some instructions which the story suggests to us.

We shall now, as was proposed,

II. Consider the *consequences* of this transgression in the remorse which it awakened in his mind, and the end to which it brought him.

When he saw that his Lord was condemned, he repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and rulers, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood. When they replied, What is that to us? See thou to it, he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple.

It will naturally be asked, wherein lay the defect of his repentance? He confessed that he had sinned; he declared that Jesus, whom he had betrayed, was innocent; and he returned the reward of his iniquity, and doubtless solicited his Lord's release. What could he do more?

Truly, if we had heard nothing more concerning him, we should be inclined to hope, that his repentance was sincere, and that he obtained pardon. But we are told, that he was a son of perdition, that he destroyed his own life, that he is gone to his place, and that it had been good for him not to have been born. Hence, though he is said to have repented, we must conclude, that his repentance fell essentially short of that to which pardon is promised. But where was the defect?

The story mentions two things wanting in his repentance to render it acceptable; one is a proper principle or motive, and the other is *faith* or *hope* in God's mercy.

1. His repentance was not from a proper *motive*. It was not the effect of a godly sorrow, but a fruit of the sorrow of the world.

“When he saw, that Jesus was *condemned*, he repented himself.”

It was a common opinion among the Jews, that the Messiah would not die. The disciples seem to have fallen into this error. They expected, that he would erect a temporal kingdom. So strong was this expectation, that after his resurrection they asked him, if he would now restore the kingdom to Israel. Judas, in the perpetration of his treachery, went on from step to step with cool deliberation and without one misgiving thought; quieting his mind, no doubt, with a persuasion, that his master would convey himself out of the hands of the soldiers, as he had before escaped the multitude who had sought to stone him, and the rabble who attempted to throw him down a precipice; or that in some miraculous way he would effect his own preservation, and soon set up his kingdom. Had Jesus done this, the traitor would have been satisfied. But here he was disappointed. He sees the soldiers take his Lord, bind him and lead him away to the assembled council; he sees false witnesses rise against him; he sees the council condemn him as worthy of death, and send him to the governor for a sentence to legalize his execution; and under all this he sees him still patient and submissive; and now, beginning to despair of his Lord's deliverance, he repents of what, by his means, had taken place. But he repented, not of the *sin*; he repented

only of the *consequence* of the sin. Whether Jesus had escaped the snare, or not, still the traitor's crime was the same. The essence of sin lies not in the event which follows from it, but in the nature of the action, and the evil temper with which it is performed. And the essence of repentance consists not in a sorrow for the unhappy *consequences* of a sinful action, but in a hatred of the *action* itself, and of the corrupt *disposition* which accompanied it. Godly sorrow is a sorrow for sin, as contrary to the will of God. This works repentance to salvation. The sorrow of the world, is a sorrow only for worldly disappointments and calamities; and this often works death.

2. Judas repented without hope of pardon, and his despair urged him to suicide. He had other views of his conduct, when he saw the issue of it, than he had while he was contriving it. As soon as he saw that his Lord was condemned, he, in the horror of guilt and the mortification of disappointment, went to the priests and rulers, returned the money he had received, confessed that he had sinned, and declared that his master was innocent.

By this restitution, confession and declaration, he probably hoped still to obtain his Lord's release. But when he found the rulers fixed in their resolution, and heard their reply, "What is that to us? see thou to it," his despair was completed. He saw he could not recall his action, and without doing this, he imagined there could be no pardon for him. And he threw down the money, and went and hanged himself. He *hanged himself*, says St. Matthew. Peter, giving an account of his death, says, that "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst and all his bowels gushed out." It hence appears probable, that the traitor hanged himself on a tree, growing perhaps near the top of a precipice, and that the branch on which, or the cord by which he was suspended, giving way, he fell headlong, and was dashed in pieces by the fall.

There can be no genuine repentance without hope in divine mercy. The goodness of God is revealed to lead sinners to repentance. If under a conviction of sin, they shut their eyes against the discovery of divine grace, their conviction may produce horror and amazement, but will not draw their hearts to God, nor incline them to love and serve him. The true penitent, under the

most aggravating view of his guilt, still relies on the abundant mercy of God, which, he trusts, is ready to forgive the greatest, as well as the smallest sins—the sins for which reparation cannot be made, as well as those for which it can be made, to the persons injured. Judas imagined, that if he could prevail with his Lord's enemies to dismiss him, he should make some atonement for his treachery, and might possibly obtain forgiveness. Failing here, he viewed his case as hopeless.

But a real penitent, while he studies to make reparation for injuries where he can, and to recall, as far as is in his power, the wrongs which he has done, trusts not in these, or in any other works which he has done or can do, as an expiation of his guilt or a foundation of pardon, but, under a conscious sense of unworthiness, relies on the mercy of the Being whom he has offended.

It may be enquired, whether Judas' crime was not of such a nature as to exclude him from hope. The answer is, that as pardon is promised to *all* sin on repentance, no sin excludes from hope further than it is inconsistent with repentance. Judas' crime answers not to the description which Christ has given of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and the apostle teaches us that even *this* sin is irremissible, only because the persons guilty of it, cannot be renewed to repentance.

The Jews, who made use of Judas' treachery to put Jesus to death, are called "his betrayers and murderers." Some of these, pricked in their hearts with a conviction of their sin, enquired of the apostles, "What shall we do?" Is there any hope for *us*? Peter answered, "Repent for the remission of sins, for the promise is to you."

Despair of mercy is always unreasonable. There can be no reason for it, but in cases of such absolute stupidity, as admit no repentance. And in such cases the horrors of desperation cannot be felt.

It may further be asked, whether Christ's previous declaration concerning the traitor, that "it had been good for him not to have been born," did not give Judas reason to conclude, that he could not be forgiven?

No ; it did not. This is to be understood as a declaration of the great *wickedness* and consequent *danger* of such a sinner. But all threatenings of future punishment against particular guilty characters, are grounded on the supposition of continued and final impenitence. So was the threatening in this case. Jeremiah's explanation of God's threatenings applies to persons, as well as to nations. Christ foreknew Judas' impenitence, as well as his crime. But Christ's foreknowledge could be no reason with Judas either for his crime, or impenitence. Christ applied to the Jews in his day the words of Isaiah concerning their fathers, that they had closed their eyes, and hardened their hearts, lest they should be converted and healed. But neither the prophet's denunciation, nor Christ's application could be any reason for impenitence or despair either in the fathers, or the children.

Such is the mercy of God, the efficacy of Christ's atonement and the extent of gospel promises, that no man has reason for despair from any cause but his own hardness and impenitence. In proportion as a sinner finds himself more hardened in sin and more assimilated to the character of those who are given over to a reprobate mind, he has more reason to fear, that his case is growing desperate. But if this view of his case awakens in him a serious concern, this shows, that he is not forsaken of God, and may justly encourage his application to mercy.

But as God had ordained, that Jesus should die for our redemption, was not the act of Judas, in betraying him to his enemies, a necessary part of the divine plan ? Was not this a necessary step to that end ? We cannot say it was. It was certainly ordained in the divine counsel, that Jesus should die, and should die *voluntarily*, for the salvation of sinners ; and as God foresaw the wickedness of Judas, and of the Jewish rulers, no other means were necessary to accomplish his purpose, than those which took place in consequence of that wickedness. But if the Jews had believed in Jesus, and if Judas had been faithful to his Lord, we have not any warrant to say, that God's purpose must have been defeated for want of means to accomplish it. "The spirit of the Lord is not straitened." Judas involved himself in all the guilt of betraying his Lord. But he gave the token so hastily, that the

soldiers did not discriminate the person of Jesus, nor apprehend him till he had offered himself. He went forward to them, enquired whom they sought, and when they told him, he voluntarily delivered himself into their hands. And when his hour was come, he might have done this, even though Judas had been an honest man.

What has been said may suffice for the illustration of the story under consideration. We shall conclude with some remarks upon it.

1. The *confession* of Judas is a decisive *evidence* in favour of the character and doctrines of Jesus Christ.

Had there been any thing immoral in his conduct, or deceptive in his design ; had his pretended miracles been fraudulent, or his scheme of religion an imposture ; had there been a studied contrivance to subvert the government, or to form a party and set him at the head of it, Judas, who had been one of his family, must have been in the secret ; and, after he had betrayed his master, he would have divulged it. Thus he would have saved his credit, and gratified his avarice ; for to obtain such a testimony, the priests and elders would have stuck at no price. Therefore Judas' declaration of his Lord's innocence, and the horror which he discovered for having betrayed him, is an undeniable proof that Jesus was, what he declared himself to be, the Son of God and a teacher sent from him.

2. *Associates* in wickedness are miserable comforters to a sinner under the horrors of guilt.

Judas, in this condition, went to the rulers who had employed him, confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood, and begged them to take back their money. They saw his distress, but treated it with contempt. "What is that to us ? See *thou* to it." Their own end was answered, and they had no further concern for him. They had used him as far as he was an instrument to their purpose ; and now they cared not what became of him. Learn, then, to have no confederacy with unprincipled and wicked men—to yield them no assistance in their evil designs—to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Men who had any feelings of humanity, or principles of justice, would, on such a proof of the accused person's innocence, have been softened into compassion, and stopped their proceedings. But whether Jesus was guilty or innocent, really was not the question with the judges. All they wanted was to destroy a man whom they hated, because he exposed their hypocrisy and reprov'd their vices.

Dreadful is the state of a people under such rulers as these. No wonder that ruin soon involved them. How inconsistent with themselves were these murderers? The money, which they had given as the price of innocent blood, they scrupled to put into the treasury of the temple, and they applied it to the purchase of a burying place for strangers. Bad men will make some pretensions to religion; but their religion is not consistent with itself. The hypocrites, who scrupled to apply to a sacred use the money, which was the price of blood, had no scruple to call false testimony, and hire perfidy, that they might shed that blood; nor would they relinquish their design, when they had full evidence that the blood was innocent.

3. Men's *evil designs*, even in this world, often *issue differently* from what they intend and expect.

This is obvious in the case of Judas. And it is equally obvious in the case of the Jewish rulers. They sought Christ's death, lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation. And by effecting his death they brought on themselves and their country the very calamity which they intended to avert. The same is obvious in a thousand other instances. By the dishonest arts which men practise for worldly ends, they involve themselves, their families, their friends, and sometimes their country, in those inextricable snares and intolerable evils, of which they imagined there was no danger. "They sink into the pit which they digged, and in the net which they have spread is their own foot taken." Let us never propose to ourselves an unworthy end, nor pursue a good end by unworthy means; but inflexibly adhere to the rules of virtue, whatever present evil we may incur, or whatever seeming advantage we may forego. The moment we deviate from the path of rectitude, we lose all our security, and expose ourselves

not only to some obvious dangers, but to innumerable hidden mischiefs. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once."

4. We see the *power of conscience*.

Judas, while he was engaged in his wicked design, felt no inward rebukes. But when he had completed his villainy, conscience arose and fell upon him with enraged violence. The scripture speaks of some whose conscience is so seared, that they commit iniquity with greediness. But though conscience, often opposed and suppressed, ceases to interpose its restraints, yet it does not forget to bring forward its reproaches. When passion and lust urge the commission of a crime, conscience cannot be heard. But when the crime is finished, passion and lust subside, and then conscience will awake and come forward with dreadful reflections and upbraidings. This is apparent in the case not only of Judas, but also of Cain, of Herod, and of Joseph's brethren, whose stories you have often read. If we would prevent the accusations of conscience, let us seasonably listen to her sober dictates.

Sin in reflection has a different appearance from that which it wore in the time of commission. Thus it deceives men, and then slays them. They invent various excuses before-hand; but when an awakened conscience lays their wickedness before them, in its true colours, their former excuses vanish. They see the force of the apostle's demand, "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." The true reason, why sinners so seldom think on their ways, is, because whenever they do so, they are constrained to condemn themselves.

When you are tempted to any evil, take time to consider, "what you will do in the end thereof;" what views you will have of it on reflection; how it will appear, when the temptation is removed, and the solemn scenes of futurity open to you; whether conscience, in an honest and sober hour, will excuse or reproach you. Do that and only that, which, you know, you shall approve in the review.

5. *Ill-gotten wealth* is a poor cordial for a wounded soul.

Judas could sell his master for money. But when he had gotten the money, he soon wished it back from whence it came. The sight of it was intolerable, and he went and threw it down at the feet of the men from whom he had received it. The triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment. Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue, yet his meat in his bowels is turned; it is the gall of asps within him. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again. God shall cast them out of his belly. That which he labored for, he shall restore; according to his substance shall his restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein. Because he hath oppressed and forsaken the poor, he shall not feel quietness within him, nor save of that which he desired.

The world is worth nothing to a man further than he can enjoy it. What madness it is then to pursue the world by such dishonest means, as will render him incapable of enjoying the world, and even of enjoying himself?

6. From the example before us, we see the awful danger of going on presumptuously in a course of wickedness.

Judas sinned against the express warnings of his master, and a review of his conduct plunged him into despair. You have not sinned like him. But is there no known sin, which you indulge, and which you repeat in opposition to the dictates of conscience and the warnings of God? You flatter yourselves, that you may hereafter obtain mercy by repentance. But consider the case of Judas. You may be hardened into stupidity by the deceitfulness of sin; or if you should at length be awakened to a sense of your guilt, this awakening, instead of bringing you to repentance, may plunge you into despair. Despair, we have said, is always unreasonable. But if you are so unreasonable as to continue in sin when mercy is offered, how do you know but you shall be so unreasonable as to despair of mercy, when a sense of guilt with all its aggravations, shall crowd upon your minds? Know therefore, in this your day, the things which belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes.

7. We see the *dreadful condition* of a sinner, when conscience, enraged with guilt, is let loose to torment him.

Judas, in this case, was filled with misery insupportable. He chose strangling and death rather than life. Destruction from the Lord was a terror to him. He was a terror to himself. The pains of hell got hold on him. In the frenzy of despair, he, for relief from his fears, plunged himself into that destruction which he feared.

His case gives us some idea of the torments of hell. There the remembrance of past sins, and of former abused mercies, the upbraidings of a guilty conscience, the sensations of Divine anger, and total desperation of deliverance, will conspire to produce consummate misery.

Be persuaded, then, to accept Divine mercy, while it is offered.

This same Saviour, whom Judas betrayed at the expense of his own salvation, has brought salvation to you. He has died to make atonement for your guilt, and through his atonement, pardon and life are freely offered to you. The conditions of your acceptance are repentance of your sins and submission to, and reliance upon this wonderful Saviour. Reject not the blessings so dearly purchased, and so graciously tendered, lest hereafter, when you would inherit the blessings, you should find no place of repentance, though you should seek them carefully with tears.

Let not the imagination, that your sins are small, embolden you to continue in them. Judas, for a while, sinned in smaller instances; but these gradually hardened him to a fatal transgression. Let not the apprehension, that your guilt is great, extinguish your hope and discourage your repentance. Where sin has abounded, grace can much more abound. If God should be strict to mark iniquity, no flesh could stand before him. But there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared. With him there is mercy and plenteous redemption, that all may have hope. May he redeem us from all our iniquities.

Finally : Let each one enquire for himself, whether he has exercised that repentance, which entitles to pardon.

You have seen the defects of Judas' repentance. Is your's more sound? Is it your sin itself, or the unhappy consequence of sin, that afflicts you? If the latter only, you would have felt as much sorrow, and more indignation, had the same evil been brought on you by the sin of your neighbor; and your indignation against him might as well be called repentance, as your sorrow for your own sin. True repentance springs from *godly* sorrow—not from the sorrow of the world. It is repentance toward God; it is accompanied with contrition of heart, self-abhorrence, self-condemnation. If only the calamitous effect of sin, not the sin itself, is the spring of your sorrow, your repentance is no better than that of Judas, who, when he saw that his Lord was condemned and his prospect of worldly greatness was at an end, repented himself and returned the reward of his treason.

Is your repentance accompanied with a humble reliance on the mercy of God through the atonement of a dying Saviour.

Paul preached repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ accompanies true repentance.

Sin deserves punishment. Repentance removes not this desert of sin, nor makes atonement for it. Restitution, where it can be made, is a fruit of repentance. If your repentance stop short of this, it proceeds not so far as Judas' did. But in many cases no reparation can be made; and in few can the reparation be adequate. If you have corrupted a man's principles, vitiated his morals, wounded his body, or destroyed his property, reflection may awaken sorrow for what you have done; but *your* sorrow does not reform *his* manners, correct his principles, heal his wounds, or replace his property. Admitting that you do the best you can, yet you must leave much undone, which you would wish to do.

You must remember too, that all injuries to men are sins against God; and that there are many sins against God, which are not injuries to men. And what reparation will you make to him? In this case, who shall intreat for you? The Redeemer only. If you think that repentance and such reparation as you can make, will remove your guilt without any other atonement, your repentance is like that of Judas, who hoped to obtain from his Lord a

full forgiveness by procuring his release. He relied not on mercy, but on his own works. When he found his works unavailing, he saw no other resort. He sunk into despair.

By God's law, gain the knowledge of your sins, and of their exceeding guilt—know that no human works can expiate this guilt. Remember that repentance, though a necessary and a sure condition of pardon, makes no atonement; but pardon must come from the unbounded mercy of God—believe that his mercy is exercised to sinners through the atonement of the Saviour. Go, and fall down before him in deep repentance, fervent prayer and humble resolutions of future obedience.

Trust not in the works you have done, or shall do, as the ground of your acceptance; but rely on his grace in Christ Jesus for the pardon of sins that are past, and for help in time to come. And rejoice in this, as a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came to call sinners to repentance, and to save them who are lost.

SERMON XXIV.

THE PRESENT CONDITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE BELIEVER.

II. CORINTHIANS v. 1.

For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

IN the preceding chapter, the apostle had given an affecting account of the sufferings, which he and his brethren had endured in the cause of the gospel. At the fourteenth verse, he mentions the main ground of their support under their peculiar trials. They knew that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, would by him raise them up also. "For this cause," he adds, "we faint not; for though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day; for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen, are eternal."

The apostle may be understood as speaking in this manner; "The afflictions which we suffer in the cause of the gospel are many and great. But they do not dishearten us. We collect

from them every day new courage and vigor, being animated with this glorious expectation, that these transient trials will be succeeded by inexpressible and permanent glory. Upon this happy result of all our afflictions we hold the eye of our faith constantly fixed. And therefore we faint not ; for we know, that when our earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we shall have a better house, a building of God—a house not made with hands, but one which shall be eternal in the heavens.”

In these words, as connected with the preceding, we may observe,

I. An affecting representation of our present frail and mortal condition.

II. An animating description of the heavenly state.

III. The assurance which believers may have of their title to that state.

IV. And the support which they may thence derive under the troubles of life.

I. Here is an affecting representation of our present frail and mortal condition. We dwell in an earthly house—a tabernacle which shall be dissolved.

The body is compared to a *house*. It is the habitation of the soul.

A house is designed for the reception of some inhabitant. The body is called a house, because it is the residence of an immortal mind.

Matter and mind—flesh and spirit constitute the man.

The mind is the superior part of the man. He who occupies a house has more honor than the house. The spirit residing in the body has more worth than the body. It is our duty to keep the house in comfortable repair ; but our principal concern should be for the health and support of the spiritual occupant. No prudent man will hazard life to adorn his house. No wise christian will neglect the salvation of his soul for the gratification of carnal desires.

A house is usually furnished with apartments and utensils for the accommodation of the possessor. Our bodies are wonder-

fully made, and curiously constructed. They are furnished with members and organs suited to the works in which they may be employed in the present world. We must therefore glorify God in our bodies, as well as in our spirits—present them living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God—yield our members instruments of righteousness to him. We are to avoid all such indulgences, as would unfit the body for the use of the mind in the service of God. We must abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Lest we should think too highly of this house, the apostle calls it an *earthly* house. It becomes us often to consider our humble original—to look to the rock from which we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence we were digged. “The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul.” These bodies are only lumps of earth, moulded into a proper shape, and animated by the breath of God.

In regard to our original existence, and the materials of which we are made, we stand on a level with worms, with insects, with the most despicable animals. Yea, the dust on which we tread is the same substance with that out of which our bodies were made, and from which they are still nourished. They are but common dust wrought up by the hand of God into their present form, to serve a particular purpose for a season; and when this purpose is accomplished, they will, like other useless buildings, either be taken down, or left to fall into ruins.

They are called earthly houses to denote their fragility—their weakness—their tendency to decay. They are not like structures of marble, which will sustain the violence of accidents, or endure the wastes of time; but like earthen vessels, which yield to the slightest stroke. They are formed with exquisite skill, but are not made to last long. They are hastening to the dust. They may be broken by casualty; or, if they escape accidents, they will soon wear out by use.

What a humbling consideration. These bodies, which we defend with care—adorn with art—nourish by labor—these bodies

whose strength is our boast, and whose beauty is our pride, will soon be reduced to deformity, impotence and dust—will soon be mixed and confused with common earth.

Do you glory in your parentage—in your possessions? Do you despise others as being, in these respects, your inferiors? What are the things in which you glory? Are your bodies made of better clay? Were they better moulded? Are they less frail—less liable to dissolution? Is not your property collected from earth? Does it not grow out of dust? May it not soon become dust and be scattered with the wind? What preeminence have you above them? The grave is the place for all—all were made of dust, and all turn to dust again.

The apostle calls the body a house—but he corrects and qualifies the term, as if it were too favorable to be applied to a mortal body. He signifies that it is a *tent* rather than a house—“Our earthly house of this *tabernacle*.”

The body is rather a temporary lodging, than a real habitation for the soul. It is called a *tabernacle*, because it is moveable. It is, like a tent, to be carried from place to place, as occasion may require. We have here no abiding city—no permanent habitation. This is a world full of change. We often change the place of our abode. Or if we dwell in the same place, our condition is changing. Our bodies are decaying with age. Our property may be wasted by the events of time. Our friends are leaving us and going down to the grave.

A tent is so slightly compacted that it may easily be taken to pieces. Our bodies were not built for ages, but only for a few days. Hence their frame is weak and tender.

A tent is not a fixed habitation, but an occasional shelter. Such is the body. Soon we must quit our present tabernacle, for a more permanent abode.

A tabernacle denotes a state of pilgrimage. We are strangers and pilgrims on earth. We are at a distance from our proper home. We are exposed to many inconveniences and trials. But we are on our homeward journey. We hope, by and by, to find better accommodations. If we say, we are pilgrims, we declare

plainly that we seek a heavenly country. Let us keep this in our eye, and be careful that we miss not our way, nor loiter on our journey. Our time makes progress; let us make progress in holiness, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling.

Tents are lodgings for soldiers. By this name christians are called. We are acting in a military character. Let us behave as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Take to us the whole armor of God—watch against a surprize—quit ourselves like men and be strong—fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life.

To finish the description of our present mortal state, the apostle says, “These tents shall be dissolved.”

In the future state, after some distant period, we shall resume these bodies; or receive bodies made of the same materials of which these were made.

But they must first be dissolved—must be reduced to their first principles—must be new-moulded, and wrought up and fashioned in a different manner. That which is sown a natural body, must be raised a spiritual body, that it may be fitted for its new station. Flesh and blood, in their present state, cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Dissolution is the fate appointed for all, except those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ. They will undergo an instantaneous change in their mortal frame, probably resembling in some respects the change of death. It will be death and the resurrection in the same moment. It will be putting off this earthly tabernacle and putting on the spiritual house at the same time, without a perceptible interval.

These earthly bodies, these material houses, are so constructed, that they cannot long weather out the storms which beat upon them. They need frequent repairs, and no repairs can preserve them long. Their joints will be loosed, their bands will be broken, their whole frame will tumble into ruins. This is their unavoidable fate, though no violence should befall them. But innumerable casualties threaten them, by any of which their structure may be demolished. Such is our frailty in the present state.

Let us consider,

II. The description, by which the apostle contrasts the heavenly with the earthly state. "We have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The apostle may here be supposed to refer to the spiritual, incorruptible, glorious body, with which the saints will be clothed at the resurrection of the just. This stands in a natural opposition to our earthly house of this tabernacle. This vile body will then be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body according to that mighty power by which he is able to subdue all things unto himself. Or, it may rather refer to the heavenly state in general, which in scripture is called the house of God, and a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. In either view, the contrast between our present and our future house, is striking.

Here our house is but a tent; but when this is dissolved, we shall have a house worthy of the name—a proper—a settled, immoveable abode. Our Lord says to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions—I go to prepare a place for you." "While we are at home in the body," says the apostle, "we are absent from the Lord; we desire rather to be absent from the body, and at home with the Lord." Here we are strangers and sojourners, having no certain dwelling place. There we shall receive a city which cannot be moved; we shall be fixed as pillars in the temple of God, and go no more out.

Here we sojourn in tents of earthly materials. Hereafter we shall have a building in heaven, not earthly and corruptible, but spiritual and incorruptible—a house not exposed to the violence of storms and the injuries of accidents, but situated in a peaceful region, where it will stand secure and unmolested.

These tabernacles are to be dissolved. Our house in the heavens will be eternal—subject to no decay and needing no repair. The mansion will never be taken down, or the inhabitant removed. The place is not only purchased, but prepared by the Redeemer—and it is well prepared. He has left nothing undone, which needed to be done. It is incorruptible, undefiled, undecaying. reserved in heaven for them who love his appearing.

Pious souls sojourn here as in a strange country, dwelling in tents, as was said of the patriarchs. But they have the promise of a city which hath foundations—of a kingdom which cannot be moved. When they shall have finished their pilgrimage, they will receive the promise of an eternal inheritance.

The heavenly habitation is said to be a building of God—an house not made with hands.

Our present houses of clay are, indeed, the work of God. He hath made us, and not we ourselves. But our house in heaven is called the building of God, by way of eminence. It is a most glorious work of God—a work of which there can be no exact pattern on earth. St. John, describing the glories of the heavenly state, borrows from nature and from art, the richest, purest and grandest images. But all these fall short of the reality. For he adds, 'The glory of God doth lighten it, and it hath no need of the sun. It cannot now appear, what we shall be when we arrive there. For it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him.

Heaven may be called a building of God, to signify, that it is a place where God himself dwells in a peculiar manner. God's essential presence is universal. It is confined to no place. He is a God at hand and a God afar off. The heavens, even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. But we may collect from scripture that there is a place in the universe, where he manifests his glory in a special and peculiar manner—in such a manner as it is manifested in no other place. There the angels worship him—there the spirits of just men will be admitted to behold his majesty—there the blessed Jesus sits enthroned in his own glory and the glory of the Father. Our Saviour says, 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, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

St. John, in his vision, heard a voice out of heaven, saying, "The tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and he shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their

eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, for the former things are passed away." This imports the great happiness and glory, which holy souls shall enjoy in heaven. When these their earthly tabernacles shall be dissolved, they will be received into a building of God—into God's own house. When they are absent from the body, they will be at home with the Lord. What greater felicity can be imagined, than to dwell in God's immediate presence. In the expectation of this happiness, the Psalmist says, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness. Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore.

How different is our present state from the state which we have in prospect? Here we sojourn in earthly houses—in moveable tents, soon to be dissolved. Here we are subject to sorrow and pain—sickness and death. There we expect to dwell in a building of God—in his glorious presence, and to enjoy a fulness of all that we can desire, without interruption and without fear of change.

Let us withdraw our affections from this world and direct them to a better state. Let us seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Let us secure a title to the inheritance of the saints in light.

Let us examine the ground of our hopes. Let us enquire whether our souls are prepared for the enjoyments of the future world—whether we have any anticipations of those enjoyments now—whether our heaven is already begun in communion with God, in the love of his worship, in a conformity to the mind that is in Christ, and in benevolence to our fellow-men and in affection to our christian brethren.

Let us often consider, to whom we are indebted for these glorious prospects. It is Jesus the Son of God, who has opened heaven for our reception and has marked the course in which we may arrive thither. He has suffered on the cross the effects of God's wrath against the sins of men, that they might be delivered from the wrath to come. He has abolished death and brought

life and immortality to light. He has gone before us in the way which leads up to the heavenly world. He has gone thither to prepare a place for his humble followers. He there lives to make intercession for them. When they are dismissed from their present abode, they will ascend to him, and be at home with him. His gracious presence will contribute much to the felicity of the heavenly state. Paul had a desire to depart, that so he might be with Christ. This he knew would be far better than to abide in the flesh.

Communion with Christ in ordinances is a pleasure to the christian now. In heaven there will be a communion more intimate and more delightful.

The present world is rendered more pleasant to the believer by means of the ordinances of Christ. Were he deprived of these, he would lose the better part of his happiness on earth. When the Psalmist referred it to God to choose an inheritance for him, he expressed an ardent desire, that it might be in a place where God was known and his worship enjoyed. This will be an object of attention with every good man, when he changes the place of his habitation.

We have the privilege of divine worship; and some of us are now about to pay our devout acknowledgments to our gracious Redeemer for the heavenly hopes which he has set before us. Let our hearts rise to him in grateful affections for the wonderful things he has done for us, and the glorious prospects he has opened to us. And let us endeavor by means of his ordinances, and of the ordinance now before us, to acquire such a love and conformity to Christ, that we may be able to say—We know that when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

SERMON XXV.

THE PRESENT CONDITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE BELIEVER.

II. CORINTHIANS v. 1.

For we know, &c.

WE have considered the affecting representation which the apostle gives us of our present mortal condition. And his animating description of the happiness of the heavenly state.

We shall now, in the third place,

III. Attend to the *assurance* with which he speaks on this subject.

We *know*, that if our *earthly* house be dissolved, we have a *building of God*.

The apostle may be understood as expressing an assurance of a future state of happiness; and a confidence of his own title to that state.

1. We may understand the apostle as expressing an assurance, that there is a state of happiness in reserve for true christians.

The evidences of such a state he suggests in our context, and in the parallel place in **Romans**.

He supposes it to be a common sentiment, founded in the reason of mankind, that there is a God—that God exercises a gov-

ernment over men, and will make a difference between the righteous and the wicked—between them who serve him, and them who rebel against him.

But this difference is not made in the present state. Here good men often have an uncommon share in the calamities of life; and there are cases in which they suffer on account of their righteousness.

This was the case of the apostles. “We are troubled on every side—we are persecuted—we bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus. If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men the most miserable.”

Can it be that that God will subject to peculiar miseries, and leave without reward, his most faithful servants—those who renounce all worldly interests and prospects for promoting his cause among their fellow-men?

This would contradict all our ideas of the equity of a moral government. There must then be another state in which their services, sufferings and self-denials may be rewarded. “For this cause,” says the apostle, “we faint not. Though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

This argument the apostle applies to the case of the patriarchs. God had promised to be their God. But how was this promise made good? Not in any worldly accommodations; for they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the world. In respect of earthly blessings they fared no better than many wicked men, to whom no such promise was made. The apostle thus answers this objection; “God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.”

Another argument for a future state, urged by the apostle, is the desire of immortality common to men, and operating with peculiar strength in sincere christians. “We know that we have a building of God; for in this tabernacle we groan earnestly, desiring to be cloathed upon with our house which is from heaven.” How is this desire an evidence of our immortality? The apostle says, “He who hath wrought us to this selfsame thing, is God.”

And if God has put this desire into us, he certainly has prepared an object to satisfy it.

But how does it appear, that it is *God* who has wrought us to this desire? Because it is universal. “The earnest expectation of the creature, the human race, waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. We know that the whole creation, or every human creature, groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, even the redemption of the body.”

As a confirmation of the doctrine of the resurrection and a future life, the apostle refers us to the *resurrection of Jesus Christ*. “We have the spirit of faith—we believe, and therefore speak, knowing, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” Christ has risen and become the first fruits of them who sleep. Reason makes it credible, that the dead shall rise and live. Christ’s resurrection makes it certain. He foretold his own death and resurrection. He has promised also the future existence and happiness of his faithful disciples. What he predicted has been verified in himself. Hence we may conclude, that what he has promised will be accomplished in others.

2. The apostle may be understood in the text as expressing a strong persuasion of his own interest in the happiness of a future life.

Hence we may observe, that a *knowledge* of our title to heavenly happiness is attainable. The apostle, not only in our text, but in various other places, speaks with great confidence, of the happiness in reserve for him after the close of his present services for Christ. And he desires that every christian give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.

This knowledge, or assurance, however, is of the moral kind. It is not like the knowledge which comes by sense. We walk by *faith*; not by *sight*. “We are saved by *hope*. But hope which is *seen*, is *not hope*; for that which a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?”

If Christian assurance were like the evidence of sight, hope would be superseded. We are to pray, that God would give us a good hope through grace, and we are to give diligence, that we may abound in hope.

The apostle in our text says, We *know* that we have a building of God in heaven. He adds, we are *confident*, or fully persuaded, that when we are absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord. St. John says, We know that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him and shall see him as he is; and every one that hath this *hope* purifieth himself as he is pure. The *full assurance*, of which the apostle speaks, is the full assurance of *hope*, or a hope which gives the mind full satisfaction.

There is no doubt, but that God, if he so pleases, can give to good men a direct and immediate discovery of their title to heaven, without leaving them to work out their salvation with fear. But we have no reason to expect this, for he has instructed us to seek the assurance of hope by diligence in the duties of religion, and to make our calling and election sure by adding to our faith all the virtues of the christian character. If we do these things, we shall never fall.

Our assurance of future glory depends on the *promises* which God has made in his word. We hope for eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, has promised. The *conditions* of these promises, are repentance of sin, faith in God through Christ, and purity of heart in conformity to the image of God. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God, and be admitted into his kingdom. "God has given us exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we might become partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the pollutions that are in the world through lust." "Having therefore these promises," says the apostle, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." Our hope of an interest in these promises must depend on our experience of their influence in purifying our hearts. And our hope may be stronger in proportion to this influence. The more we abound in the fruits of righteousness, the more we may abound in the hope of eternal life.

The apostle exhorts christians to *fear*, lest a promise being left them of entering into the heavenly rest, they should finally come short. This fear must not arise from a distrust of God, but from a distrust of themselves—not from a doubt whether God's promises are sure; but from a doubt whether their own hearts are right. Therefore they are directed to examine themselves whether they be in the faith, and to prove their own works, that they may have rejoicing in themselves. From hence it follows,

1. That a full and satisfactory hope is not to be attained *suddenly*. New converts cannot have had opportunity to prove their sincerity. There must be time to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, before we can feel any thing like an assurance, that our repentance is sincere. They who lay aside all fear—all self-distrust, immediately on their supposed conversion, discover more of the presumption of the hypocrite, than of the humility of the christian. It requires much labor, self-denial and vigilance, a good knowledge of religion and of the heart, and a steady, uniform practice of piety, in order to our making our election sure. All this cannot be the work and experience of a day. They who come by their assurance suddenly and easily—without taking much time, or employing much attention, may well suspect, that it stands on sandy ground, not on a firm foundation. It follows,

2. That such an assurance as banishes all fear and self-distrust, is not an ordinary attainment.

We pretend not to say, what God may do for some chosen vessels on special and extraordinary occasions—for some eminent servants in season of persecution—for some christians of high experience near the close of life. But we speak of ordinary christian attainments.

As our hopes ought to bear some proportion to our improvements in holiness; and as holiness, in the best christians, is imperfect in the present state, it must be expected, that hope, as well as other graces, will be imperfect. Few christians can, on solid ground, rise above what the apostle calls “a good hope through grace.” If they trust, generally, that their hearts are right with God, yet there are times, when a view of their imperfections in duty, the dulness of their heavenly affections, and the remaining

inward corruptions, awaken anxious suspicions. They apply to themselves the directions given to christians in general. Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. If ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

It follows further,

3. That growth in holiness is one of the safest grounds on which this hope can rest.

The more eminent is our holiness, and the greater proficiency we make in the religious life, the clearer will be our evidence, that our hearts are sincere in the sight of God. If our heart condemn us not, then we may have confidence of our acceptance with him. St. John says, We know that when the Lord shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope *purifieth* himself as he is pure.

We may also infer,

4. That whenever a person finds, that his assurance, or his hope encourages him to remit his diligence in religion; he has just reason to call in question the sincerity of his heart.

God has wisely ordered, that in this imperfect state, the way to maintain christian hope should be the habitual exercise of a christian temper. If we have gained a satisfactory hope, and in consequence have become careless of our temper, and neglectful of our duty, imagining, that as our state is safe, our concern and diligence may be laid aside, it is an undoubted truth, that we have deceived ourselves, and seemed to be religious, when all our religion is vain. The religion which makes men vain, proud, fearless of sin, and regardless of duty, is a false religion. It is worse than none.

It follows once more, that the assurance of hope, as it is an important, so it is a difficult attainment. We are therefore to make it an object not only of desire, but of diligence. We are not to rest satisfied with any moderate attainments in goodness, but we must press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let as many as have come nearest to perfection, be thus minded. Paul kept under his body to bring it into subjection, lest by any means he should be a castaway.

In order to gain a good hope of glory, we must proceed in the following manner.

1. It is necessary that we obtain a good acquaintance with religion—that we not only be persuaded of the truth of religion in general, but also that we understand the way of salvation and the terms and conditions on which it is promised. In these points we may gain full satisfaction by looking into that gospel, which God has put into our hands. Here we are taught, that the happiness of eternal life is procured for us by Jesus Christ the Son of God who has suffered for our sins, that he might redeem us from the wrath to come, and bring us to God's presence—that this happiness consists in the enjoyment of God, whose favor is life—that our qualification for admission into his glorious presence is an assimilation to his character in purity, righteousness and benevolence—and that this holy temper is effected in us by Divine operation on our hearts, in concurrence with our faithful attendance on the means of knowledge and holiness, which God has appointed.

2. In order to a good hope of glory, we must renounce all known sin both in heart and life. Repentance is not only a conviction of, and sorrow for sin, but an actual forsaking of it with full purpose of heart to walk in the way of God's commands. This repentance is not an act once for all, but an habitual temper, to be carried into the religious life, and to be renewed in its exercises as often as we are conscious that we have transgressed. We must often think on our ways. And when we find that we have erred, we must without delay, turn our feet into God's testimonies.

Repentance must be followed with the real love and steady practice of righteousness, without the allowed neglect of known duty, or habitual toleration of known corruption in heart, or iniquity in life. If we would know whether our obedience be sincere and acceptable, we must enquire, whether it be regular and constant—whether it be impartial and unreserved—whether it proceed from the love of God as its principle—whether it be directed to the glory of God as its end—whether it aim at the favor of God as its object. But as there will be many imperfections discernible by us, both in our temper and life; therefore,

3. Religious *improvements* are necessary to a good hope. Hence we are directed to grow in grace—to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit—to go on to perfection. Though we should find much deficiency in our religious character, yet if by comparing the present with the past time, we really find that we are on the gaining hand—that we make some advances—that we rise more above known imperfections—that we keep our passions in better subjection—that our pious affections are more ardent—our faith more strong—our benevolence more active—our government of ourselves more steady and uniform, we have then good evidence of the existence of real religion in our hearts.

We have only to add,

IV. That this assurance of hope is the best support under the troubles of this mortal state. The apostle says, “For this cause we faint not; for we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house eternal in the heavens.”

The apostle here supposes the worst which can befall us in the world, that our affliction should issue in a dissolution of our frame; and yet he says, We faint not, because we hope for a building of God. If this hope will support us under the last distress of nature, much rather will it sustain us under the common burdens of life. In this view of his case, the christian sees, that all the afflictions which can attend him in his weak tabernacle and during his short pilgrimage, will be but light and transient; but that the happiness to be enjoyed in the world above will be full and lasting. He therefore reckons that all the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed, knowing that his present light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The shortness of his abode here, and the nearness of his departure hence, give his hope great advantage in viewing the glory which awaits him. Hope reaches forward after its object with longing desire. The nearer the object is to actual possession, the more it rejoices in the opening and brightening prospect. It looks

beyond present pains to that world of eternal felicity, which is soon to be enjoyed.

The christian thinks it a small matter how he fares here, as long as his future interest is secure, and as long as he is under the protection of God's promise, that all things shall work for his good—and that whether life or death—things present or things to come, all are his.

His heart is in heaven, because his God, his Saviour, his home, all his interest is there. Fully persuaded that the great object of his desire, his eternal salvation, is safely kept in reserve for him, he is willing, in this wilderness through which he is travelling to his eternal home, to submit to any inconveniences, which may put him in mind of home, keep him in the way thither, quicken his pace to it, and render it more delightful when he arrives.

Do we wish to escape the afflictions of the present state? This we cannot do, for we are mortal—our friends are mortal—the world in which we live is mutable and uncertain. But we may do that which is better—we may obtain that good hope, which will prepare us for, and sustain us under the afflictions of the world, and will anticipate the happy issue of all our afflictions in the glories of the heavenly state. Blessed are they who can say with the apostle, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord will give me in that day.

SERMON XXVI.

THE SECURITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

PSALM xcī. 1.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

WE live in a dangerous world—our substance is exposed to fire and storm—our limbs to casualties and wounds—our bodies to sickness and death, and our souls to temptations and snares. Many of the dangers which attend us are too secret to be foreseen, too sudden to be avoided, and too violent to be resisted. It is but little that we can do to secure ourselves and less that others can do to secure us. Go where we will, still dangers surround us—dwell where we can, evils await us. What then shall we do? Must we live in perpetual anxiety and fear? No: our text points out a method of personal safety and mental serenity. Let us repair to God, and we shall be secure under his protection. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

We will consider, what is intended by dwelling in God's secret place—and the safety arising from thence, expressed by adding, under the shadow of the Almighty,

I. We will first consider, what is intended by dwelling in the secret place of the most High.

The words teach us, that God has provided a place of safety to which we may resort—that it is a *secret* place, which many disregard, or overlook—that it is the place of the *most High*, and to find it we must direct our eyes above this world—and that we must *dwell* there—not merely cast an eye, or make a visit to it, but take up our abode. The expression imports nearness to God, and constant communion with him.

1. They who dwell in God's secret place, have, in their hearts, entered into his covenant.

The covenant of God is the secret place to which we must repair. The prophet says, "The *secret* of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant." In the covenant of grace, God offers himself to us to be *our* God. This is the great and comprehensive promise which it contains, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." This comprises every blessing that we need, or can reasonably desire. Such as the pardon of all our sins—free access to him in prayer—the supporting and comforting grace of his Holy Spirit—the guidance and protection of his providence, and a title to eternal life. They who are within the covenant of God, are interested in all these privileges.

The condition of our interest in the covenant, is the dedication of ourselves to him, or a submission to him as our God. And this is a secret transaction. There are, indeed, in covenanting with God, some visible and external acts. But the main substance of it is *internal*. It is a secret intercourse between God and the soul.

Repentance of sin is one thing implied in choosing God for *our* God. If we yield ourselves to him, we renounce every thing which is contrary to his will. If we submit to his government we disclaim all other lords. He is a holy God, and if we choose him for our God, we choose him in this character; and consequently we forsake all the ways of sin; for these are contrary to his will.

In repentance there are some things external. Confession of sin, reformation of life, and attendance on religious instructions, are in some measure visible acts; but the main and leading exercises of repentance, are inward and secret—they belong to the hidden man of the heart—such as meditation on God's holy law—convictions of guilt—humiliation for sin—godly sorrowing under a sense of its evil nature and tendency—resolutions against it—earnest desires of, and supplications for the sanctifying grace of God—conflicts with carnal lusts and criminal passions—watchfulness against the corruptions of the heart and the temptations of the world. These are exercises which belong to repentance. Of these the penitent soul is conscious in itself—but they are invisible and unknown to others.

Faith is implied in our entering into covenant with God. The covenant of grace is in the hands of a mediator. Jesus Christ is this mediator. He has by his atonement and intercession procured for us all the blessings which it contains. It is in him, that God reconciles the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses. It is through him, that he condescends to become the God and Father of unworthy creatures. It is by faith in Christ, that we draw near to God and become his children and the subjects of his grace and mercy. The *works* of faith are visible—but faith itself is a secret and humble grace—it is an inward exercise of the soul which the world cannot see. That humiliation and self-abasement—that view and apprehension of the worthiness of Christ and of the mercy of God in him—that consent of soul to receive him in all his characters—that reliance on his righteousness and strength—and that desire of conformity to his character, which are all included in saving faith, are secret and unseen.

So also is *self-dedication* a secret thing. They who are in covenant with God, have devoted themselves to him to serve and honor him with all their powers, and through all their existence. They give themselves to him to be his forever. They serve and honor him in an open and visible manner. But the *dedication* of themselves to him is an inward exercise. The view of God's perfections—the love of his character—the approbation of his commands—the choice of his service—the reliance on his

promises—the submission to his government, which are included in this dedication, are tempers and exercises, which none immediately know but they who *feel* them.

In these respects, they who take hold of, and embrace the covenant of God, come into the *secret* of the most High.

2. The promise in the text is to them who *dwell* in God's secret place.

To be in a state of security, we must not only consent to, but also abide in God's covenant. That temper with which we enter into this covenant, must be an abiding temper. Repentance, faith and self-dedication are not the whole extent and compass of religion; they are rather the beginning of religion. If we really repent of sin, we renounce it forever. If we sincerely believe in the Saviour, we commit our whole souls and all that we have to his keeping. If we truly dedicate ourselves to God, we give ourselves to him to be his in life and through eternity—we no more reckon ourselves to be our own, but to be wholly his.

Conversion to God is not merely an occasional and temporary transaction—but it is entering upon a new manner of life to be continued through our existence. That temper which begins in conversion is an abiding temper, and the main exercises of it are secret; as secret, in future, as they were at first.

The penitent *walks humbly* with God. He watches against sin and temptations—he laments his remaining corruptions—he seeks pardon for daily offences, and he trusts in the aids of divine grace in his conflicts with spiritual enemies. He goes on through life in a penitent and humble manner.

The believer *lives by faith*. The same faith by which he embraces the Saviour, still operates in his soul, and strengthens and animates him in the religious life. It brings to his view the great motives of religion and gives them an influence on his heart. It is the continual spring of his comfort, resolution and hope.

The convert serves God in newness of *spirit* as well as of life. He maintains the exercise of love to God. He meditates on the Divine perfections and commands—examines himself to discover his remaining sins, watches his steps to see his deviations from the path of duty—thinks on his ways, and when he finds he has gone

astray, he makes haste to turn his feet into God's testimonies. He often renews his self-dedication, and his holy resolutions, and gives diligence to make improvements in the virtues and works of religion.

In these secret exercises the power of godliness principally consists.

And, then,

3. To assist these exercises he attends with diligence and constancy on the *secret duties* of religion.

From the ordinances of the sanctuary he derives great benefit and delight. By attendance on these, his religious knowledge is improved—his pious affections are enlivened, and his benevolence is extended and enlarged. But these alone are not sufficient. There are many things of immediate and personal concern which require a more secret intercourse with God. In his closet he can open to God his own complaints—he can confess and lament his own sins—his own deadness and stupidity—his weakness of faith—his vain thoughts—his unruly passions—his in-dwelling corruptions—his coldness and indifference in God's service, and the particular sins and temptations which most easily beset him—and he can seek that grace which is more peculiarly adapted to his own case. He therefore is careful to keep up a stated communion with God in the devotions of the closet. If he feels not that freedom in them which he has sometimes felt, yet he will not neglect them. For he derives advantage from them, even in cases, where the life and spirit of devotion rise not to that height, that he could wish. Nor does he confine this sacred intercourse to the *stated* hours of retirement. His heart is often with God in the seasons of secular business. He aims to walk daily with God, and to be in the spirit of religion all the day long. Thus he dwells in the secret place of the most High.

The subject teaches us,

II. The happiness of those who thus dwell in God's secret place. "They abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

The expression imports two privileges, *protection* and *comfort*.

1. It imports *protection* and *safety*. For so it follows, "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in

him will I trust. He will deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler.”

They who dwell in the secret place of the most High will be defended from great and dangerous *temptations*.

Greater is he who is with them than all their enemies who are in the world. They are under the security of God's promise, that the wicked one shall not touch them, or if he should assail them, they shall be able to tread him under their feet; and when they resist him, he shall flee from them—that no temptation shall take them which is too mighty for them, but with every temptation, there shall be a way of escape, that they may be able to bear it.

They shall be secured from final *apostacy*. If they fall, God will raise them up, and keep them by his power, through faith, unto salvation—and none shall be able to pluck them out of his hands.

They shall be preserved from the *dangers of the world*. The common afflictions of life are incident to them as well as to others; but then they have the promise of God, that all things shall work for their good—that nothing shall separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, but that in all their tribulations they shall be more than conquerors through him that loved them.

Death is indeed appointed for them as well as for others. To exempt them from death was no part of the design of Christ's redemption, and no part of the privilege promised to them. But from the *evil* of death they shall be delivered. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but to believers, God has given the victory through Jesus Christ. Death is to them a blessing; for it is their deliverance from this world of sin, temptation and sorrow, and their passage to a better world, where they shall be present with their Lord and enjoy the riches of the inheritance prepared for them there. They have nothing to fear from those dangers which alarm the guilty—for these will be prevented, as long as it is best for them that life should be continued—

and if these should prove the means of death, death will be their gain.

2. To dwell under the shadow of the most High is not only a safe, but a comfortable situation. A shadow is a place of retreat from the sun, and of refreshment in weariness, and therefore is figuratively used in scripture to express a state of consolation in trouble. Hence it is foretold of the Messiah, that he should be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

There is great consolation in that nearness to God, which they enjoy who dwell in his secret place. They may freely open to him their wants and make known their requests. Whatever their troubles may be, whether inward or outward—whether from the corruptions of their hearts, or the temptations of the world—whether from doubts of their own good state, or fears of surrounding enemies, they may immediately repair to God, and tell him their distresses. They may pour out their souls into his ear, and be assured that he will hear them. They may express in his presence all their feelings, such as they would not communicate to the nearest earthly friend. Thus they may cast their cares and burdens upon him.

We find it, in many cases, a great relief to communicate our troubles to *earthly* friends—much greater consolation must it be to spread them before that heavenly friend, who will judge for us with perfect wisdom, and can do for us more than we ask or think.

They who dwell near to God, receive from him grace to help in time of need, and such measures of grace as their case requires, either for support in affliction—succour in temptations—assistance in duty—defence in danger, and direction in darkness.

They have many promises to rely upon. The scripture abounds in promises of the most important blessings ; and *all* these promises belong to good men. Whatever their condition may be, they may look into the word of God, and there find some promise exactly suited to it. Hence David says, Unless thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction. I will de-

light myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. Remember thy word unto thy servant on which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me.

They have comfort in their *past experience* of God's grace. They review with pleasure and gratitude the power of God's grace in awakening them from their stupidity—in renewing them to repentance—in defending them from temptations—in supporting them under afflictions—in answering their prayers, and in giving them the tokens of his favour and love. This experience of God's mercy encourages their hearts to trust in him in all their fears and perplexities. If at any time, they are tempted to say, "God's mercy is gone, and he has forgotten to be gracious," they look back, and remember the years of the right hand of the most High and call to mind his wonders of old.

They have comfort in *hope*. They now dwell in the secret place of the most High. But they hope soon to dwell in the open place of his glory—in heaven itself, where there is fulness of joy and pleasure forevermore—where they shall see God as he is—serve him without sin, and enjoy him without interruption.

We have described the character, and illustrated the security of those who dwell in a state of nearness to God. And who of us does not wish to dwell in such a state?

We see that the world is full of dangers. These dangers are at some times more apparent than at others. But they are more or less apparent at all times.

This is a time, when dangers threaten us on every side. A pestilence* is commissioned to spread death and mourning among us—especially among our children. So great a mortality has never been known in this place. Within the compass of about eighty families there have been fifteen deaths in about the same number of days—and the distemper still prevails—new cases almost daily appear—and several subjects are considered as in extreme danger. The power of medicine fails among the children in most cases, where the attack is violent. We know no effectual means of defence—no place of security against this awful malady.

* The dysentery, in the autumn of 1800.

If we hear of a physician who professes skill to remove it, we seek his aid. If we knew a place where we need not be afraid for the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor for the destruction which wasteth at noon day, thither we would repair, and thither we would carry our children. There is no such place on earth. But there is the secret place of the most High, in which we may dwell secure under the shadow of the Almighty. There no evil will reach us. If sickness there invade us, yet it will not hurt us—it will not separate us from God—if it should put an end to our mortal life, it will bring us to life eternal.

The warning of providence seems to be peculiarly directed to you who are young. If you wish to know where you shall find safety in this time of sickness and mortality, our text instructs you; go and dwell in the secret place of the most High; enter into God's covenant. This is the secret place where you may dwell securely.

The covenant of grace is framed for such as you—for helpless, unworthy, guilty creatures. It offers you pardon and life. You have been taught, what it is to enter into this covenant so as to obtain the security which it promises. You must renounce sin with sorrow of heart for it, and with a hatred of it, and resolution against it—you must commit yourselves to Jesus Christ by faith in his righteousness for justification, and devote yourselves to serve him in newness of life. By this faith, repentance and self-dedication you enter into God's covenant, and you abide in it by continued watchfulness against sin—by the renewal of your repentance for all known transgression, and by a steady obedience to God's commands. If you thus dwell in God's secret place, you will be safe under the shadow of the Almighty. He will defend you from temptations—he will keep you from sickness, or overrule it for your good—he will preserve you from death, or make it gain to you. Having thus entered into God's secret place, come forward and make an open declaration of your relation to God and of your faith in his promises. Take him to be your God by a sincere dedication of yourselves, and avouch him to be your God by a public profession of this dedication. Consider, that as long as you live out of this secret place, you can have no

security. You are continually exposed to death with all its consequences to guilty souls. When you come into this place you are safe. Sickness and death cannot hurt you there. They who are far from God, perish. It will be good for you to draw near to him—to come and dwell with him. Delay no longer—make haste to get into this place of safety. It is now open for you to enter in—you are invited—arise, flee for refuge—God himself calls you. There is room for you, and it is his will that his house should be filled. He loves to see it filled with the young. Come, you know the way. There is nothing to hinder your obtaining security, but your own corrupt hearts. Indulge this corruption no longer. Give yourselves up now to God—take him for your God—improve his grace—trust in his mercy—submit to his government—cast yourselves on his care—forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding. Then shall no evil befall, nor any plague. God will keep you under his protection, guide you by his counsel and afterward receive you to glory.

SERMON XXVII.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE RELIGION.

JEREMIAH XXIII. 28.

What is the chaff to the Wheat?

THE difference we all know. *Wheat* is solid grain, nourishing to the body and agreeable to the taste. *Chaff* is the reverse. It is light, insipid and void of nutritive qualities. The metaphors are aptly chosen to illustrate the difference between *true* and *false* religion.

The prophets of God, faithful in their office, reprov'd the people for their sins; warn'd them of their dangers; exhorted them to repentance; assured them of God's favor on this condition, and confirm'd their declarations by the precepts, promises and threatenings of the law deliver'd to Moses, and by the works performed by themselves. Thus they endeavor'd to reform the manners, and prevent the ruin of the nation.

The false prophets, of whom there were many, counteracted the ministry of the true prophets. They prophesied by Baal and caus'd the people to err; they walk'd in lies and strengthen'd the hands of evil doers, that none should return from his wickedness. To every one who walk'd in the imagination of his heart, they said, "Ye shall have peace; no evil shall come to you." They

deceived the people by fictitious visions and dreams, and by forging lies out of their own hearts. And many were so simple and credulous as to believe them. Men of corrupt minds easily believe what they wish to be true, that there is no danger in a course of sin.

God says, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. I have heard what the prophets said, who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed; I have dreamed." They prophesy the deceit of their own heart. They think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbor. The prophet that hath a dream," which is accompanied with evidence of Divine communication, "let him tell a dream; he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." A dream is nothing, unless it be a suggestion consonant to the Divine word. "*What is the chaff to the wheat?* saith the Lord."

This similitude illustrates the difference between true and false doctrines—between *sincerity* and *hypocrisy* in religion—between a sound and an empty *hope*—between a godly and ungodly life in the *final result*.

I. False *opinions* in religion are to true, as chaff is to the wheat.

The doctrines taught in Divine revelation are adapted to the moral condition of fallen men, as wheat is adapted to the wants of the human body.

What the scripture teaches us concerning the state of human nature, is agreeable to universal experience and observation, "that we are all gone out of the way—that there is none who doeth good and sinneth not; no, not one." With every thinking man this is a natural enquiry; "How shall we obtain the favor of an offended God? How shall we secure felicity in the future state of our existence?"

To all inquiries on this important subject the gospel gives a complete and satisfactory answer. From this we learn, that as God is just and holy, so he is merciful and gracious—that as he will support his own moral government by testifying his displeasure against sin, so he will pardon every penitent soul, and receive him to everlasting favor—that to open a way both for the manifes-

tation of his holiness and for the exercise of his mercy, he has appointed a Mediator, who has once suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that we might be saved through him—that under a conscious sense of native impotence we may resort with confidence to God's throne, and obtain grace to help in time of need—that guilty and unworthy as we are, we may, in the name of the constituted Redeemer, come acceptably to God, and successfully seek the blessings of his goodness—that God will give all good things to them who humbly and diligently seek him, even the pardon of sin, the grace of the Spirit, and the happiness of eternal life.

These are doctrines perfectly suited to our case. If we are guilty, we need pardon ; if we are ignorant, we need instruction ; if we are weak, we need assistance ; if we are polluted, we need cleansing ; if we are to exist in another state, we shall need happiness there ; if this is our time of probation, we here need a preparation for that happiness which we hope for ; if by sin we have cut ourselves off from all claim on God's justice, we are dependent wholly on mercy ; if human reason can give us no assurance of these blessings, then for the foundation of our hope we need explicit promises.

Every thing in the gospel scheme is adapted to the human condition. If we reject this, there is no substitute. If you reject the wheat, what is left but chaff? Examine and judge.

Will you say, "God, as a merciful Creator, will make all his creatures happy?" Merciful most certainly he is. But creatures may become so corrupt, that he who made them will not have mercy on them, and he who formed them will shew them no favor. In the present state, you see that vice tends to misery. Will its nature be reversed in another state? Malignant passions and vile affections destroy human enjoyment now. Will they be a source of enjoyment hereafter? Experience teaches, that without a holy temper and virtuous life, there is no rational felicity. If you hope for future felicity without such a temper and life, you oppose the sense of your own mind, as well as the dictates of the Divine word.

God is merciful; but mercy is free; it is not mechanical. It is guided by wisdom, not by caprice. It is *just* for God to punish the sinner. And no man can be sure, that God will exercise his mercy in the forgiveness of sin, unless he can find some Divine promise for the ground of his assurance. If we reject the promises of the gospel, we reject all our security. If we make these the foundation of our hope, very well. But then we must take them as we find them. They assure us of God's mercy to pardon. But at the same time, they state the *terms* of pardon. If we refuse to comply with the terms, we cast away the promises.

You think, perhaps, that you may comply with the terms at any time, when the occasion shall require. But is there not hazard in this presumption? Have you always kept your former resolutions? Have you always acted as wisely as you intended? May you not happen to fail in the present case? Are you not dependent on the grace of God for a future disposition, as well as on his providence for a future opportunity, to comply with the terms of his mercy? Can you see any safety, but in an immediate compliance with the terms, and in an immediate application to grace?—Here only your safety lies. All other devices are but chaff; light, vain, unsubstantial. They may flatter and amuse you, but cannot support and comfort you. They may blind your eyes, but cannot avert your real dangers, nor extinguish your rational fears. They may continue while the season is calm; but the first storm will blow them away.

II. The metaphor in the text illustrates the difference between *sincerity* and *hypocrisy* in religion. The former is as wheat; the latter is mere chaff.

The sincere christian has not only *learned* the truth as it is in Jesus, but has received the *love* of the truth; and he feels its influence in purifying his heart, regulating his affections and governing his life. Convinced, that in himself he is impotent, guilty and unworthy, he humbly resorts to the mercy of God revealed in the gospel. Conscious that no future works of his own can expiate his guilt, he relies on the righteousness of the Redeemer as the ground of his justification before God; and sensible that no resolutions of his own can secure his future obedience, he ap-

plies to the grace of the Divine Spirit for help in the time of need. Viewing the precepts of the gospel as holy and good, he laments his deviations from them, and studies a nearer conformity to them. Admiring the excellence of the doctrines of the gospel, he acts under their influence, and regards them as the grand motives to works of righteousness. Feeling still the corruptions remaining within him, he carries on a continual warfare against them. Aware of the temptations to which he is exposed, he watches to avoid them; if they assault him, he firmly opposes them; if, in any instances, they prevail, he laments his weakness, and seeks pardon for past offences, and grace for future security. Not reckoning himself to be already perfect, he forgets the things which are behind; not contenting himself with present attainments, he looks forward to the things which are before, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling. The eternal world he keeps in view, and lives by faith in unseen things. He sets his affections on things above. These he regards and seeks in preference to all earthly interests. He reckons not his life dear to him, that so he may finish his course with joy. He counts all worldly things but loss in comparison with the glory which shall be revealed.

This is the present life of the good christian. And such a life his reason and conscience approve. He is satisfied from himself, so far as he finds himself conformed to the gospel. The work of righteousness is peace. The testimony of his conscience to his simplicity and godly sincerity affords him the rejoicing of hope. He here receives some first fruits of the coming harvest; and these fruits are wheat—they are solid grain—they nourish, refresh and strengthen him.

What is the religion of the hypocrite?—It is but as chaff to the wheat.

Under certain alarming circumstances he has perhaps experienced some exercises of mind, which he calls conversion; and, recurring to these as his security, he lives as he did before. He feels some occasional emotions, which he imagines to be the workings of grace; but still he walks according to the course of the world. If he preserves a decency of manners, in the sight of men, yet the hidden man of the heart is still corrupt in the

sight of God. He shews a warmth of zeal against the sins of other men, but is not zealous to repent of his own. He attaches himself to a particular religious sect, and has charity for no others. He is industrious to gain proselytes; but when his proselytes have joined his party, he is indifferent how they live, and how he lives himself, except so far as is necessary to keep up his party. He talks much about principles and forms; about orthodoxy and heresy; but his religion consists chiefly in the talk of the lips; in finding fault with other people; in condemning their opinions and ceremonies, and commending his own. His religion is speculative, superficial and ostentatious; it mends not his heart; it makes him not at all more humble, meek, peaceable, condescending and charitable; but rather the reverse. He glories in himself, and despises others.

But after all of his spiritual pride and vain boasting, there is an inward self-distrust. If ever he sits down seriously to examine his character, and compare it with the word of truth, there will a suspicion arise, that all is not right. His religion, even in the eye of his own reason, appears too light and chaffy to satisfy himself.

This leads us to observe,

III. As there is a difference between sincerity and hypocrisy, so there is an answerable difference between the *hope* which results from the former, and that which results from the latter. The one is wheat, and the other is chaff.

The sincere christian hopes; but hopes humbly. He serves the Lord with fear, and rejoices with trembling. He retains a serious concern to know his real state, that if it be good, he may enjoy it; and may rectify it, if it be evil. He consults the sacred oracles, that he may understand the christian character; and examines himself, that he may know whether this character be his own. Convinced of the natural disposition of depraved mortals to flatter themselves, he watches against the influence of this dangerous bias, like Paul, who said, "It is a small thing for me to be judged of men; yea, I judge not my own self;" I dare not hastily confide in my own judgment; "for he that judgeth me is the Lord." In his examinations he implores Divine direction,

adopting the language of the Psalmist; "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." He proves his works, and brings them to the light, that they may be made manifest, and he may see whether they are wrought in God.

He acquires his hope, not suddenly by immediate impression, but gradually by experience of the operation and fruits of the christian temper. He forms his opinion of himself more by the permanent effects of religion on his heart and life, than by occasional exercises, or transient feelings. When he has gained a degree of hope, he observes how it operates in him; whether it makes him more secure and negligent, or more humble and watchful. The former, he knows, is a deceitful; the latter only is a sound hope. "Every man who has this hope, purifieth himself as Christ is pure." Thus he gives diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. Like the apostle, he keeps under his body to bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after all his hope, he should be a castaway. He fears lest a promise being left him of entering into the eternal rest, he should finally come short of it. He endeavors to make his calling sure, not so much by recurring to former works, as by adding one christian attainment to another, knowing, that if the graces and virtues of the gospel are in him and abound, he shall never fall, but an entrance will be ministered to him abundantly into the kingdom of Christ.

A hope acquired in this manner is solid and substantial; sweet and refreshing. It may, indeed, through the imperfection of grace in the heart, and through the influence of remaining corruptions, suffer abatements, and give room to painful doubts. But in such a case the good christian will labor to recover his former comfort by careful self-examination, by renewed repentance of sin, by greater watchfulness over himself, by increased activity in the duties of religion, and by fervent prayer for the enlivening influence of Divine grace. Thus by walking in the fear of God, he will walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.

Very different from this is the hope of the hypocrite. He may gain a hope, such as it is. Yea, he may rise high in his boasting, and assume a degree of confidence, which the sincere and humble christian dares not pretend. But his hope will fail, because, like a house on sand, it has no solid basis. Like the spider's web, it has no firmness or consistence.

The hypocrite has no real love to religion itself. But he believes that there is such a thing, and that this will be the only security of mortals when they die. He wishes for this security. He thinks he could enjoy himself and the world better, if the apprehension of misery after death were removed. He is solicitous to gain a hope which will release him from this troublesome apprehension. His governing aim is to think well of himself and banish his painful fears.

He entertains partial and superficial notions of religion. He flatters himself, that he has enough of it to answer his necessities, and he does not wish for more. He examines himself under the influence of prejudice; extenuates his corruptions; excuses his transgressions; and observes and magnifies in himself every thing which looks like virtue. He makes much of the good things which he has done, but attends not to the motives which governed him. If conscience tells him, he has offended, he pleads infirmity and temptation, not considering, that a temptation invited is an aggravation of guilt, and an infirmity indulged is a wilful sin. He relies much on some past seasons of seriousness, but regards not the manner in which he has since lived. He banishes the remembrance of former iniquities, because, he trusts, he has balanced them by repentance, or by some equivalent good works. He gains his hope hastily without waiting the tedious process of experience. A hope once gained he holds fast, for the saints are kept by the power of God unto salvation. Conscious that his life corresponds not with his profession, and that his works are not meet for repentance, he comforts himself with the thought, that the principle of grace may remain, when the exercise of it is suspended—that good men may in many things offend—that he is no worse than some other reputed christians, and that he has never committed so great crimes, as are recorded of eminent saints.

Thus he flatters himself, that his hope will not make him ashamed, when, if he would be honest with himself, he might see, that it makes him a worse man.

His hope may at times rise to confidence and boldness ; but after all, it is too artificial to feel like that humble hope, which spontaneously issues from an honest and good heart. It is gained by deception and maintained by flattery ; not by impartial inspection of the heart, and distinct knowledge of the character. The hope of the hypocrite does best in prosperous seasons ; for in times of trouble conscience charges him partiality and unfairness ; and excites a jealousy that all is not sound at the bottom. The honest christian proves himself, whether he be in the faith. The hypocrite, distrustful of his case, glides over it superficially. Like a man of suspicious worldly circumstances, he is afraid to look deeply into his affairs, lest he should find them worse than he chooses to believe. His hope springs from ignorance of himself, and will issue in painful disappointment.

IV. The difference of these characters in their *final result*, the Psalmist relates to us. “ He that delighteth in the law of the Lord, shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth its fruit in season. His leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so ; but they are like the chaff, which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous ; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

The improvement of our subject is taught by John the baptist, who preached in the wilderness of Judea, and whose preaching is recorded by St. Matthew. “ Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Flee from the wrath to come. Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.” Trust not in a pious ancestry, in external forms, in any thing short of real repentance manifested by its proper fruits. “ Behold, now the axe is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed minister to you the baptism of repentance. But one, mightier than I, will come.

He will baptize you with a purifying wind and with fire. His fan is in his hand; he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his granary, but will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire”

What then will be the chaff to the wheat? The wheat will be safely stored; but the chaff will be given to the wind and flames. In that day we shall discern between truth and error—between hypocrisy and sincerity—between sound hope and proud confidence—between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. Of them who fear God, he says, “They shall be mine, when I gather in my treasures. For behold the day cometh which shall burn as an oven; and all the proud and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the fire shall consume them.”

Let it be our care to know the truth and embrace it. Do you ask, how we shall distinguish between truth and error in a time when they are mingled together in confusion. Say, how you distinguish wheat from chaff. There is as real and palpable a difference in one case as in the other. If you are in doubt whether a doctrine proposed to you, be true, bring it to experience; apply it to practice. If the doctrine in question tends to make you vain, proud, self-confident, uncharitable, indifferent to sin, negligent of duty, inattentive to your eternal interest; it is chaff, which will be blown away with the wind, and consumed with the fire. If the doctrine tends to purity and virtue; if, in the belief and under the influence of it, you become more humble, pious, prayerful, contented, peaceable and benevolent, and, in all respects, better men; it is a doctrine according to godliness; it is sound speech which cannot be condemned. It is pure and solid wheat.

The upright christian needs not much to concern himself in religious controversy. If he will keep up an acquaintance with himself and his bible, he may, in matters which relate to his duty and salvation, judge from himself and from his bible what is truth and what is error.

A real concern to know and do the will of God will supersede many controversies in religion, as love to our country will supersede a thousand disputes in politicks. “The meek God will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way.” The

gospel uses great plainness of speech. Let us attend to this with a governing concern to be approved and accepted of God, and we shall meet with no obscurities, which will perplex our conscience, or endanger our salvation. Let us detest all hypocrisy, and abhor all duplicity in religion. Let us suppress all pride and shun all self-flattery in judging of our character. Let us avoid all selfishness, partiality and worldly affection in searching for truth and in choosing our religion. Let us have our conversation in simplicity and godly sincerity. Thus we may have rejoicing in ourselves, and may keep the rejoicing of hope firm unto the end.

Serious people often feel a solicitude concerning their religious state. There are few, who can say, they have risen above fear; and perhaps there are few, who would be safe without fear. Such is the imperfection of most christians, and such the temptations which attend them in this evil world, that fear may be necessary to keep their minds awake to their danger, alive to their duty and attentive to their eternal interest. The apostle enjoins it on all christians to fear, lest they come short of the promised rest. This solicitude may be one evidence in their favor. It shews, at least, that they are not in a state of indifference to religion, to their present duty and future happiness. To relieve their anxiety, they must examine whether the temper of the gospel exists in them. If this be doubtful, let them follow the advice which St. Peter gives; "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity; for if these things be in you and abound, you will never fall." That kind of religion, which the apostle here describes, is solid wheat. Every thing different from this is chaff. If you find your religion to be only external works, or formal ceremonies, or speculative opinions, or transient feelings, or any thing which makes not the heart better, more assimilated to the character of God and the pattern of Christ, it is all but chaff, which the wind will drive away.

The nature of religious sincerity is clearly stated in the gospel. By attention we may understand what it is, and by examination we may form some judgment whether we possess it. It is called

godly sincerity ; for it has God for its object. It acts with an aim to please him, and seeks his favor above all worldly interests. It is a conformity of temper to the gospel. Hence it is expressed by our obeying from the heart that form or mould of doctrine into which we are cast—by our having the law written on our hearts—by our being sealed with the Holy Spirit—by our having the mind which is in Christ.

If we find in ourselves an assimilation to the example, precepts and doctrines of Christ—if we find the impress of his Spirit in those tempers which are called the fruits of the Spirit—if we find this to be our habitual and growing character, we may rejoice in hope of being glorified with him. And every one who hath this hope will now purify himself as Christ is pure. And though it doth not yet appear what he shall be, yet this he may know in general, that when Christ shall appear, he shall be like him, and see him as he is.

Let us give diligence to attain this character in such a degree, as to remove our anxious doubts and desponding fears.

The day is coming, which will try every man's work and every man's character of what sort it is ; and will separate between the precious and the vile. The great husbandman, with a fan in his hand, will thoroughly purge his floor ; he will gather the wheat into his barn, and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. 9—14.

And he spake this parable unto certain, which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 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 a week; I give tythes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

WHAT was the occasion and design of this parable, the evangelist tells us in the introduction of it. It was spoken for the conviction and reproof of certain persons, numerous in that day, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

It is a parable formed on existing characters. It represents the different tempers of two sorts of men, known by the denomination of *pharisees* and *publicans*.

The *pharisees* were nominally a religious sect, which affected great learning and superior sanctity; but really were odious and detestable hypocrites. The character of them generally is thus given by our Saviour. They loved to pray and do alms in conspicuous places, that they might be seen of men. They for a pretence made long prayers, that they might devour widows' houses. They paid tythes of mint, anise and cummin, but neglected more weighty matters, justice, mercy, faith, and the love of God. They studied to appear outwardly righteous to men, but within were full of extortion, hypocrisy, uncleanness and all iniquity. Though they were so abominably wicked in heart, they trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

The *publicans* were not so called as a religious sect, but as men employed in a civil office. They were the farmers of the public taxes, or men employed in collecting the tribute, which the Jews were compelled to pay to the Roman empire. Many of them were Romans, and some of them were Jews. And as they were employed in an office highly offensive to their countrymen, who could not patiently submit to a foreign tax, and as they had in their hands an advantage to make profits to themselves by exacting more than the appointed tax, hence they became objects of general odium, and were classed with the heathens.

A *heathen* and a *publican* were terms of equal reproach. We find, however, by our Saviour's account of them, that they were much less depraved than the pharisees, and that they much more readily and generally embraced his doctrines and obeyed his precepts. He says to the pharisees, "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." They repented at the preaching of John, and attended to the doctrines of Christ, while the pharisees, in opposition to both, persisted in their unbelief and impenitence.

The parable before us is formed on these two characters—that of a vain, proud, ill-natured hypocrite—and that of a humble, prayerful, penitent sinner.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray." Here is an allusion to the common usage of the Jews, who, in their daily pray-

ers, resorted to the temple, if their situation were near it. If they were remote, they prayed with their face toward the temple.

We will consider the different manner in which these two men offered their devotions at the temple.

We will,

I. Attend to the devotion of the pharisee.

He 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 a week; I give tythes of all that I possess."

1. It is said, "The publican stood afar off." This, being noted as a circumstance in which he differed from the pharisee, imports, that the pharisee approached near to the most holy place; that sacred inclosure in the temple, into which none but the high priest might enter, and *he* only once a year, on the great day of atonement. He pressed as near as he could to the Divine habitation. Such an opinion had he of his own sanctity and worthiness, that no ground was sacred enough for him to stand on—no intimacy with God too familiar for him to claim—no distance from the sinful publican too great for him to seek. How different was his approach from that of good men impressed with a sense of personal unworthiness. They draw near to God with reverence and godly fear. His dread falls upon them, and his excellency makes them afraid. They dare not be rash with their mouths, nor be hasty with their hearts to utter any thing before God, who is in heaven, while they are on earth. How different his temper from that of Abraham his boasted father, who, interceding for Sodom, said, Let not the Lord be angry, when I, who am but dust and ashes, take upon me to speak to the Almighty—from that of Jacob, who, when God appeared to him at Luz, was afraid, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not; this is no other than the house of God; it is the gate of heaven—from that of the prophet, who, having a vision of the appointed Saviour, humbly exclaimed, Wo is me; I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts—from that of the heavenly worshippers, who cover their faces before God, and cry one to another, Holy,

holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

He humbles himself to behold the things which are in heaven. He charges his angels with folly. Surely it becomes us who dwell on earth, and are polluted with sin, to approach him with a penitent sense of unworthiness and with a dread of his glorious majesty.

2. The pharisee came before God with a heart full of *self-confidence*. He valued himself on his superior sanctity. He boasted, that he was not as other men are. It is true, he pretended to *thank God*—but these were words of mere form; there was no sincerity in them; for he trusted in *himself*. He was particular in his self-commendation. I am no extortioner—no adulterer—no unjust dealer. Yea more. I fast twice in a week and pay tythes of all that I possess.

His fasting twice in a week was not prescribed by the Divine law. The language of his prayer, therefore, is, I am not only more righteous than other men, but more pious than the law requires. He arrogantly insinuated, that God was under some obligation to him—that he had no occasion to resort to mercy for pardon—that he might claim a reward from the justice of God. Such was his confidence in himself.

3. His confidence was accompanied with *pride* and *ostentation*. He takes pleasure in displaying his virtues and good works—in enumerating the sins which other men practised but he avoided—in detailing the duties which they neglected, but he performed. The sins and the omissions which he mentions, were only such as the publicans were reputed to be guilty of. Hence his boasting was a direct insult on them, and proves that he was entirely void of that righteousness for which he pretended to thank God. He discovers not the least sense of any spiritual wants. He makes no confession of any omission of duty, or of any defects in his righteousness, or of any remaining corruptions in his heart. He only boasts of his goodness. He dwells on the subject with a vain pleasure, as if his only business to the temple was to tell the Almighty how well he had behaved, and how high were his merits.

4. He discovered great *ignorance of religion and of himself*. What if he was such a man as he pretended to be—what if he had abstained from two or three vices which many practise—what if he had been more exact than most men in paying tythes, and had fasted much oftener than he needed to have done? Did all this make a righteous, pious and good man? No. Let us give him credit for every thing that he boasts of; still he might be corrupt and ungodly at heart. If he was not an extortioner, he might be avaricious. If he was not an adulterer, he might indulge those fleshly lusts which war against the soul. If he was not grossly unjust in his dealings, there might be malice and envy in his heart. If he observed forms and ceremonies with strictness, he might neglect moral duties. True religion is not partial. It includes a respect to all God's commandments—It is not merely external—It reaches to the hidden man of the heart. It consists not in ceremonial observances, but in love to God, charity to men, in pure aims and heavenly affections. If the pharisee had nothing more to say for himself than what we hear from him in the parable, and doubtless Christ related all that could be said, certainly he was very ignorant of the nature of religion, and of the plague of his own heart. He thought himself better than other men only because he was in some respects less vicious than he supposed some others to be.

5. His prayer was all *hypocrisy*. He affected to appear a better man than he was. He studied to cover his inward corruptions by the mask of outward forms. He laid great weight on mere ceremonies; little on internal holiness. He was zealous in fasting and paying tythes even to excess; but a stranger to that meekness and humility, piety and benevolence, in which religion greatly consists.

6. He was *ensorious in his prayer*. There were none, besides himself and his own proud sect, of whom he seems to have had a favorable opinion. Had he known himself more perfectly, he would have esteemed others more, and himself less. He speaks in general terms; "I am not as other men are;" as if no man was equally good. Not content with this general indiscriminate censure, he vilifies the poor publican, even at a time when he was

penitently confessing his sins, and sinking under a sense of his guilt. "I am not like this publican." How did he know that the publican was so bad a man—that he was unjust, oppressive and lewd, as he plainly insinuates? Why, he was a publican—that was enough to settle his character. He belonged to a fraternity, which the envy of the day had reprobated. And doubtless he was as bad as the rest. What a censorious spirit does this discover? To condemn a man as unrighteous merely because he belongs to a class, some of which are reputed to be such. The business in which the publican was employed does not appear to be unlawful. And he might be honest, though others were oppressors. But, admitting him to be a man of evil manners, what occasion was there for the pharisee to *reproach* him in his prayers? He does not pray that God would bring the man to repentance and bestow on him pardon; he only accuses him to his Maker, and aggravates his imputed vices, that he may display his own imaginary virtues.

We may observe;

Finally; It is said, He went up to pray. But what did he do when he came there? He only boasted of himself, gave thanks that he was so righteous a man, and reproached others that they were not so good as he. This was all his prayer. Not one petition was made—not one sin confessed—not one want opened—not one favor requested.

Let us now,

II. Consider the prayer of the publican. This exhibits to us a very useful example. "Standing afar off, he would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote on his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

1. The publican came to God with great reverence and humility—with a sense of the purity and majesty of God, and of his own vileness and unworthiness. He stood afar off, probably in the court of the Gentiles; and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven. He was ashamed to lift up his face to God. His iniquities had taken hold of him, so that he could not look up. They had gone over his head as a heavy burden, under which his soul was depressed.

2. He discovered a painful conviction of, and a deep sorrow for his sins. This we may collect from his calling himself a sinner, and from his smiting on his breast, which is an action expressive of inward grief. Repentance includes sorrow and confession. I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation.

He shewed a sense of his dependence on the grace and mercy of God. He did not recount his good deeds. He did not attempt to excuse or extenuate his crimes. He did not plead any thing which he had done over and above his duty, to compensate for what he had come short of it in other respects. He did not intimate a hope of being able to expiate his guilt by a future reformation. His only hope was in the mercy of God. To this he applied—on this he rested. God be merciful. He does not pray, God be careful to remember, and just to reward my righteousness; but, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

His prayer resembled that of David in the fifty-first Psalm. “Have mercy on me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness; in the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out all my sins. I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest. But hide thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities, and make me to hear the voice of gladness.”

3. The prayer of the publican was a prayer of *faith*. He came to God, believing that with him there was forgiveness and plenteous redemption. Though he was convinced that he was a sinner, and felt his ill desert, yet he did not despair of mercy from that God, whose tender mercies are over all his works, and who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. On the contrary, he with humble faith, cast himself on that mercy, which is the only foundation of hope to a convinced and awakened sinner.

Every man who believes there is a God, must believe that he requires of his intelligent creatures perfect holiness of heart and life—or, in other words, that he approves and allows no sin. He must believe also that God has a right to punish sinners. Every one therefore who is really convinced that he is a sinner, must

see himself dependent on mercy. He can have no claim on the justice of God to pardon him—for it would not be unjust to punish him. Pardon therefore must come in a way of mercy. In mercy must be the sinner's hope. This the publican saw. Hence he prayed with earnestness and importunity. It was not a formal, indifferent prayer which he offered, such as may often proceed from the lips of those who still regard iniquity in their hearts. It was a prayer dictated by inward sentiments and feelings. He smote on his breast, when he implored mercy. Such an action accompanying his words, shewed that his prayer proceeded not from feigned lips. We often pray for the forgiveness of our sins, and for grace to lead and preserve us in the way of God's commands. Let us examine, whether we really desire what we ask—whether our hearts go along with our words? If our prayers are sincere, there is in our hearts a hatred of sin, and a resolution against it. Our hearts can echo to such a promise and such a petition as this. We will not offend any more—that which we see not, teach thou us. If we have done iniquity we will do no more. Incline our hearts to thy testimonies, that we may walk therein.

4. This prayer of the publican was short, as one observes, but it was very comprehensive. It contained all the important parts of prayer; as *invocation*, he called upon God—*adoration*, he acknowledged God's mercy—*confession*, he called himself a sinner—and *petition*, he implored forgiveness. He did not waste his words in comparing himself with others. A sense of guilt pressed too closely to allow his thoughts and words to wander. He was a sinner; such he owned himself to be. He was dependent on mercy; to this he applied. Mercy must come from God—and to God he made his request. Mercy was what he needed—this only he sought. He asked not for worldly accommodations, for health, long life, reputation, or riches. However desirable these may be, he viewed them as nothing in comparison with his salvation from sin and guilt. Though we may with submission ask for worldly good; (our Saviour teaches us to pray for our daily bread;) yet a petition for worldly good could find no place in a prayer offered to God for his pardoning and saving mercy.

We see two very different prayers addressed to God at the same time and in the same temple. One full of presumption, pride, ignorance, hypocrisy and censoriousness. The other full of reverence, humility, self-abasement, sorrow for sin and faith in God.

This difference accounts for the different success of these prayers. Our Saviour says, This man, the publican, went down to his house justified rather than the other. The comparison implies a negation of the privilege to the pharisee, and the bestowment of it on the publican.

Such forms of speech are not uncommon in scripture. Judah says, in a particular case, Tamar has been more righteous than I—that is, she is blameless, and I am in fault. Saul says to David, Thou art more righteous than I—that is, thou hast done right; I am wholly to blame. So Christ says in the case before us; the publican was justified rather than the pharisee—that is, the former was justified and the latter condemned. For the justness of this declaration, our Lord appeals to a maxim, which he often repeats. “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; and he that exalteth himself shall be abased.” Hence we learn with great certainty, that a prayer made in the manner of the pharisee will be rejected; but one made after the manner of the publican will be accepted.

This is a matter too plain to need discussion.

At another opportunity our attention may be called to some remarks on this subject.

SERMON XXIX.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. 9—14.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, &c. &c.

WE have, in a preceding discourse, illustrated the difference between the prayer of the pharisee, and that of the publican, and shewn their different success.

What I now propose is to make some remarks upon the parable.

I. Our Saviour, on a particular occasion, observed, that the publicans went into the kingdom of God before the pharisees. Hence some have inferred that the most vicious and profligate stand fairer for converting grace, than sinners who are more sober and correct in their morals—that the prayers and endeavors of the unrenewed are so far from bringing them nearer to the kingdom of heaven, that they place them at a greater distance from it. But the parable under consideration shews this inference to be unjust, and unfounded. It justifies an inference quite the reverse; for the pharisees were most immoral of the two.

This parable, and other discourses of our Saviour, describe the pharisees, in general, as men abandoned to wickedness. If they

assumed an appearance of rectitude in their manners, it was only to cover a base and infamous design. They neglected justice, mercy, truth and piety. They were full of extortion, unclean-ness and iniquity. They devoured widows' houses, corrupted the law of God and indulged all manner of wickedness in their hearts, and practised it when they could find a cloak under which to conceal it. They observed trivial ceremonies of their own invention, but disregarded the weighty matters which God's law enjoined. If they prayed, it was only in pretence of piety, that they might oppress the widow with less suspicion. The good which they did, had no goodness in it, for it was done to be seen of men. They were, in their morals, much more depraved than the publicans; for these, however depraved they might be, are never accused of abusing religion to cover their sins.

With respect to such men as the pharisees, who make an ostentation of piety, that they may sin with more secrecy and security, it is doubtless true, that they are far from the kingdom of heaven. But we quite mistake the case, if we thence infer, that all the prayers, strivings and watchings of awakened sinners, who are seeking their salvation, not the applause of men, are of the same kind, and that therefore the most vicious and profligate are more likely to obtain conversion, than they. Such an inference cannot follow. The contrary is the just conclusion.

The sacrifice and the prayer of the wicked is abomination, when he offers it with a wicked mind, as the pharisee did—that is, with a heart full of pride, hypocrisy, malice, and contempt of others, and without any resolutions against sin—any conviction of guilt, or desire of pardon. They receive not, who ask amiss, that they may consume it on their lusts. It will not from hence follow, that all the prayers and endeavors of awakened sinners, before they are actually in a state of conversion, are equally amiss, and are equally abomination in the sight of God. Such a construction would lay a grievous burden on tender consciences, and prove a constant discouragement in the way of duty.

The scripture directs christians to pass the time of their sojourning in fear—to fear lest they come short of the promised

rest—to give diligence to the full assurance of hope—to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

Such directions evidently suppose, that the exact point, and precise time of real, saving conversion may be uncertain to the subjects of it; and that many true converts may be in painful doubts concerning their character. Now if all the prayers of the unconverted are abomination, what shall these doubting christians do? Plainly they must live without prayer. For no man may do that which he doubts his right to do. He that doubts his right to do an action, is condemned if he does it. In this sense, the apostle says, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Whatsoever is done without a belief that it may be done, is sin in him who does it.

To know whether you have a right to pray in a particular case, and may hope for an answer to your prayer, enquire whether the thing which you ask be good,—be what you ought to seek and desire; and whether you really desire it. If you have a desire, you may direct this desire to God, and may hope that he will hear and answer you.

II. Our subject teaches us, that men may make a show of religion before others, when they have no religion in heart.

The pharisee was one who went up to the temple to pray. He fasted often and paid tythes punctually; and, if we may take his word, he abstained from adultery, injustice and extortion. If he did all this, it was more than most of his brethren did; for our Saviour says, they were full of uncleanness, extortion and iniquity. The truth is, they had so corrupted the law of God, that it had become of little effect. In their estimation, nothing was adultery, but the outward act—nothing was oppression, but downright violence—nothing was injustice, but barefaced injury. Inward lusting, secret fraud, studied revenge, were not forbidden. As they had the art to cover their crimes from men, so they had the subtilty to conceal them from themselves. Hence we see, that men may abstain from many of the outward acts of iniquity, and shew a great zeal for the worship of God, while they are full of spiritual pride, luxury, avarice, malice and envy. It is not abstaining from a few vices in the external act, nor is it making a noise about modes of worship and articles of speculative faith,

that constitute one a saint, or give him a claim to heaven. He must become a new creature—must renounce all known sin in heart and life. He must make conscience of all known duty, as it respects the inward and outward man. He must have a faith which purifies the heart, and quickens him to works of righteousness.

III. We see that men sometimes grossly impose on themselves and entertain a high opinion of their own religious character, when their real character is odious in the sight of God.

The pharisee was vain, proud, ostentatious, uncharitable, censorious; yet he trusted in himself, that he was righteous. He seemed to himself to be religious, when all his religion was vain. It is a caution given us in scripture: *Be not deceived*. We are afraid of being deceived by others in our secular concerns. Let us rather fear lest we deceive ourselves in our spiritual concerns. The latter deception is probably more common—certainly more dangerous, than the former. Examine yourselves, says the apostle; prove your own selves. The example of the Psalmist deserves our attention; “Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Who can understand his errors?—Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

IV. We here learn, for our caution, some of the ways in which hypocrites deceive themselves. We will attend to them particularly.

1. Self-deceit often takes its rise from an intention to *deceive others*. This was evidently the case with the pharisees. They did many good deeds to be seen of men. They made prayers and bestowed alms in a publick manner, that their pretended piety and charity might be known to the world, and regarded as real and sincere. Their great aim was to establish a reputation of uncommon benevolence and sanctity. In subservience to this end they managed all their religion. With a view to deceive others they did so much, and did it with such address, that they ultimately deceived themselves, and trusted that they were righteous. Like some men of whom it has been said, that having asserted a known untruth, they repeat it so often, and insist upon it so long,

in order to make others believe it, that they really believe it themselves.

2. Men sometimes deceive themselves by *mutilating* the rules of duty, and corrupting the precepts of religion. Thus did the pharisees. Finding the law too severe upon their lusts, and broader than their obedience could fill, they debased, relaxed, contracted it by their corrupt interpretations and false traditions, till they reduced it to the standard of their own carnal minds. They made it quite another thing; but just such a thing as they wished it to be. According to their loose construction, they must not commit adultery, but might indulge inward lusts—must love their neighbor, but might hate their enemy—must not do an injury, but might revenge one—must perform their oaths *to the Lord*; but might swear by the throne of God, by the gift on the altar, or by their head, without bringing themselves under any obligation. They must not kill, but might revile their brethren and indulge wrath in their breasts. They must honor their parents; but might leave them in the day of impotence, to starve, by consecrating to some holy use the necessary means of their maintenance.

When they had brought the law of God to a level with their own lusts, they fancied themselves righteous, because the law, as they explained it, did not condemn them. Whereas in truth they had explained away all the better part, and nothing remained, which could be a safe rule of common conduct.

3. It is not uncommon, that men lay the principal weight of religion on the smaller parts of it; and place the whole of it in things which are only the means and instruments of it. The pharisee valued himself on his frequent fastings; on his punctual payment of tythes, and on his abstinence from some of the grosser forms of vice. But he ought to have considered, that the external ceremonies of worship were but the means of religion, and were of no worth, when they failed of their end—that purity of heart and truth in the inward parts are as strictly required, as decency of behavior—that virtue is not merely negative, but positive—that we must do good as we have opportunity, as well as forbear to do evil.

4. Hypocrites fix their whole attention on the things which appear commendable in their conduct, and overlook that which is censurable. The pharisee boasted, that he was not unjust, oppressive and adulterous—If this were true, so far was well. But he did not consider wherein he had deviated from rectitude. He took no notice of his pride and uncharitableness, though these were so strong as to operate even in his prayers. Some, we see, glory so much in a few good things which they do, and in their freedom from some common vices, that they conclude all is well, and never bring themselves to the light by a faithful examination. Or, if at any time conscience reminds them of their sins, they invent some plausible excuse for them, and study to balance them by a recurrence to their innocence and virtue in other respects.

5. Hypocrites support their pride and confidence by *comparing* themselves with *other* men, whom they think to be more faulty than *they* are themselves.

The pharisee trusted in himself that he was righteous. Why? Because he was not such a man as he supposed the publican to be. He compared himself with one whom he had denounced as a very bad man, and because he thought that in the comparison he could claim a preference, he concluded himself to be righteous. But if the publican were as bad a man as he supposed, what was that to him? Was he at all the better, for his neighbour's being wicked? If he did not practise the three vices, which he imputed to another, did it follow from thence, that he practised none? We must not conclude ourselves to be really virtuous, merely because we see, or think we see, others who are worse than we are. We must draw this conclusion only from the evidence that we find of our own godly sincerity. The apostle's direction is, that we prove our own works, and thus have rejoicing in ourselves alone, and not in another. True and safe rejoicing arises from the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have our conversation in the world.

The sins of good men, whose names are recorded in scripture, as those of David and Peter, are the main support of the hope of some hypocrites. They argue thus. 'We never committed such crimes as those men are charged with. If they were men after

God's own heart, what reason have we to doubt of our final acceptance?' But ask yourselves; Have you ever repented of your smaller sins, as they repented? Have you ever sought mercy with the same importunity—the same humility—the same contrition of heart, with which they sought it? Their guilt consisted only in a particular transgression, and this was followed with repentance. Do you repeat your transgressions without remorse and without amendment? Your case essentially differs from their's. Your comfort must be derived from your own repentance—not from the transgressions of other men. I would observe

Once more. Some deceive themselves into an opinion of their own piety, by their disposition to censure and condemn others. This pharisee, doubtless, made great complaints of the wickedness of the times. In his prayer he reprobated all men but himself and his own sect. 'I am not like other men.' Finding that he had a zeal, such as it was, against the sins of others, he made this an argument of his own piety. But what does a zeal against other men's sins avail, as long as we are content with our own? If we have a zeal for God, according to knowledge, we shall be zealous to repent and to maintain good works.

Having illustrated the various arts of self-deception, we proceed to another remark on the parable.

6. It is common for men, when they think of sins which are not their own, to condemn them in others without examining themselves. The pharisee, when he thanked God that he was not as other men, immediately turned his eyes on the publican, and reproached him for not being as righteous as himself.

We are apt to excuse and palliate our own faults, whether others are guilty of them or not. But when others are guilty of faults, from which we think ourselves clear, we are little disposed to admit the same excuses for them. It will be more useful, and a better evidence of a good heart, to be candid toward others and severe with ourselves. Hypocrites will always be forward to censure others; but they take no care to know, examine, or mend their own hearts. The pharisee assumed an unbounded liberty in condemning mankind; but he was utterly insensible to his own guilt. He could discern a *mote* in another's eye, when he felt not

a *beam* in his own eye. There are many who judge and condemn their neighbours, when they themselves do the same things. Our first care should be to correct the errors of our own hearts, and reform the irregularities of our own lives.

Nothing can be more absurd than for a man to be severe against the sins of his neighbours, and at the same time indulgent to his own. 'Cast out the beam out of thine own eye,' says our Saviour, 'then thou canst see clearly to pull the mote out of thy brother's eye.' Then only can we have influence in our attempts to reform others, when we begin with ourselves. 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify God.

7. It becomes us to consider and admire the great mercy of God to guilty men. The publican, though he was a sinner, for such he confessed himself to be, yet upon his humble confession, penitence and prayer, obtained mercy. He went down to his house justified. This affords mighty encouragement to sinners of all descriptions to come to God for pardon with penitent supplication. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. Let sinners under an awakened sense of guilt read this parable, and they will see an encouraging hope set before them. Let them look to the cross on which the Saviour died and their hope will be increased and confirmed. The blood of Christ there shed, cleanses from all sin. And 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. Our hope stands on a better foundation, than did the hope of the publican. His hope rested on the mercy of God revealed in his word. Our hope may rest on this mercy more fully displayed in the death of Christ, and on a promise sealed by that blood which cleanses from all sin.

Finally. We see what is necessary to render our prayers acceptable to God. On the one hand we must guard against presumption, confidence in ourselves, spiritual pride, self-conceit, formality and hypocrisy, and a censorious, uncharitable spirit. These were the tempters which blasted the pharisee's devotions. On the other hand, we must come to God with humility, serious-

ness and reverence ; with a sense of our wants, and with correspondent desires ; and our prayers must be animated with faith and hope. And since a dying, risen and interceding Saviour is revealed, whatever we do, we must do all in his name ; praying and giving thanks to the Father through him.

Let no man think, that because the publican obtained mercy on this short petition, ‘ God be merciful to me a sinner,’ he may also find mercy with God at any time, if he only utter the same, or the like form of words. For the publican’s prayer proceeded from a heart penetrated with a sense of his sins. It was not the effect of sickness, distress or approaching death. He is represented as being able to go up to the temple ; but it proceeded from conscious guilt and hope of mercy.

If we hope to be heard when we cry for mercy to pardon and grace to help, we must cry in the manner in which he did—with humility—with importunity—with faith—with a sense of sin—of our dependence on mercy—and of our desert of misery. It is sin which must affect us, rather than the immediate apprehension of death. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. Let us come, as this penitent came, to the throne of grace, and we shall not be sent empty away. We shall go down to our houses justified. Jesus will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, till he send forth judgment unto victory. In him let the humble trust. This is his call : ‘ Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke which is easy, and my burden which is light. Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest to your souls.

SERMON XXX.

THE EVIDENCES OF OUR TITLE TO THE HEAVENLY
INHERITANCE.

GENESIS xv. 8.

And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know, that I shall inherit it.

THE patriarch Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans to sojourn in the land of Canaan. While he was in this land, God appeared unto him in a vision, and made him a promise of a numerous posterity, and of an inheritance for them in the country in which he now sojourned. God said to him, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees to give thee this land to inherit it." And he said, "Whereby shall I know, that I shall inherit it?" This he spake, not as disbelieving the truth of the promise, but as desiring a more full confirmation of his faith. This confirmation God was pleased to grant him, in the manner related in the following part of the chapter. 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.' He was distinguished by the eminence of his faith. He is called the father of all them that believe.

The land of Canaan, which was promised as an inheritance to Abraham, was a type of the *heavenly* inheritance, which is prom-

ised to those who walk in the steps of his faith. If the patriarch was solicitous to know, that he should inherit the former, much rather should we feel a concern to know our title to the latter. Canaan was a valuable inheritance, but heaven is far more valuable.

Canaan is called a *holy* land ; for it was sequestered from other lands for the people whom God had chosen to be a peculiar people to himself. There, God's name was known, his worship maintained, and his will revealed. There, such privileges were enjoyed, as were granted to no other country on earth. The psalmist says, ' God sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments to Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments they have not known them.'

Heaven is in a more eminent and peculiar sense a holy place. Into that, nothing enters that defiles—there the spirits of just men are made perfect—there God displays the glories of his character—there he is worshipped with constancy, zeal and delight. There is no corruption to damp the fervor of devotion, and no impertinent and obtruding objects to divert the pious thoughts of the worshippers, or interrupt their pleasing service.

The seed of Abraham in Canaan saw many wonderful works of God—many astonishing interpositions—many stupendous miracles in their favour. These were to pious men subjects of delightful contemplation and devout thanksgiving and praise. In heaven more glorious scenes will open to the view of the saints. There they will behold such works, as they never saw or imagined before ; and many works which they have seen, they will there behold more clearly and understand more perfectly. Their views of creation, providence and grace will be enlarged—The mysteries of God's dispensations will be unfolded. The happy consequences of a thousand grievous events will be manifested. They will join in the song of those around God's throne. ' Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power ; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for he hath redeemed us by his blood.'

Canaan was a rich and fruitful inheritance. It was a land flowing with milk and honey, and abounding in all the blessings which could be desired—a land in which they might dwell securely, and eat bread to the full. In this respect it was a faint emblem of heaven, where ‘the saints shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; and the Lamb shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’

The land of Canaan was given to the seed of Abraham for an *everlasting* possession. They were to enjoy this land, as long as they continued in God’s covenant. The perpetuity of the possession depended on the constancy of their obedience. The promise was conditional. When they departed from that obedience, which was the condition of the promise, they forfeited the inheritance. When they returned to God, they were reinstated in the possession of it. For their wickedness they were sent into captivity in Babylon.—In their captivity, they repented and sought God’s mercy; and were again restored to their ancient country and privileges. They are now, for their unbelief, cast out of their land again—but they are still preserved as a distinct nation.—The time is coming when they will embrace the gospel; and then they will be gathered together in the land of their fathers, and will inherit it to the end of time. They shall long enjoy the work of their hands. The promise, therefore, that this land should be to the seed of Abraham an *everlasting* possession, or a possession to continue as long as the earth shall be a habitation for men, will doubtless be made good; for those temporary interruptions, which are caused by their own unbelief and disobedience, are no infractions of the promise. This promise, however, could respect the seed of Abraham only in their collective, or national capacity—not the individuals of the nation. Though a nation may be continued long by a succession of generations, yet the particular persons must soon be removed by death.

The heavenly inheritance is everlasting in the most absolute sense. There is no curse, no mortality, no succession of generations among the happy possessors of it. Each one will possess it for ever in his own personal right. His probation is finished—

his holiness is confirmed—his security established. There will be no temptation to corrupt him—no sin to eject him—no death to remove him—no enemy to supplant him. He will abide forever in the inheritance of the Lord, under his sure protection and gracious smiles. This is an eternal inheritance. It is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and fading not away. It is now promised to the faithful. It is reserved in heaven for them; it is secured to them by promise, and it is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Here now, methinks, I hear some of you say : This is, indeed, a good land—I feel a solicitude to obtain a share in it. But whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? I shall endeavor to answer this important enquiry.

1. Look to the patriarch Abraham and see how he gained a knowledge of his title to the heavenly inheritance.

“ He became an heir of the promise by *faith*,” and under the influence of faith he walked with God in a course of humble obedience; he lived on earth as a pilgrim and a stranger; sought a better country, even a heavenly; and looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The apostle to the Hebrews exhorts christians to give diligence, even to the end, that they may obtain the full assurance of hope; and to be followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. By faith we obtain a title to the promises; by patience and persevering obedience we prove the sincerity of our faith, and the sureness of our title. The promise of eternal life is to them who seek it by a patient continuance in well-doing.

Now ask yourselves : Do you believe there is an heavenly inheritance, and do you walk as if you believed it? Have you that faith by which you look at things unseen? Are those things in the steady view of your minds? Is it your governing concern to obtain an interest in the world above? Do you live like Abraham who saw the promises afar off, and was persuaded of them and embraced them, and confessing himself a stranger in the earth, sought a heavenly country for his home, and relied on the word of God, that he was *his* God, and had prepared for him a city?

Observe farther,

2. Abraham desired a *confirmation* of his faith. He sought a fuller evidence of his title to the inheritance. He enquired, whereby shall I know that it is mine? He felt its importance, and wished to have all doubts concerning his claim to it, entirely removed. Is this your temper? If you content yourselves with a careless and superficial hope in a case of so much consequence, you are not like Abraham. He prayed, Lord God, whereby shall I *know* that I shall inherit it?

You are not satisfied with a doubtful title to an earthly inheritance. If your heart is as much engaged in securing a heavenly, as an earthly possession, you will not rest contented with a precarious claim to that. You will fear, lest a promise being left you of entering into it, you should seem to come short of it. If you are not as solicitous to secure an eternal as a temporal inheritance, then your affections are principally set on the latter. And whether a governing affection for this world be consistent with a title to heaven, you can easily judge for yourselves.

3. Whether we shall inherit the heavenly land, we are to know by our *attendance* on Divine ordinances; for these are the means by which we are to improve our qualifications for it, and ascertain our title to it.

In answer to Abraham's enquiry, God directed him to prepare and offer a sacrifice. He prepared it in exact conformity to the Divine instruction, and attended upon it with great watchfulness and care. In his devout attendance God gave him new and fresh assurance of the promised inheritance.

God has instituted other ordinances for us to observe; and has appointed them for the same gracious purpose. In them we are to seek communion with God—to learn his will—to enliven our faith—to strengthen our resolutions of obedience, and thus to acquire a knowledge of our interest in his favor.

If we turn away from the institutions of God, we can have no evidence of our title to the inheritance; for we not only neglect the means of obtaining this evidence, but shew a temper of disobedience, which is inconsistent with such evidence.

Let us not, however, depend on an external attendance as full evidence in the case. Negligence is evidence against us ; but bare attendance is not conclusive evidence for us. We must enquire for what end, and in what manner, we observe Divine institutions. Do we approach them with a desire to learn God's will—to be quickened in our obedience—to gain the knowledge of ourselves, and to correct the errors of our hearts and lives ? And do we feel a love to them and delight in them ? Can we say with the saints of old, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord God of hosts : our soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord ?" "A day in thine house is better than a thousand." "Our soul thirsteth for thee, our flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where is no water, to see thy power and glory, so as we have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, our lips shall praise thee. Our soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. O send out thy light and thy truth ; let them lead and guide us. Let them bring us into thy tabernacles. Then will we go unto the altar of God ; unto God our exceeding joy."

If we have the same end in approaching God's ordinances, as he had in instituting them, even our spiritual edification ; and if we feel our hearts corresponding to them and delighted in them ; then we have communion with God, and receive fresh evidence that we shall be admitted into the presence of his glory.

4. Do we *renounce* and *abhor* every thing which is *inconsistent* with the nature of this inheritance ?

Into heaven nothing can enter that defiles, or works abomination. The fearful and unbelieving and abominable are cast out, and will have their part in a far different place—in a place more congenial to their character. "Know ye not," says the apostle, "that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God ? Be not deceived ; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God."

There is a kingdom prepared ; but none can inherit it who are habitually unrighteous, for it is a kingdom of righteousness ; and

God will cast out of it all things which offend, and them who do iniquity.

The apostle tells us, that not only such as practise *all* unrighteousness, but they who practise *any* unrighteousness, shall be excluded from it. If then there be any known wickedness which we love and indulge, whether it be impurity, intemperance, covetousness, injustice, deceit, extortion, envy, or malice, or whatever kind of wickedness it be, we cannot inherit the kingdom, until we are washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.

5. To know whether we shall inherit the heavenly Canaan, we must enquire, whether we have a *temper conformed* to it—whether we are made meet to be partakers of it. It is a holy land ; and without holiness none can enter into it. The inhabitants of it are employed in holy services ; and without holiness we cannot take part in those services. The Psalmist makes this important enquiry, “ Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle ? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill ? ” And he answers under Divine direction, “ He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that doth no evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against him. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but they who fear the Lord are honored.” The qualifications for the heavenly inheritance, our Saviour has more particularly described. The blessedness of this inheritance, he tells us, belongs to those, who are poor and humble in spirit—who mourn under a sense of their sins, and seek comfort in God’s mercy by repentance—who are meek and gentle in their temper, and kind and beneficent in their deportment toward mankind ; yea, even toward their enemies, as well as their friends—who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and are never satisfied with the scanty measure which they have, but reach after more full supplies—who are merciful to the afflicted, and forward to relieve them in their distress, and to comfort them in their sorrow—who are pure in heart, free from evil passions and vile affections, and conformed to the Divine character in holiness and goodness—who are of a peaceable disposition in themselves, and who study the things which make for peace among others, and who are steadfast

in the practice of righteousness, even though they should be reviled and persecuted for righteousness' sake. Such are the men who shall inherit the land of promise.

The religion which qualifies men for heaven, is not merely an abstinence from vice and wickedness in its grossest forms. It is positive purity and goodness. To constitute this religion, there must be a real love of God's character—an esteem and approbation of his commands—a submission to his government, as well as a forbearance of what the world calls evil.

That we might not have too partial and limited ideas of religion, the apostle describes it both negatively and positively. He tells us, what it is not, and what it is—what it excludes, and what it contains. “Ye have been taught, as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off concerning your former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore put away lying, and speak every man truth with his neighbor. Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him work with his hands the thing which is good, that he may give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying. Let all bitterness and wrath and clamor be put away from you, and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another. Be ye followers of God, and walk in love. Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the acceptable will of God.”

The state of heaven is not merely the absence of misery, but the enjoyment of happiness. The qualification must be not merely the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, but the love of godliness, sobriety and righteousness. If there be positive happiness in heaven, there must, in order to our enjoying it, be a temper of positive holiness formed in us.

You think, that you shall enter into heaven, because you shun many of the vices which others practise. But possibly you would shun these vices, even though you thought there was no

such place as heaven. It may be, your constitution, your interest, your worldly circumstances, your social connections forbid them. Do you love and practise the opposite virtues? Do you practise them, even when the world would tempt you to renounce them? You must not only abhor that which is evil, but cleave to that which is good.

6. That you may know whether you shall inherit the heavenly country, enquire, whether you have been *sealed* by the Spirit, and whether you have the earnest of the Spirit in your hearts. This is an evidence in the case, on which the scripture lays great weight and to which you ought carefully to attend.

The apostle says to the Ephesians, "Ye have obtained an inheritance in Christ, in whom, after ye believed, ye were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." He says to the Corinthians, "All the promises of God in Christ are yea, and amen. He who hath anointed us in God, hath also *sealed* us and given the *earnest* of the Spirit in our hearts." And to the Romans he also says, "Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

A *seal* leaves its image on the substance, on which it is impressed. This kind of sealing, in common usage, is designed for evidence of a person's right to some privilege, or property conveyed to him by another. In allusion to this usage, the apostle speaks of the *sealing* of the *Spirit* as an evidence of our title to the heavenly inheritance. As the seal leaves its image on the wax, so the Spirit, in the work of sanctification, forms the Divine image in the soul. What are the marks and characters of this Divine seal the apostle particularly instructs us. They are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" or as he elsewhere expresses them more summarily, they are "all goodness and righteousness and truth."

Now if we have these virtues and graces wrought in our souls, we have the seal of the Spirit. And the existence of these graces in us is called the *earnest* of the Spirit; and the *first fruits* of the

Spirit. They are a pledge and earnest of our inheritance, as they are a preparation for it, and an anticipation of it. They are not only a qualification for heaven, but they are heaven already begun. The comfort and pleasure resulting from a holy temper wrought in the soul are foretastes of heaven. They are the first fruits of the promised land. Thus the Spirit witnesses with our spirit, that we are heirs of God. The work of sanctification in the soul is an evidence of our heirship. As this is a work of the Divine Spirit on *our* spirit, so in this work he bears *witness* with our spirit. And this testimony is complete, when, by quickening our graces into sensible exercise, he enables us to discern their truth and reality.

In enquiring, therefore, after the *earnest, seal* and *testimony* of the Spirit, we are not to look for any extraordinary discovery in a way of immediate communication, or revelation ; but to examine the habitual state and temper of our minds. If we find in ourselves those graces which the gospel requires, and which constitute the christian character, such as love to God, charity to mankind, affection for good men, meekness, humility, patience, contentment and sobriety ; then we have the sealing of the Spirit ; and hereby we may know, that we shall inherit the purchased possession.

Paul says, "God hath *anointed* and sealed us." And what Paul calls the *sealing*, St. John calls the *anointing* of the Spirit. "This," says he, "is the promise, which God hath promised, even eternal life." The promise is sure, but how shall we know whether it belongs to us ? The apostle adds, "The anointing," that is, the sanctification, "which ye have received of him abideth in you." There is a permanently holy change formed in you. "And ye need not that any man teach you"—that is, instruct you whether the promise of eternal life belongs to you ; "But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things" relative to this question, "and is truth, and as it hath taught you, so abide in it." Let this work of sanctification continue, and increase, and you will have a continual evidence of your interest in the promise. "And now abide in Christ," that is, in the faith of Christ's gospel, "that when he shall appear, ye may have confi-

dence, and may not be ashamed before him at his coming.”
 “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one who doth righteousness is born of him. Now we are the sons of God—and it doth not yet appear what we shall be—but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope, purifieth himself, as he is pure.”

I have now laid before you the nature and excellency of the good land which God has promised to his people; and have answered the question, Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

If I had been describing some country in this world, which was preferable to all other countries, and had been shewing you how you might obtain a settlement in it, and might know that you should inherit it, probably you would give me your attention.

The present is a subject of much higher importance, and I hope you have not been inattentive to this.

The land of Canaan, which was formerly called *the glory of all lands*, falls infinitely below the land which has this day been offered us for an everlasting possession. Who is there, that does not desire to inherit it? If you desire to inherit it, surely you have enquired, ‘Whereby shall we know that we shall inherit it?’ The evidences of your title have been stated. Can you, on the foot of these evidences, support a claim to it? If you can, you are rich and happy—you will inherit all things. You may be contented in poverty, for you are rich. You may be patient in adversity, for your souls are in health. You may cheerfully distribute your substance, for by scattering you increase. You may take joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that you have in heaven a better and enduring substance. Let those who are rich in this world, be rich in good works; ready to distribute, and willing to communicate; for they will lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, and will lay hold on eternal life. Let them who are poor in this world, rejoice in the assurance, that ‘God has chosen the poor, who are rich in faith, to be heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to them who love him.’ Let all learn, in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content, for God will supply all their need, according to the

riches of his goodness in Jesus Christ. Let them who are in affliction, be patient and establish their hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and he will admit them to inherit a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

If you have good evidence, that you shall inherit the kingdom, keep your evidence bright, and brighten it more and more. Walk by faith in unseen things—keep the eyes of your faith fixed on the future world—strengthen your faith, and enliven your heavenly affections by attending on the instituted worship and ordinances of God—be not conformed to this world, but be ye, more and more, transformed by the renewing of your minds, proving what is acceptable in the sight of God—be followers of them, who by faith and patience inherit the promises, and thus give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.

If any find the evidences which have been stated, inapplicable to themselves, and are led hence to conclude, that the inheritance described is not their's; let them not continue in so unsafe and unhappy a state. The inheritance is glorious; it is offered to all without distinction; but the conditions must be complied with, before any can know that they shall obtain it. The conditions are such, and only such as are necessary to the possession. They are such as imply a meetness to partake of it.

Go to God, and implore his grace for the renewal and sanctification of your souls—renounce the ways and manners of the world—devote yourselves to God to serve him in newness of life—converse with his word—attend on his worship—yield yourselves servants to him—commit yourselves to the guidance of his Spirit and to the protection of his grace, and place your hope in his faithfulness and promise. Go, like the returning captives, mourning your past sins; seek the Lord your God—ask the way to Zion with your faces thitherward—stand in the way and see—ask for the old paths, where is the good way—walk therein and ye shall find rest to your souls.

SERMON XXXI.

THE DANGER OF OFFENDING CHRIST'S LITTLE ONES.

MATTHEW XVIII. 10.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

SUCH a race of beings as we are, attended with various infirmities, subject to innumerable wants, probationers for future happiness, and soon to quit the present scene and enter upon an eternal state of existence, ought to feel for each other in every calamity and danger, and by prudent offices of kindness and love, to assist each other's safe passage through this world, and happy entrance into the other.

All pride in the contemplation of ourselves—all contempt of others for their supposed inferiority—all such treatment as would injure their feelings, corrupt their minds, or endanger their future felicity, is utterly inconsistent with the condition in which we are placed, and our relation to one another ; and highly offensive to the benevolent Creator whose impartial providence extends its care to small as well as great.

Benevolence is the principle which should dictate our social conduct. And this principle must be founded in humble thoughts of ourselves.

When the disciples, aspiring to a worldly superiority, asked their master, who should be greatest in his kingdom, he rebuked their ambition by placing before them a little child, as an emblem of that humility, which should distinguish his disciples from the men of the world. "Except ye be converted," says he, "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Having taught them humility as the first virtue in his religion, he next inculcates benevolence, as a virtue connected with it. "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me; but whoso shall offend one of these little ones who believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

From the danger of offending these little ones, Christ takes occasion to give the general caution in the text. Take heed that ye despise them not—that you entertain not such indifferent and contemptuous ideas of them, as to be careless how you treat them. Think it not a small matter to cast in their way offences and stumbling-blocks, because they are little ones. For this reason you must rather encourage, strengthen and support them. To enforce this caution he represents little ones as God's peculiar care. He has given the angels charge of them; and their angels do always behold His face in heaven, and stand ready to execute His commands in their defence, or in the punishment of their enemies.

We will consider,

I. Who are intended by these little ones.

II. What is that contempt of them which is here forbidden, and

III. The force of the argument against despising them.

I. The persons, whom we are cautioned not to despise, are called little ones. They are said to have believed in Christ—and are compared to the little child whom Christ placed before his

disciples, as an example of that character which he requires in us all.

The persons thus primarily intended, are pious children and youth. Those who, impressed with a sense of religion, commit themselves to the grace and to the service of their Redeemer.

There were, in our Saviour's day, some who believed in him while they were but little ones. From the womb of the morning he received the dew of the youth. Out of the mouths of babes, flowed praises to his name. The children in the temple sang, Hosanna to the Son of David. John speaks of little children who knew the Father, and who had obtained forgiveness by faith in Christ.

The tender minds of the young are more susceptible of serious impressions, than those in riper age; but these impressions are more easily effaced by the sensible objects which surround them.

They may form virtuous resolutions, but they meet with numerous temptations which divert them from these resolutions. Inexperienced in the dangers of the world, they are liable to be entangled in unseen and unsuspected snares. They need more frequent cautions, counsels and encouragements, than those who are habituated to the practice, and confirmed in the purposes of piety and religion. They are thus entitled to our particular attention and care.

The Saviour expressed a special concern for them; and has enjoined on us a tender and cautious treatment of them, lest we cause their feeble feet to stumble in the path of virtue, on which they have newly entered.

Besides children in years, there are many who, according to the style of scripture, may come under the denomination of little ones.

There are new-born babes—those who have but lately been begotten through the gospel; and though they may, in a natural sense, be men, yet they are but children—but babes in Christ Jesus. Their powers, as men, may be great; but as christians, their experience is but short, their strength small, and their resolution weak. These are exposed to many of the same dangers, and therefore need the same cautious and tender treatment, as chil-

dren in age. Christ would not call to the severer and more rigorous exercises of religion, those disciples, who had but newly engaged to follow him. He treated them with tenderness, lest he should discourage their hopeful beginnings, and divert them from their good resolutions. New wine, he said, must not be put into old bottles, lest the bottles burst, and the wine be lost; but new wine must be put into new bottles that both may be preserved.

There are some, whom the apostle calls *weak* brethren. These must be sustained and assisted by such as are strong.

Men of honest hearts and virtuous aims, may be weak through a natural inferiority of mental powers—or through the want of education and an opportunity to enlarge the mind by the acquisition of knowledge—or through certain prejudices early imbibed and long indulged—or through infirmities of body which affect the mind—or through the difficulty of their worldly circumstances which subjects them to peculiar temptations. From these and similar causes, we may often see those whom we esteem as upright men, still betraying, in matters of religion, much of the weakness, injudiciousness, and instability of children. These, therefore, may be comprehended in the appellation of little ones who believe in Christ.

Now the treatment which elder and stronger christians owe them, our Saviour,

II. Expresses in our text, by not despising them; and in the preceding verses, by receiving them, and not offending them.

The same language, the apostle uses in the fourteenth chapter to the Romans. “Him that is weak in faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. One believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not, and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth, for God hath received him.” “Why dost thou judge thy brother, and why dost thou set at nought thy brother?” If thy brother be grieved by thy meat, thou walkest not charitably. “Judge not one another, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother’s way.” Do nothing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is

made weak. The same cautions are found in the first epistle to the Corinthians. Take heed lest your liberty become a stumbling-block to them who are weak. When ye sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

To grieve, offend, judge, or reject our weak brother, or by any means to occasion his stumbling and falling, or to walk toward him in a manner inconsistent with charity, humility and meekness, is to despise one of Christ's little ones.

Particularly,

1. We despise Christ's little ones, when we reject, on account of immaterial differences, those whom Christ has received.

Christ owns as his disciples all who with the heart believe in him, and submit to him. The qualifications for admission into his kingdom are not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost—not distinguished abilities, and superior gifts, but a humble, sincere, and good heart. The apostle directs those who are strong in faith to receive him that is weak; and though he may be supposed to err in matters of meat and drink, not to reject him, for God has received him. To exclude from *our* favor one whom God has received to *his* favor, is to despise not only man, but God. It is to set ourselves above him, and to trample on the merciful constitution of his government.

It will at once be admitted, that those whom God receives, we are to receive too. But then the question is, How shall we know whom God has received? The apostle tells us, we must walk charitably; and charity hopeth all things. We are thus to receive as our brethren, however weak they may appear, all whom there is a charitable ground to hope that God has received. We are not to reject them because they cannot prove beyond doubt their acceptance with God; but to receive them unless we can prove their rejection of God. No errors or infirmities, no differences of opinion, or varieties of practice, which affect not the substance of religion, can be a justifiable ground on which to reject a brother from our christian communion, or from our charitable opinion.

We are not to condemn men as sinners for errors in sentiment or conduct, which may be imputed to weakness. This is to despise Christ's little ones.

2. We show a contempt of our brethren, when we wound and grieve their consciences by a strenuous adherence to things indifferent, or matters which we ourselves judge not to be important.

Christians differ not more in their opinions, than in their apprehension of the importance of those opinions. A youthful, or a weak christian, may view as sacred, certain sentiments or usages, which one of a more enlarged and liberal mind, may see to be indifferent. In cases of this nature, the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak ; not please themselves only, but please their brethren, for their good to edification. Now if, in such cases, we take the side which is contrary to the opinion of our brethren, and stiffly maintaining it, grieve their tender minds, we treat them with the contempt which Christ forbids—We discover such a disregard to their peace and edification as is inconsistent with charity—In matters of essential importance, we must not please men by sinful compliances ; for if we thus please men we are not the servants of Christ—But in things of mere expedience, we are to condescend to men of low estate ; and if we have faith concerning the lawfulness of an action, which appears sinful to our brother, we must have it to ourselves before God ; and not condemn ourselves in that which we allow.

3. We despise Christ's little ones, when we make that use of our christian liberty which will embolden them to real iniquity.

Tender minds are to be treated with caution. The young and inexperienced are influenced much by example. We should conduct in their presence with circumspection and reserve. If we venture too near the borders of vice, we may embolden them to pass over, into its territories. The rule given by the apostle to the Corinthians, concerning eating in an idol's temple, is applicable to all cases of this kind. He concedes that an idol is nothing, and though a christian should eat meats offered to an idol, he is not the worse ; and though he should forbear, he is not the better ; for its being consecrated to an idol, changes not its quality, nor need to affect the conscience of a discerning christian. How-

ever, says the apostle, take heed lest this liberty of your's become a stumbling block to those who are weak; for if any man see thee, who hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak, be emboldened to eat things offered to idols, and to eat in honor to them, and through thy knowledge shall thy weak brother perish for whom Christ died. The apostle here teaches us that we ought never to use our christian liberty in such a manner, as will tend to encourage and embolden others in things really sinful.

4. We despise the weak, when we by any means, draw them away from the truth, or put in their way occasions of stumbling.

If we entice them into sin—set before them corrupt examples—instil into them licentious errors—ridicule their serious resolutions and virtuous reformations; and after they have escaped the corruptions of the world, entangle them again therein, we offend Christ's little ones. And when we thus sin against the brethren we sin against Christ.

5. Our contempt of the weak appears in the neglect of the duties which we owe them. Benevolence is not a negative virtue. It includes the performance of positive duties; and the omission of these, is despising Christ's little ones and a violation of christian love, as well as direct injuries. We are to strengthen weak hands—confirm feeble knees—make straight paths for lame feet, that they may not be turned out of the way, but rather be healed. We are to encourage hopeful beginnings in the weak and young, and animate them to persevere in their virtuous purposes. We are to instruct the ignorant—establish the wavering—reclaim the wandering—reprove the offending—warn the incautious—and guard the defenceless. Inattention to these christian duties discovers a contempt of our brethren and a disregard to the laws of Christ, as well as real injuries. We are required to exhort one another—to rebuke our brother and not suffer sin upon him—to deliver those who are drawn unto death.

Christian love will operate not merely to restrain us from laying stumbling blocks before the weak and the blind, but excite us to remove stumbling blocks out of their way.

Having considered the caution of our Saviour against despising his little ones, let us,

III. Attend to the reason of this caution—In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.

As there are evil spirits who roam about, seeking whom they may destroy, so we are assured from revelation, there are innumerable multitudes of pure and benevolent spirits who are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. And our Saviour here teaches us, that those little ones who believe in him, are the special and immediate charge of angels. They are called *their* angels, to signify their particular care for such. In what ways angels administer to them it may be difficult for us to determine, but of the fact there can be no doubt, since it is so plainly and frequently asserted in revelation. They may be employed in defending feeble saints and little ones against the assaults of evil spirits—in guarding them from dangers and snares—in watching them while they sleep, and in protecting them in their common employments.

Nor can we say, how often seasonable thoughts and wholesome counsels may be suggested by their friendly influence. If we believe that evil spirits have power to work in the children of disobedience, and to molest the minds of good men by wicked suggestions, we must believe that angels have as much power to infuse wholesome meditations, and to aid and strengthen virtuous resolutions.

But what seems more especially to be intended in the text, is their attention to the injuries which Christ's feeble disciples receive, and the information which they carry to heaven against those, who despise and offend these little ones. Not that God needs information from any ; for his eyes are on all his creatures. But to impress us with a deeper sense of the danger of offending them, Christ represents the angels as watching around them, and flying to heaven with the report of every thing they suffer.

The angels are often, in scripture, represented as witnesses of our conduct. The apostle therefore charges Timothy to fidelity in his office, in the presence of the elect angels.

Christ says, "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father." But if they are always in heaven, how do they watch over and minister to Christ's little ones here on earth? Can they be in heaven and on earth at the same time?—But can we say where heaven is? Need we suppose that it is only in some distant part of the universe? If the happiness of angels and saints consists in the view and contemplation of God's glory—in the sense and enjoyment of his favour—in attending his worship and doing his will, may not heaven be in one place as well as another? God's presence fills the universe. It is confined to no part of the creation—to no part of boundless space. Wherever he is pleased to manifest his glory and favor to his rational creatures, there he makes a heaven to them. The angels, then, may be said to behold the face of God in heaven, even while they are ministering to saints on earth. It is heaven to them to do his will and serve the interests of his kingdom. It is heaven to them to exercise their benevolence in promoting the happiness of the meanest and humblest believers here below. Did the heavenly host lose any part of their happiness—was their pleasure and enjoyment in any degree suspended, when they visited the shepherds in the field, and sang glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good will to men? Or when they sang together and shouted for joy at the first creation of the world? Is it not from the contemplation of God's works of power, wisdom and grace, that their knowledge is improved, their devotion kindled, and their joy and admiration raised to the highest elevation? Angels are indeed said to come from heaven, when they execute particular commissions in this world, and return to heaven, when they have finished their services. So also God himself is said to come down, and to return again to his place. But such phrases, as they respect God, are only figurative, and used in accommodation to human language and conception. As they respect angels, they are used, not to express a real change of place, but rather the accomplishment of their errand. When the angels are said to come to the shepherds, and to go away from them into heaven, their appearance and disappearance are all that is intended. They might be near them

before, and near them still ; but now their errand was executed, their song was finished, and the visible glory withdrawn.

How grand and solemn is the thought, that we dwell in the midst of spirits—that we are daily surrounded with angels—that we continually mingle with those wonderful beings, though they are invisible to us ! While we dwell in clay, our sight is too dim to perceive the company that we are in. Should the curtain be withdrawn, and our eyes enlightened, how should we be surprised, to find where we are, and whom we are among.

When the Syrians compassed the city of Dothan, where Elisha was, that they might take the prophet ; his servant, seeing the host which surrounded them, exclaimed, “ Alas, my master, how shall we do ? ” The prophet answered, “ Fear not, there are more with us, than with them. ” And Elisha prayed, Lord, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the young man’s eyes and he saw. And behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. When his eyes were opened, he beheld a numerous guard of angels, surrounding the prophet to protect him from his enemies.

The situation of the good man is, doubtless, still the same. Those ministering spirits, which are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation, faithfully attend their charge ; and when the christian drops his mantle of clay, and sees with other eyes, he will, like the prophet’s servant, see these heavenly beings around him. The angel of the Lord encampeth around them who fear him. These friendly spirits attend the dying beds of the saints, receive their departing souls, and convey them to the paradise of God.

Now, if the angels, those dignified and exalted beings, disdain not to minister to the meanest saints, even to Christ’s little ones, shall we despise them ? If they guard and defend the just, shall we dare to injure them ? If they lead and support the tottering steps of the weak and young, shall we presume to throw blocks in their way ? If they attend upon them, can we innocently neglect them ? How insolent is that pride of man, which despises the saints for the poverty of their condition, the weakness of their powers, the disadvantages of their education, or the infirmities of

their body, when angels make them, on these accounts, their more immediate care.

If they attend the saints, they will observe the injuries and offences which we offer them. They will behold our pride and insolence with displeasure. If they have immediate access to God, and are always admitted to his face, they can carry to him their complaints against us. Let us not dare then to despise or offend one of Christ's little ones, lest, as one expresses it, "we provoke those mighty spirits to sue out and execute some commission of vengeance upon us." To such a case may be applied God's warning to Israel. I send my angel before thee—beware of him—provoke him not—for he will not pardon your transgressions. No conduct of our's can be more provoking to those kind and benevolent spirits, than our offending and despising those little ones, of whom they have taken the charge, and for whose safety they daily watch.

What mighty encouragement have the young, the tender, the weak, and new beginners in religion, to persevere in their virtuous course, against all the difficulties and dangers which may threaten them. Christ has made you so much the objects of his care, that he sends his angels to attend you. While they minister to the heirs of salvation in general, they exercise a more special watch over you. In proportion as you are more weak, you enjoy a more immediate defence. When you are weak, then you are strong. Let your enemies be ever so numerous, there are more with you, than against you.

How circumspect should we be in all our walk, since so many eyes are upon us. Not the eyes of men only; they see but few of our actions: but the eyes of superior beings—beings of more perfect knowledge than the wisest, and of higher purity than the purest, of the sons of men.

Little do we realize the state which we are in. How watchful are we of our behaviour in the presence of those whom we revere. How careless in other company. But if we are always in the company of those holy angels, who are full of eyes, what manner of persons ought we to be? Where is the place, and what is the company, in which we can safely, or decently indulge in folly and

vice, in levity, wantonness and impiety? Can we sin with boldness, when ten thousand eyes are upon us, and when multitudes of angels are looking at us with indignation and astonishment?

Viewing ourselves thus surrounded with strict observers—thus acting under the eye of innumerable spectators, let us conduct with the dignity of christians—with the caution of probationers—with the purity of those who expect to be made equal to angels.

If the presence of angels is an argument of weight, a more solemn argument still, is the presence of the Deity, to induce us to be holy in all manner of conversation. He seeth not as man seeth, nor as angels see. His eyes not only penetrate the curtains of our chamber, but reach the inmost recesses of the heart. No thought is hidden from him, and he will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing.

Let us act as under the eye of Him who searcheth all hearts, and knoweth all the imaginations of the thoughts; who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart. And believing that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and every one of us must give an account of himself to God, let us not judge or set at nought our brother; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or occasion to fall, in his brother's way.

Let us hear, in a word, the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

