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Isaac Thomas
SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,
EVANGELICAL, DEVOTIONAL AND PRACTICAL.

ADAPTED TO THE PROMOTION OF

CHRISTIAN PIETY, FAMILY RELIGION,
AND YOUTHFUL VIRTUE.

—*—*—*—*—*—*—
BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WESTSPRINGFIELD.

—*—*—*—*—*—*—
IN FIVE VOLUMES.



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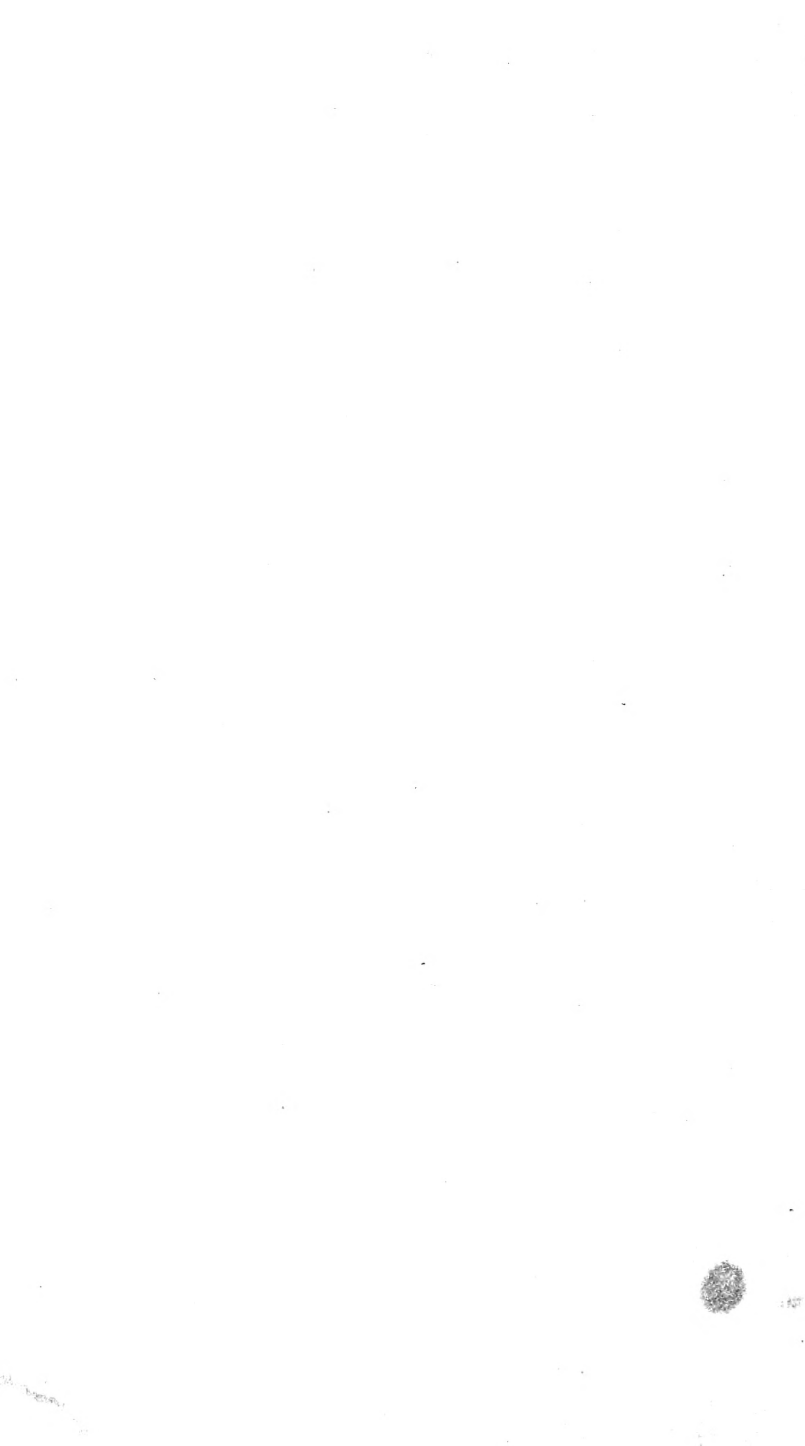
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THE Author takes this opportunity to thank the public for the liberality with which they have patronized, and the candor with which they have received his former publications. He had not intended to make any farther trial of their goodness in this way. But the opinion of some friends whose judgment he values, that another volume would be useful, and the request of several gentlemen, that certain discourses on particular subjects, might see the light, either by themselves, or as a part of a volume, have induced him again to presume on the public candor. He has the rather been willing to comply with the advice of friends, as knowing that his time is short.— An argument this, which they have pressed, and which he has felt. For this volume he has selected subjects which he thought highly important in themselves, and not unseasonable at the present time. He has aimed to treat them with perspicuity, and wishes they may merit the approbation of such as shall patronize them, and contribute to confirm the Faith and promote the Piety of all who may read them.





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SERMON I.

The Folly of Atheism.

PSALM xiv. 1.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God : They are corrupt ; they have done abominable works ; there is none that doth good.



THE first clause in this verse, correctly rendered, might be read thus ; “ The fool hath said in his heart, NO GOD.” It may be understood to express a *wish* that there *were* no God, as well as an *opinion*, that there is none. And, indeed, such an opinion always presupposes the wish.

No man ever disbelieved the existence of a Deity, unless his heart was previously disaffected to the character and government of the Deity.

There are few men, who are settled in the persuasion, that there is no God ; but there are many, who in their hearts wish there were none ; or none who hates sin, and will punish sinners. This opposition of heart is the ground of speculative unbelief. The reason, why fools say, There is no God, is because they are corrupt, and have done abominable works. If there is a God, he must be perfect ;

he must approve of righteousness and hate wickedness ; consequently the workers of iniquity must be exposed to punishment. Hence in their hearts they wish, there were no God, and labor to believe, there is none.

We will inquire, to whom the charge in the text may be applied : And then we will shew their folly.

I. We will, first inquire, To whom the charge in the text may be applied.

1. If there are any who really disbelieve, and directly deny the existence of a God, these stand foremost in the class of *Atheists*. It is a question, however, whether there can be many, if there are any, of this description. The effects which we see, lead us up to the first cause ; and this cause must be eternal, independent, intelligent, and powerful ; must possess all perfections ; that is, must be God. But then, it is one thing to believe in God, as the original creator and constant preserver of the *natural* world ; and another thing to believe in him, as the righteous governor of the *intellectual* and *moral* world. There are some, who, while they acknowledge him in the former character, deny him in the latter. To say, that there is no invisible power, which made and sustains the universe, is, in effect, to say, that the universe is eternal, or the product of fate or chance. This is too absurd and unphilosophical for a thinking man to admit. But then there are those, who deny a future state of retribution, and profess to believe, that all men, if they exist at all, will be happy after death, whatever may have been their previous character. These though theists in a philosophical sense, are in a *moral* sense atheists. To say that God regards not our conduct, and will make no discrimination between characters, nor dispense rewards or punishments in a future world, comes exactly to the same thing, in a



moral estimation, as to say, There is no God. For the belief of a God, who is indifferent to our moral conduct, will have no more influence upon us, than a belief, that there is none. If we can persuade ourselves, that all men, will cease to exist, or will be alike happy hereafter, whatever is their character here, we shall feel no motive to virtue, or restraint from vice, except what arises from temporal convenience, or inconvenience. And of his own convenience every man will judge for himself: He will consequently submit to no fixed rules of action, but be wholly governed by his idea of present worldly advantage.

This persuasion of happiness for all men, and punishment for none, whether it be grounded on an opinion, that there is no God—or that he is indifferent to men's actions—or that he is too merciful to punish any actions—or that Christ has absolutely and unconditionally redeemed all men, still comes to the same result, that all men are safe; as safe in one way, as another; and perfectly safe in any way.

2. They who confound virtue and vice, and deny all moral obligation, say in their hearts, "NO GOD."

If moral perfection is the character of God, then morality is binding on men: For certainly intelligent creatures ought to be assimilated to the character, and subject to the will of the Creator. There are few, who will *directly* deny the obligations of morality: But there are many who admit sentiments, which, whether they see the consequence or not, do in fact *lead* to the denial of those obligations.

Some plead, that "whatever they *think* to be right, that *is* right for *them*; and if they act according to the persuasion of their minds, they shall be approved."

Now what is this, but to exalt their own opinion above the divine authority? On this ground they

may justify the vilest actions. When once they are so depraved, as to call evil good, and good evil, their crimes will become virtues, and other men's virtues will be crimes. "But must not a man follow the dictates of his conscience?" Yes; but he must first see, that these dictates are agreeable to truth; for a man is responsible for his opinions, as well as for his actions. Paul verily thought, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; and he did them: But he afterwards condemned himself, as one of the chief of sinners, for having done them. "But does not the wise man say, 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he;' meaning, that what he thinks to be right, the same is right for him?" No: I have heard *foolish* men sometimes say so, and pretend to adduce the authority of the wise man: But really the wise man says no such thing. He says, "Eat not the bread of him that hath an *evil eye*, for as *he* thinketh in his heart so is he. Eat and drink, saith he, but his heart is not with thee." A niggardly, envious, evil hearted man may, to serve a turn, make a forced ostentation of liberality: But this alters not his character. The thoughts and feelings, the sentiments and dispositions of his heart, not the professions of his mouth, determine his character. Let him say what he will, he is such a man in reality, as he is in the temper of his soul.

Some say, "The end will consecrate the means; and if they have a useful and benevolent end, all means, which they think conducive to that end, must be good." But this is a most licentious doctrine. It sets aside the rules of virtue, and the precepts of revelation, and sanctifies fraud, injustice, perjury, and every vice, whenever a man can persuade himself that he is applying them to a valuable purpose. There were some in the apostolic times,

who said, "Let us do evil, that good may come; for if the truth of God abounds to his glory through our life, why should we be judged as sinners?" And they affirmed, that the Apostles taught the same doctrine. But Paul says, Their imputation is a slander, and their damnation is just. This is what some call "political morality," in distinction from scripture morality. A sacred writer calls it "earthly and sensual wisdom," in opposition to the wisdom from above, which is "pure and peaceable, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

3. "They who call not on God's name," are in scripture ranked among heathens and infidels, "on whom God will pour out his wrath."

If there is a God, who sustains the world, and exercises a moral government over men, we are dependent on him for all that we want, indebted to him for all that we enjoy, and accountable to him for all that we do. Hence it plainly follows, that every man as a rational and moral creature, is bound to worship God by prayer and supplication, praise and thanksgiving. The Psalmist says, "The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts. He saith in his heart, God hath forgotten, he hideth his face, he will not see." They, who will not seek after God, are here supposed to disbelieve and deny his providence, his inspection of human conduct, and his justice to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. To live without a sense and acknowledgment of the divine moral government, is to live as atheists do; and as every man would do, if he were persuaded, there was no invisible being, on whom he was dependent, to whom he was accountable, or from whom he had any thing to hope or fear.

4. The apostle speaks of some, “who profess to know God, but in works deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.” These are such atheists as David describes in our text. “They say, There is no God; they do abominable works: There is none that doth good; they are all gone aside; they are all together become filthy.”

If there is a God, he must be a holy, just, faithful and benevolent Being. They who are corrupt, and do abominable works, are in their temper and practice the reverse of this character. They are in their minds alienated from God, and enemies to him. They, in their hearts, speak the language of the fool in our text, either that there is no God, or that it is desirable there should be none. If they rejoiced in the belief of God’s moral character, they would study to live in a manner agreeable to it. While they in heart oppose it, they secretly wish it did not exist.

5. *Hypocrisy* is a species of atheism.

By hypocrisy I here mean making the form of religion a mere cloak for designed wickedness—such hypocrisy as was practised by the pharisees, who made long prayers, that they might devour widows’ houses, and kept up the show of extraordinary piety, that they might execute their meditated schemes of iniquity with surer success, and less suspicion. The language of such hypocrisy is, “How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the most High?” If we believe, there is a God of all perfections, we ought to set him always before us—to act as under his inspection, and to keep our hearts with all diligence; for our inward thoughts are as obvious to his view, as our external actions. All studied hypocrisy is a practical denial of his knowledge and holiness; and this is a denial of his

existence ; for a being void of these perfections cannot be God.

We have described the atheist. We are now,

II. To shew, that such a man is *a fool*. So David calls him ; and so he justly calls him.

1. The speculative atheist is a fool, because his belief is contrary to plain evidence and common sense.

“ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard ;” there is no region or country, where this evidence may not be seen. But the atheist shuts his eyes, and stops his ears, and will neither hear the voice of nature proclaiming the existence, nor behold the evidence of nature displaying the glory of a God. He lives in the midst of God’s works, and will not observe his agency ; he is sustained by the influence of God, and will not acknowledge his bounty. He rejects, in this case, that evidence, which, in all other cases, commands his belief, and directs his conduct. He knows, that every house is builded by some man ; but denies, that he who built all things is God. In the works of human art, he knows an artificer has been employed. But from the infinitely greater and more wonderful works of nature, he excludes the divine artificer. When he sees a man perform rational actions, he has no doubt, that this man possesses a rational faculty, though this faculty is as invisible as the Deity : But when he sees the system of nature, which is full of wisdom and goodness, he ascribes it to chance or fate, and will not believe that an invisible Being possessed of infinite wisdom has created it.

2. If the speculative atheist is a fool, because his belief is contrary to plain evidence, the practical

atheist is a greater fool, because he acts contrary to his own belief.

He acknowledges, that there is an allperfect Being present in all places, and observing all the actions of men—that this Being approves virtue and condemns vice, and will reward the former, and punish the latter ; and yet, in plain contradiction to this acknowledgment, he lives as if there were no God, or as if God would never make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. To practise contrary to our belief in the smallest matters, is folly : To do the same in matters, which relate to our eternal happiness, is madness.

Even though it were only *probable*, that we were accountable to a supreme moral governor, we ought, in all prudence, to act with a view to please him : How much more, when the evidence of this truth is so clear, that we pretend not to doubt it ?

Wisdom in doubtful cases, directs us to choose the part which can be attended with no danger.—were *this* a doubtful case, we ought to act with the same precaution. We all know, that there can be no danger in the belief of a God, and in a conduct agreeable to that belief ; but there may be infinite danger in the contrary. Though there were no divine government, nor future accountableness, yet the man, who in the full belief of these things, shuns vice, and practises righteousness, will suffer nothing by his mistake, but will really be a gainer by it.—He will escape the present mischiefs of iniquity, experience the present advantages of goodness ; and enjoy much consolation in the hope of a happy futurity. If this hope should not be realized, still he will lose nothing by entertaining it. His state will hereafter be no worse, than theirs who entertained the opposite opinion. In annihilation there can be no distinction. The believer will feel no disap-

pointment ; there will be none to reproach him, nor will he be an object of reproach. But, on the contrary, if there is a God and a future state—if there is a difference between sin and holiness—if the former leads to misery, and the latter to happiness, inconceivable in degree, and interminable in duration ; then the pious believer has infinitely the advantage. He is safe ; the Atheist is undone. All the hazard therefore is on the side of infidelity ; there is none on the side of religion. The believer is wise ; the Atheist is a fool.

If the Atheist is a fool, even on the supposition of the *uncertainty* of religion, he must on the *contrary* supposition, be more than a madman.

That there is a God—that he is a moral governor—that we are immortal and accountable—that there will be an eternal retribution, are truths which can be proved by evidence much superior to that which governs us in the ordinary affairs of life ; and yet the sinner, in opposition to this evidence, pursues a course, which must terminate in his ruin. Who would imagine, that rational beings were capable of such a voluntary and deliberate kind of infatuation ? “ The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil : Madness is in their hearts while they live ; and after that they go to the dead.”

3. He who says, there is no God, or wishes, there were none, is a fool, because, whether there is, or is not a God, his opinion and desire are founded in the supposition of an absolute falsehood ; that the government of God is the only thing, which exposes the sinner to misery.

He who thinks there is, or wishes there were no God, is conscious, that he is corrupt, and has done abominable works ; and he endeavors to persuade himself, there is no God, that he may be delivered from the fear of punishment ; for he imagines, that

if there is no God, there will be no punishment of misery beyond the present life.

But I would ask this man, Are you sure, that your conclusion is just?—You think that if there is a God, you are in danger. But whence arises your danger? Surely not from God's government, but from your own wickedness: God's ways are equal; your ways are unequal. Whether there be a divine government, or not, still it is an obvious truth, that sin tends to misery—that vice reigning in the heart excludes self-enjoyment, and produces inward vexation. This is what men constantly experience, though they will not allow the connexion. “The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” All irregular and exorbitant passions; all corrupt and perverse tempers, are a torment to the soul; an habitual course of vicious actions involves men in a thousand perplexities and troubles. And whether they believe, or disbelieve the government of a Deity, these fruits of wickedness are the same, and they are undeniable. If you could persuade yourself, that there is no God, would envy, malice, pride, impatience, avarice, jealousy and ambition, immediately become pleasant and agreeable sensations? Would intemperance and debauchery secure your health? Would idleness and dissipation make you rich? Would strife, discord and revenge sweeten the social life? Would fraud, perjury and injustice, cement friendship, and ensure the favor, confidence and assistance of mankind?—No.—The effects of vice indulged in the heart, and practised in the life, would be still the same. You suffer, then, from yourself; not from God. It is not God's government, but your opposition to his government, which brings your present unhappiness, and will bring your future misery.

But you imagine, that if there is no God, there will be no *future* misery. Why not? If vice in its own nature tends to misery, how will you escape misery without renouncing vice? You say, perhaps, "If there is no God, there is no *future existence*; and if no existence, then no misery."

Is this, then, a pleasing thought? Is there nothing gloomy in annihilation? Is the hope of such an end as this, the best comfort you find in your guilty course? Suppose you knew, that after death, the religious man would exist in complete and endless felicity, and you would not exist at all, should you think, your lot more eligible than his? Would you not call the man a fool, who should choose vice with a speedy annihilation, in preference to religion with a happy immortality?

"This," you will say, "is a fictitious supposition. All will share the same fate." But what advantage will it be to you, that good men should be annihilated with you? Will your annihilation be more comfortable, because none will be left to exist, after you are gone? Do you expect to be refreshed with this thought, when you cannot think at all?

Now say, Is not that man a fool, who, in preference to a holy life and a happy immortality, chooses a course in which there can be no comfort, but the gloomy hope, that he shall soon cease to exist, and the envious hope that better men will cease as well as he?

But if it were true, that there is no God, what evidence can the Atheist have, that he shall not exist, and be miserable after death? How came he to exist at all? Whatever was the cause of his existence here, may be the cause of his existence hereafter. Or if there is no cause, he may exist without a cause in another state, as well as in this. And if his corrupt heart and abominable works make him so unhappy here, that he had rather be annihilated, than run the

hazard of a future existence, what hinders, but that he may be unhappy forever? The man, then, is a fool; who wishes, there were no God, hoping thus to be secure from future misery; for, admitting there were no God, still he may exist hereafter, as well as here; and if he does exist, his corruptions and vices may render him miserable eternally, as well as for the present.

4. He who wishes, there were no God, is a fool, because he wishes for that, which is utterly inconsistent with all rational comfort and happiness.

Here we are in a world, abounding, indeed, with many good things, but full of dangers, vicissitudes and trials. We feel ourselves impotent; we see others impotent, like ourselves. We may be unable to procure the things which we want, or to enjoy them, if we had them. Our friends are dying around, and we are soon to die, like them. We cannot abide on earth long; and if we could, we should soon be in a kind of solitude; for when we had outlived the ordinary age of mortals, there would be few whom we regarded, and fewer who regarded us; we should dwell among strangers; none of the cordialities of earlier life would be felt.

If we be believed, there was no God, whither should we go for support in our troubles, comfort in our sorrows and defence in our dangers? What could we do in the day of anguish and distress? To whom could we resort, when lover and friend must forsake us? Where would be our consolation when we were entering the dark abode of the grave? To the Atheist this must be a dreary and disconsolate world—a world without light and without hope. But the pious believer has light in darkness, hope in sorrow, comfort in adversity, peace in death. Amidst all the changes of the world, he rejoices in the unchange-

able goodness, wisdom and faithfulness of God. He views all events as ordered by a Being who never errs. In all his afflictions he repairs to the throne, and in all his dangers confides in the care of this great and merciful Being. If things seem to be against him, he is sure that divine wisdom can turn them to his eternal benefit. When he knows not what to do, his eyes are directed to the eternal source of goodness and power. When the sorrows of death compass him, he calls on the name of the Lord, who preserves the humble, and sustains them who are brought low. To pass from one world to another, he views as a vast and solemn change. But whether he is in this world, or another, he knows, he shall be surrounded with God's presence, and he trusts, that in God's presence he shall find a fulness of that joy, which he has, in some degree, experienced already. He can say, "I am continually with thee; thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? There is none on earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart fail, but thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

Our subject may justly lead us to inquire, whether we really believe, there is a God. All will perhaps say, they believe this plain truth. Inquire then, do you live, as if you believed it? Do you devoutly attend on God's institutions? Do you pray without ceasing? Do you prove what is the will of God, and obey it, when you have proved it? Do you keep your hearts with diligence, that you may not offend him by evil thoughts and vile affections? Do you seek his favor above all other interests, and choose this for your portion and happiness? You may then say, you believe and rejoice in God. But if you cast off the fear of God, restrain prayer before

him, despise his word and worship, trample on his commands, serve divers lusts and pleasures, and act without a governing regard to the happiness of a future life ; in vain you pretend to faith in God. Whatever you may profess in words, you say in your heart, "NO GOD."

We see, that they, who forsake God, forsake their own mercies—they renounce happiness here, and hereafter. Without faith in God, and obedience to him, there can be no rational enjoyment of the world, no comfort in affliction, peace in death, or happiness in eternity. All happiness comes from God. None but the holy in heart can relish the happiness which he gives. That we may enjoy happiness in God, we must be like him. They who enter into his presence, are such as have clean hands and a pure heart, walk uprightly and do righteousness. They only who are like God, will see him as he is. If we have this hope, let us purify ourselves, as he is pure.

It is manifest from our subject, that they who believe in God, will believe also in Christ. If we regard God as a moral governor, we shall feel our obligation to obey him, and our desert of punishment when we offend him. Conscious, that we have in many things offended, we shall be solicitous to know, on what terms we can be forgiven, or whether we can be forgiven at all. Reason can never assure us, that there is forgiveness with God ; for, to punish the sinner is just ; and whether mercy will rejoice against judgment, God only can determine, and he only can reveal. The gospel teaches us, that God sent his Son into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, to call sinners to repentance, to save them who are lost, and that they who confess and forsake their sins will find mercy. And certainly every one who feels him-

self justly exposed to condemnation for his disobedience to the divine government, will esteem this gospel a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. Hence the Savior says, "Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." And "he who hateth me, hateth my Father also."

How happy is the pious man ! He believes there is one God—a Being of infinite power, unerring wisdom, unbounded goodness and unfailing mercy. He believes, that this God has sent a Savior into the world, by his doctrines to instruct, and by his death to redeem ignorant and guilty men. He believes, that through this Savior God will hear the prayers of the humble, forgive the sins of the penitent, help the infirmities of the saints, and reward the services of the faithful. He believes that God has prepared an eternal state of felicity for them who love him, that the afflictions of the present time are means of preparing him for that state, and that death will be his passage to it. He believes that God is his friend, and that under God's gracious care, he shall be guided in the path of righteousness, supported in trouble, succored in temptation, defended in danger, comforted in death, and brought safe to glory. What has such a man to fear ? What can harm him ? What can separate him from the love of God ? Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous : Rejoice ever more ; for he is your God ; and he will never forsake you. Fear not, for he is your shield, and your exceeding great reward. "Though the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine ; though the labor of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat ; though the flocks shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stall ; yet you may rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of your salvation."



SERMON II.

Enmity to the Gospel the true Cause of Unbelief.

JOHN xv. 22, 23, 24.

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin : But now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin ; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.

THESE words, though first spoken to the unbelieving Jews, will apply with equal force to all, who reject the gospel of Christ, after they have had a fair opportunity to learn its nature and design, and to examine the evidences of its truth and divinity. We are therefore as deeply concerned in them, and as solemnly warned by them, as were the Jews in our Savior's day.

They teach us, that, in respect of guilt, there is a great difference between those who have never known Christ, and those who have both *known* and *rejected* him—that in those who have known him, the true cause of unbelief is a *hatred* of him—that they who hate and reject him and his gospel, are in their hearts enemies to *all* religion. They hate his Father, as well as him.

1. The first observation to which our attention is called, is the distinction, which our Savior makes

between those who have never heard of his gospel, and those who have *known* and *rejected* it. The former have no sin ; the latter have no cloak for their sin.

There are many nations, who have no knowledge of the gospel, and who, perhaps, have not so much as heard of it. Of these it may be said, in the sense in which our Lord uses the expression, "They have not had sin." They are not chargeable with *unbelief*. This is the sin here intended. The Jews, though Christ had not spoken to them, would not have been absolutely innocent. From the ancient oracles of God they had so grossly departed, that they were condemned as a wicked and perverse generation. Neither were the heathens, in an unqualified sense, without sin ; for though they had not the written law, yet they were a law to themselves, and shewed the works of the law written on their hearts. Their violations of this law involved them in guilt ; for they knew the judgment of God, that they who did such things were worthy of death. The scripture asserts that "Jews and Gentiles are all under sin—that all have sinned and comes short of the glory of God—and that all the world are guilty before him." It can therefore be only the sin of disbelieving and rejecting the gospel, which is intended in our text.

It is agreeable to the sense of mankind, and to the declarations of the gospel, that every man will be treated according to the advantages which he has had, and the use which he has made of them. "To whom much is given, of him much will be required." "There is no respect of persons with God ; for as many as have sinned without law, shall perish without law ; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law, in that day when God shall judge the secrets of men according to the gospel."

Whether any of those who know not the gospel will ever obtain salvation, some have doubted. But Christain benevolence inclines us to hope, they are not absolutely and universally doomed to destruction. Before any written revelation was given, there were some, who, by the secret aids afforded them, made such an improvement of their natural advantages and traditionary communications as to attain to an acceptable piety. The atonement of the Redeemer is sufficient to expiate the sins of the world. God can, by special discoveries, supply the want of external means. The same grace, which applies the benefits of the atonement to infants, who have not a capacity for actual faith, can apply these benefits to adults, who have not the ordinary means of faith. "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." "Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world;" or of all nations, whether Jews or Gentiles. We cannot then absolutely conclude, that none among the unenlightened nations of the earth are admitted to a share in the great salvation purchased by the Redeemer.

But whatever may be their final condition, it is certain, they will not be condemned for rejecting a gospel, which was never brought to them, nor for want of faith in a Savior of whom they never heard. They who among them perish, "will perish without law." Their guilt will arise from, and their condemnation will be grounded upon the violation of those moral obligations, which by the light of nature and the dictates of conscience, they had, or might have known. The Judge of all the earth will do right. His judgment will be according to truth. In his presence every mouth will be stopped. None will have cause to complain, that his ways are unequal,

But this is a case which little concerns us. Whatever hopes we may entertain concerning those, who have never known the gospel, our Savior plainly signifies, that for those who have known, and yet have finally rejected it, there remains no hope.—“They have no cloak for their sin.” Their sin is great and inexcusable, because the gospel which they reject is infinitely important; and the evidence against which they reject it, is clear and decisive.

1. The gospel, in its nature and design, is infinitely important.

It comes to us in the name of God, and declares itself to be a revelation from him. As such it demands our attention and obedience. The things, in which it instructs us, are of the most serious concern. That we are intelligent beings, we know from our own consciousness; and that we are soon to be removed from this world, we are taught by daily observation. Whether death will terminate our existence, or bring us to a new manner of existence in another world, is a question, in which every serious mind will wish to be satisfied. By the gospel, life and immortality are brought to light. A future existence, a righteous judgment and an equitable distribution of rewards and punishments, are doctrines which it teaches with convincing perspicuity, and on which it dwells with an affecting solemnity.

If there is a state of happiness, and a state of misery, which await different characters, it infinitely concerns us to know, how we may obtain the one, and escape the other. Here the gospel comes in to our relief. It instructs us, that, as God is rich in mercy to pardon offenders, so he exercises his mercy toward them through a sacrifice offered by his own son to expiate the guilt of sin—that the terms, on which pardon will be granted, are repentance to-

ward God, and faith toward his Son Jesus Christ—that his gracious spirit is ready to our assistance, not only in the work of repentance, but in all the subsequent duties of a holy life.

Is not a revelation, which makes such discoveries as these, worthy of all acceptance? If we are not convinced that it is divine, yet, at least, we ought to examine it; for it professes to be divine: And if it really is so, its importance is infinite. Whatever may be its real merits, the man who will not so much as inquire into its merits, betrays a moral infatuation. He acts contrary to all those rules of prudence, which govern men in the smaller concerns of common life. If a husbandman, contemplating a removal, hears of an inviting situation to be purchased on advantageous terms, he will, at least, pay so much attention to the information, as to make inquiry concerning the truth of it. If a merchant hears of a lucrative source of traffic, opened near at hand, he will immediately examine, whether the report is well founded. The gospel comes to us with the words of eternal life; an object of more value, than all the interest of this perishing world. If we will not so much as inquire, whether this gospel be true, and whether the object which it proposes be attainable, we renounce, in relation to the future world, all that prudence, which guides us in the concerns of this world; we treat everlasting happiness with an indifference, which we should condemn in the smallest of our temporal affairs.—As inattention to the gospel is a great sin, because the gospel is important; so,

2. Unbelief is an inexcusable sin, because the gospel is credible. “It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”

When God sends men a revelation, he sends with it such proofs of its divinity, as may not only justify them in receiving it, but render them inexcusable in rejecting it. The evidence which attends the gospel is superior to that, which was given in favor of any preceding revelation. Christ did such works, as no other man had done ; and such as no man could do, except God were with him. From the perfection of God's character we are sure, he would not miraculously interpose to give such evidence in favor of a false religion, that men, examining fairly, and judging rationally, must believe it to be true. Such evidence as this has attended the mission of Jesus ; and this evidence must be conclusive.

The works which Jesus wrought, were to them who saw the works, sufficient demonstration of his divine authority. The witnesses of his miracles were numerous. Several of these witnesses soon published their testimony to the world. They would not have published it, if they had not known it to be true, because they foresaw, that it could procure them no worldly emoluments, but must expose them to innumerable dangers. Their testimony has never been confuted, though they had many powerful and zealous enemies, who wished to confute it, if they could, and could have confuted it, if it had been false. This testimony has been regularly transmitted to us by an uninterrupted series of vouchers from the beginning to the present day. We have therefore all the external evidence of the truth of the gospel, which the nature of the case will admit. The miracles of Christ and his disciples, as far as we have evidence that such miracles were performed, are to us as good proofs of the divinity of the gospel, as they were to those who saw them. And we have much fuller historical evidence of their reality, than we have of almost any other facts equally ancient.

In addition to this, we have evidence of the truth of the gospel from its propagation and continuance in the world. For it did not prevail by fraud, or by force, as impostures have always done ; but by the testimony of a number of sensible, but artless men to plain facts to which they constantly appeal as proofs of their masters divine authority, and which, if they never existed, could easily have been disproved. It is manifest, then, that a divine power has been employed in the support and spread of the gospel ; and we are sure, this power would never have accompanied a wicked and dangerous fraud.

We have farther evidence from the accomplishment of many predictions contained in the gospel. Whoever attentively reads some of the prophecies of the New Testament, and compares them with events recorded in history, will see such a correspondence between them, as cannot be accounted for, but upon the supposition, that the latter were providential fulfilments of the former.

The purity and benevolence of the gospel, the sublimity of its doctrines, the grandeur of its scheme, its tendency to render men virtuous and happy, and its useful effects, wherever its genuine influence prevails, afford still farther demonstration of its truth. The plan of it is too great for the invention of man, and the design of it too holy and benevolent for the fabrication of wicked and malicious spirits.

When the gospel comes to men with such strong and various evidence, and declares to them matters of such high and lasting importance, their unbelief and inattention must be a sin, which nothing can equal, and for which no excuse can be made. And hence we may conclude, that, whatever may be the condition of heathens, for these enlightened infidels there is no hope in the future world, unless they repent and embrace the truth in this. Repentance on

the gospel plan, is the express condition of pardon. True repentance extends to all sins. And if there must be a repentance of all sins, there must surely be a repentance of that unbelief, which is the greatest of all, and radically includes every other. Our Savior has expressly declared, concerning those to whom he had spoken his word and manifested his works, "He who believeth not on the Son of God, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." "This is the condemnation, that light hath come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." This brings us to our 2d Observation, That the true cause of infidelity is a *hatred* of the gospel. Our Savior says of the unbelieving Jews, "They have seen and *hated* me."

If the gospel is important in its nature, and credible in its evidence, the only reason of men's opposition to it, where it comes, must be the contrariety of their hearts to it. They reject it, because they dislike it. They oppose it, because it condemns them. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." It is through an evil *heart* of unbelief, that men depart from the living God. They who make shipwreck of the faith, have first put away a good conscience.

1. Infidels feel an enmity to the gospel, because it requires a strict *purity* of heart and life. While their hearts are fully set in them to do evil, they cannot be pleased with those holy precepts, which forbid and condemn the evil; they cannot love those plain spiritual doctrines which urge the neces-

sity of repentance and newness of life. They desire happiness ; but it is a happiness devised by their own imagination, rather than that described in the gospel. And they wish to obtain it on easier terms than the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts. If Christ were the minister of sin, and would save them in a way which accorded with the corruptions of their hearts, they would receive him. But when they are taught, as the truth is in Jesus, that they must be born again, become new creatures, be renewed in the spirit of their minds, put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man which is created after the image of God, they pronounce these to be hard sayings, and they will not receive them.

2. In the religion of the gospel there is too much *selfdenial* for unbelievers. To renounce *some* of their iniquities perhaps they would consent. But to lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets them—to keep themselves from their favorite iniquity—to take up the cross and follow Christ whither soever he goes—to forsake the interests and honors of the world, when these come in competition with heaven—to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts—to make their secular business give place to the duties of piety, and their temporal concerns yield to the happiness of eternity, these, they think, are too severe and mortifying terms ; and they endeavor to persuade themselves, that a scheme of religion so opposite to their natural desires and propensities, is not divine. They hope to pass in a smoother road to happiness.

3. The gospel is too *humbling* a dispensation for some to receive. It teaches us, that we are all sinners, guilty before God, condemned by his law, and worthy of death, and that we can be saved only by sovereign grace through the righteousness of a Sav-

ior—that we must be convinced of our guilty and lost state, and of our desert of the wrath to come—that we must renounce all selfconfidence, lay ourselves at the foot of divine mercy, and seek salvation as a free gift from God, to which we can make no claim on the foot of any thing which we have done. The natural pride of the human heart objects against this humiliation and selfabasement. It would make out some merit of its own. It would set up some kind of demand on God's justice. It would indulge the persuasion, that God has not been so much offended and dishonored as to justify him in any great severity. It is only through the power of God, that the word becomes mighty to cast down these proud imaginations, and to captivate every thought to the obedience of Christ.

4. Some reject the gospel, because they hate the *threatenings* which are there uttered against the finally impenitent.

These threatenings are indeed awful. They plainly import, that there is a punishment for the workers of iniquity, and that this punishment will be terrible in degree, and interminable in duration. Such threatenings as these, sinners resolved to continue in a wicked course, choose not to believe. They contrive various artifices to mollify their harshness, or shorten their duration, or to cavil them out of the Bible. But after all that can be done, here they are; the language of them is plain; it will not yield to human sophistry. They are so deeply engraved, that they cannot be effaced—so inwrought with the doctrines and precepts of revelation, that they cannot be separated. While this remains, they will remain in it. Some, therefore, to get rid of these threatenings, renounce the gospel which contains them. They had rather believe, that the gospel is not true, than believe, that such a punishment awaits

them, as these threatenings import. And in this, they are more consistent with themselves, than those who pretend to believe the gospel, and yet disbelieve all future punishment. For, if there is any thing in scripture which can be understood, it certainly denounces destruction against the finally impenitent. The man who pretends that all the threatenings, which he reads, must mean something else, may as well pretend, that the precepts, which literally forbid murder, theft, drunkenness, lying and swearing mean something else ; and that the promises which seem to import a state of future happiness for the righteous, mean something else ; and that there is no intelligible meaning in any thing which we read there. But whatever artifice men may use with themselves to suppress the fears, or with the Bible to expunge the threatenings of future punishment, still the danger awaits them ; and they can obtain no security, till they comply with the terms which the gospel has stated, and by repentance flee from the wrath to come and by faith lay hold on the hope set before them.

5. Some dislike and reject the gospel, because it contains doctrines which are not within the reach of human discovery, and affirms certain facts which are now out of the course of common observation. In their exalted opinion of their own wisdom, they despise a scheme of religion, which is too deep for their penetration, too wonderful for their investigation, and too grand for their comprehension. They make their own pride and prejudice the standard by which to judge what the wisdom of God ought to do, what his justice has a right to do, and what his goodness will be inclined to do. Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools, and change the glory of God into the likeness of men, and degrade his sovereignty to the dictates of men. The Apostle says,

“ We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew.” And how should they know it, without a revelation from God ? “ For what man knoweth the things of a *man*, save the spirit of man which is in him ? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” If we cannot know the intentions of a man without information from the man himself, much less can we know the will of God without a revelation from God. “ The Spirit searcheth,” or perfectly knoweth “ all things, even the deep things of God ; and God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit. We have received the the Spirit, that we might know the things, which are freely given us of God ; and these things we speak. The natural man,” vainly relying on his own powers, “ receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things ; and to him the gospel of Christ is the wisdom of God.”

The gospel is a glorious scheme for the salvation of sinners. As such it is worthy of immediate attention, full belief and thankful acceptance. It is to be lamented, that among those, to whom it comes, so many either deny the truth of it, or hold the truth in unrighteousness. The cause of their infidelity is the wickedness of their hearts. The wickedness which prompts their opposition to the gospel, disqualifies them for the blessings of it. They cannot be saved by the gospel, while their enmity to it remains. They must embrace it with faith, love and submission ; else, instead of being to them a Saviour of life unto life, it will be a Saviour of death unto death.— And awful will be the condemnation of those, who, when light has come into the world, still love darkness rather than light.



S E R M O N III.



Enmity to Religion in general the natural Consequence of Enmity to the Gospel.



JOHN, xv. 22, 23, 24.

If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works, which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.

OUR Divine Lord in these words teaches us, that, in respect of guilt, there is a great difference between those, who have never heard of the gospel, nor had an opportunity to receive it, and those who have seen its evidences and yet have rejected it. The former cannot be charged with the sin of *unbelief*; the latter have no cloak for their sin.

He shews us what is the true cause of unbelief in those who have known the gospel: It is their *hatred* of it. They have seen and *hated* me.

He warns us what is the next and natural consequence of rejecting his gospel: It is the rejection of *all* religion in principle and practice. “He that hateth me, hateth my *Father* also.”

It is this last observation, which now lies before us.

Some of those, who discard the Christian revelation, pretend to believe the truth of natural religion. They verbally acknowledge, that there is a God, a providence, a future existence; and that there are certain moral virtues, which are useful to mankind, such as justice, veracity, beneficence, temperance and prudence. Though they have no reverence for *Jesus* as a *divine* teacher, nor for his gospel as a *divine* communication, yet they believe there were such men as *Socrates*, *Plato* and *Seneca*, who taught good moral rules of life, and whose rules are still worthy of observation. But whatever they may pretend, our Savior expressly affirms it, at least as a *general* truth, that they who hate *him*, hate *God*—that they who despise his *gospel*, cast away *all* religion.

And this is not merely an incidental observation; but what he often repeats and much insists upon, in his discourses to the unbelieving Jews, as a matter which deserved their most serious consideration.—“He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father—he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me. Every man that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Ye neither know me, nor my Father. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also.”

If against so high authority as this, an authority, which the *Christian* surely will not dispute, any doubt the truth of our position, that “they who reject the gospel, after they have known it, generally reject *all* religion,” let them attend to some considerations, which will illustrate and confirm it.

1. So far as we can judge from facts, this is generally the case.

I will not say, there are no temporary exceptions. Some, I suppose, there may be. For men run not *at once*, to the last extreme either in dissipation of

morals, or in licentiousness of opinion. But if there are exceptions, they are few, and *these* only for a time.

The opposers of revelation, in the present day, if we can learn their sentiments from their writings, are generally Atheists. Though they sometimes speak of a God, yet they appear not to revere him as a moral governor, who will finally judge his rational creatures according to their characters. They oppose revealed religion, not because there is another, which they like better, as being more rational, and pure and better founded; but because they like none: They hate all in every form. They, perhaps, might have been Deists once; but they did not long remain such. Deism leads on directly to Atheism. They who run into the former, seldom stop short of the latter. Some may choose to reject the *name*, when they embrace the thing. But there are those who have not much delicacy about the name. Infidelity used to have some modesty; but now it has very much thrown off disguise.—That which once called itself deism, has now the audacity to avow itself to be atheism.

2. It is an observation of the Apostle, “Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” One degree of error, as well as of vice, leads to another. When men begin to depart from the truth, they can no more prescribe bounds to their wandering, than when they depart from virtue, they can set limits to their corruption. The traveller, who, being disgusted with small inconveniences in his plain and beaten path, strikes off at a venture in expectation of an easier or straiter course, is soon disappointed. He meets with obstructions, which he did not foresee, and he must turn to avoid them. Still new difficulties occur and again he must change his course, until perplexed,

bewildered and lost, he sits down in despair of recovering his first path, or finding a new one, which will conduct him home. So is the man who forsakes the path of truth and uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness and error. His ways are crooked; he has none to guide him. One devious trait leads to another; the farther he wanders, the more difficult it is to return, and the more easy to wander still.

3. The Psalmist observes, "The meek God will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way." Humbleness of mind is the best preparative for the residence of that heavenly Spirit who leads into all truth. Pride and self confidence oppose his influence and forfeit his direction. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The Apostle speaks of those to whom God sends strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, and perish in the error of their way. These are they, who received not the love of the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. If there are any whom God gives over to a reprobate mind, and a deceived heart, none more likely to be thus abandoned, than they who have known and hated the gospel of their salvation. Of such the Apostle speaks, when he says, "It is impossible for those, who have been once enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God, if they shall fall away, to be again renewed to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God." If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment."

4. From the nature of the gospel we may conclude, that they who renounce it, will, of course, renounce all religion.

The gospel contains every thing, which belongs to the religion of nature, and every thing which is

wise and good in any religion whatever. It teaches us the existence of an all perfect Deity. It gives us the most exalted representation of his character and government. It lays before us the purest and plainest rules of virtue and piety. It enforces the obligations of duty by the strongest motives. It brings to view all the arguments for a holy life, which reason can suggest, and places them in the clearest light. It adds many encouragements, which reason could never ascertain, but which must wholly depend on revelation; such as the acceptableness of repentance for past transgressions, the grace of God to help the infirmities of the humble, the resurrection of the body from the dust of the grave, and the greatness and perpetuity of the rewards reserved for the obedient:

They who reject such a religion as this, reject every religion which can be worthy of belief. When they have exploded the description which the gospel gives of the divine character—the precepts which mark out the duty of man—the motives which recommend his duty, and the hopes and assistances which encourage repentance and obedience; they may be challenged to shew, what materials are left, out of which they can fabricate a religion of their own. The enemies of the gospel cannot stop short of total infidelity, because, when the gospel is thrown aside, every thing is gone, which belongs to the religion of nature. If they pretend to believe and respect the latter, they can mean no more by it than a liberty to live as they list, and to follow the impulse of their inclinations, with only such restraints as are imposed by a regard to health, reputation, interest and the laws of society. To call this *religion*, is to profane a sacred name by applying it to a licentious life.

5. That temper, which urges men to cast away the gospel, will never be easy until natural religion goes after it.

There is nothing more true, than these words of our Savior, "He that hateth *me*, hateth my *Father* also." He who hates the character of Christ, hates the character of God. He who hates the religion of the gospel, hates the religion of nature.

The character of God, as drawn in the gospel, is such as reason must approve. If God is a Being of justice, truth, mercy and goodness, it must be his will, that his rational creatures imitate his character by the practise of these virtues. This imitation of God essentially belongs to natural religion, properly so called. The moral perfections of God are exhibited in the example of Christ, and recommended to our imitation in the precepts of his gospel. It is the substance of his religion, that we be renewed after the image of God—that we be followers of God as dear children, that we be holy as he is holy, righteous as he is righteous, and merciful as he is merciful. It is manifest, then, that they who hate the gospel, because it requires a holy heart and life, must hate the character of God, and all the virtues connected with it. It is a contradiction to suppose, that a man can be an enemy to Christ, and a friend to God—a hater of revealed, and a lover of natural religion; for God has manifested his own character in the person of Christ, and displayed the religion of nature in that of the gospel. The man who pretends to admire the character of God and the religion of reason, while he cavils at the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, is as inconsistent with himself, as a man who professes to be a friend to civil society and regular government, while he opposes every necessary measure of government, and condemns all the laws by which society is supported and preserved.

6. The objections which infidels urge against the credibility of the gospel, operate as strongly against the credit of natural religion. Their objections against the Christian revelation, stop not there ; they go farther ; they militate against all religion. Hence it may be concluded, that they who renounce Christianity, will eventually renounce religion at large, if they have not done it already.

Some will ask, “ Can it be supposed, that the gospel, if it were true in itself and important to men, would be confined to so small a part of the world ? Is not God an impartial Being ? Why then has he made so partial a communication of his will, and of the way of salvation ? ”

But this objection, if it has any weight, may as well be made against natural religion as against the Christian revelation. Men have different capacities, are placed under different circumstances, have different advantages of education ; and, were they ever so well disposed, they would make very different improvements in the knowledge of religion, as they do in all other branches of science. Among the heathens there were some, who spake and wrote excellent things on the character and government of God, and on the nature and obligations of virtue. Now admitting that *these* had attained to a competent knowledge of religion, yet had *all* heathens done so ? Or *could* they all do so ? Probably not one in ten thousand ever did, or ever could make the same attainments by the mere efforts of their reason, or by all the assistance within their reach. Natural religion, then, has always been as partial and confined, as Christianity is ; and, indeed, vastly more so. For there is a much greater proportion of mankind, who enjoy the gospel, than there ever has been of heathens, who had at

tained to the same knowledge in morals, as Socrates, Plato and Seneca.

Again.—Some object against the credibility of the gospel, the mysterious doctrines, which it contains : “ For surely,” they say, “ if God gives men a revelation, he will give them one which they can understand.”

This is doubtless true. And such an one he has given us. But still it must be supposed, that a revelation from God relating to the invisible and eternal world, and to our preparation for an entrance into it, will contain some things, which, though intelligible as far as our practice is concerned, may yet be mysterious and incomprehensible in many unessential circumstances : For, indeed, almost every thing which we see, is so. Even the religion of nature contains as great and inscrutable mysteries, as the religion of the gospel. The eternity, self-existence, omnipresence and foreknowledge of God are as inexplicable, as the doctrine of the Trinity. The connexion of body and mind in man is as mysterious, as the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. The influence of providence in supporting our frame, directing our motions and overruling our actions is as unsearchable, as the influence of the spirit in forming us to the temper, and assisting us to the duties of religion. The creation of the world and of the first man out of nothing is as inconceivable to our reason, as the resurrection of the dead after their bodies are mingled with dust. If then we reject the gospel, because we find in it doctrines, which we cannot comprehend, we shall not long retain natural religion, whose doctrines are quite as incomprehensible.

Every man who pretends to believe any thing about religion, must believe the eternity, omnipresence, foreknowledge and universal providence of

God ; the existence and immortality of a rational mind united to this mortal body ; the creation of man by the immediate power of God ; and our continual dependence on him for life and breath, and for all our abilities and pleasures. Without a belief of these grand truths, there is no foundation for religion. But if every thing mysterious is, for that reason, incredible, these must be discarded with the mysteries of the gospel. The infidel who cavils at the latter will not long spare the former.

Again.—The man who renounces the gospel on account of its awful threatenings, will of course explode all religion. For if there is a future state of rewards and punishments, which religion, in its very nature, supposes ; then, on any scheme of religion, the sinner is justly exposed to punishment ; and the infidel, by discarding the gospel, does not get rid of his guilt and danger ; he only throws away his remedy and his hope.

The religion of nature teaches us, that God is a holy and righteous Being, who loves virtue and hates wickedness : It leads us therefore to expect, that he will punish the latter as well as reward the former. As exact justice is not administered in this world, it is very credible, that we are to exist in another world, where such a distribution of rewards and punishments will be made, as justice requires. The Apostle says, “ The Gentiles, who have not the law, are a law to themselves ; they shew the work of the law written on their hearts ; their consciences excuse or accuse them, as they do good or evil ; they know the judgment of God, that they who do evil are worthy of death.” Thus far the religion of nature may go. But “ all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” What then shall they do ? Reason teaches them their danger, but points out no security. Repentance is a duty ; but will it be a rem-

edy? If it prevent future transgression, will it also wipe off past guilt? Can it *claim* exemption from punishment already incurred, and *demand* a reward already forfeited by disobedience? Certainly it cannot. It is only the revelation of God, which assures us, that "whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy"—that this mercy is exercised toward men through the death of a mediator—that the grace of God is ready to the assistance of those who seek it. The man, therefore, who, offended at the threatenings of the gospel, casts it away, casts away with it all its promises as well as threatenings; all its comforts as well as terrors. Its promises and comforts he can find no where else: Its threatenings and terrors he still will find in the law of reason and in the sense of conscience. And he will never rest, till he has suppressed and smothered these. If he is become an enemy to the gospel, because it denounces wrath to the impenitent, though, at the same time, it sets a hope of pardon before all; surely he cannot be a friend to natural religion, which holds forth wrath without a promise of mercy, and points out danger without providing a remedy.

It may naturally be expected, that they who reject the gospel, will reject all religion; for as long as they believe and realize the obligations of morality, the government of a providence, and a state of retribution, they cannot pacify their consciences in a course of vice. To reconcile their minds to their iniquities, they must discard these principles of reason with the doctrines of the gospel.

We see, then, the justness of our Lord's observation, "He who hateth *me*, hateth my *Father* also." He who despises the gospel of Christ, whatever respect he may pretend, or feel for the religion of nature, will soon trample on this, as well as the other. He first becomes an enemy to God by wick-

ed works; and then to excuse his wicked works, he admits atheism in speculation. "The fool," the libertine, whose heart is fully set in him to do evil, "says in his heart, There is no God. He is corrupt, and does abominable works." He therefore wishes there were no God, and endeavors to persuade himself, there is none; or none who regards the actions, or will punish the iniquities of men.—"Through the pride of his countenance he will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts. He saith in his heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face, he will never see;" nor recompence what is done on earth.

Some perhaps will say, "Though we disbelieve the gospel, we are not atheists: We believe there is a God, as much as you Christians do."

But let me ask you, What kind of God do you believe?—You talk of a God as the creator and upholder of the natural world, because you know not how to account for the existence and continuance of nature without him. You make the same use of him, as you do of gravitation and attraction. You consider him as a kind of philosophical cause; for you think it more rational to say, There is a God who made and sustains the frame of nature, than to say, It had no cause, or created itself, or was eternal. Now if you stop here, you are atheists in a moral sense, as much as if you thought the world came into existence by chance. Do you believe that God is a moral governor—that he exercises a particular providence—that he inspects your heart and observes your conduct—that he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, and will finally punish or reward you according to your character?—You may then say, You believe there is a God. And if you thus believe in God, you will believe also in Christ. But if you deny your

accountableness—disbelieve all future punishment—discard the idea of a providence directing the affairs of the world, and overruling the actions of men, you cannot pretend, that you believe there is a God in any rational and moral sense. Your God is nothing more than a *natural* cause of events, and in his hands the universe is nothing better than a system of *mechanism*. And such a belief will have no more influence on your heart and conduct, than a belief that the tides are caused by the moon, that a thunder storm is produced by electrical fire, or that the material system is held together by attraction. In short, the denial of all future punishment is atheism in effect; for he that disbelieves this, feels no accountableness to God, fears nothing from him, is under no moral restraint, and is intitled to no man's confidence. This corruption of sentiment seems to have been one main cause of the unbelief of the Pharisees, when Christ came to them. Though they condemned the *Gentile* world to future punishment, yet they imagined all *Jews*, and be sure all who belonged to *their sect* would be saved. Hence they practised iniquity without restraint, and hated and persecuted the Savior, who reproved them for their sins, and urged them to repentance as the condition of salvation.

Our subject warns us of the awful danger of despising the gospel. There is a great difference, in respect of guilt, between those who reject the gospel, and those who have never known it. The latter "have no sin;" they are not chargeable with the sin of unbelief. The former "have no cloak for their sin;" for the gospel has been laid before them with its evidences, and they have hated it, and cast it from them. Their sin lies not in an error of judgment, but in perverseness of heart, and therefore admits of no excuse.

We are they to whom the gospel has come. We are not in the condition of heathens, nor can we put ourselves in their condition; and, consequently, we can never avail ourselves of the excuse which will be made for them. If we reject the gospel, still it remains a truth, that we have had it; but would not retain it, because we hated it. And this evil heart of unbelief disqualifies us for the blessings which it offers. And whatever hopes we may have for an honest heathen, who never has enjoyed this glorious dispensation, there is no ground to expect the salvation of an infidel; for there is in him a perverseness of heart inconsistent with salvation.

We see, that not only a belief of, but a conformity to the gospel is necessary to our being saved by it. If the guilt of unbelievers lies in their hatred of the gospel, all who hate it, are condemned by it, whether they profess to believe it or not. We pity the unhappy state of heathens, to whom the gospel has never been sent; and we condemn the perverseness of infidels, who will not receive it when it is brought to them. But if we profess to believe it, and yet practically oppose it, what are we better than heathens? Nay, better than infidels? We cannot plead the ignorance of the former. We are guilty of the perverseness of the latter. The same perverseness, which is the cause of professed infidelity, is also the cause of practical disobedience. The servant, who, when his Lord comes, shall not be found doing his Lord's will, but smiting his fellow servants, and drinking with the drunken, will have a portion appointed him with *unbelievers*.

It concerns us to inquire, whether we have in heart embraced this gospel. We would be thought to believe it. Have we felt its power, yielded to its authority, and complied with its design? Do we possess the temper, and maintain the works which

it requires ? Have we been convinced of our guilt as transgressors of a holy law, realized our dependence on sovereign grace, renounced all confidence in ourselves and humbly consented to accept pardon as the gift of divine mercy and the purchase of a dying Savior ? Have we, with godly sorrow, forsaken all the ways of sin, and devoted ourselves to God to serve him in newness of life ? Conscious of our insufficiency to think any thing as of ourselves, have we placed our reliance on the sufficiency which is in Christ ? And being, as we have supposed, renewed in the spirit of our mind, have we put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which is created after the image of God ? If we find this practical conformity to the gospel, we have believed it with the heart and received it with love. If our character is the reverse, whatever profession we make of faith in Christ, we in works deny him. We have seen, but hated him.

Our subject teaches us, how dangerous it is to depart from the truth. When we begin to deviate, we can set no bounds to our wandering. One error produces another ; and a total rejection of religion may be the consequence of one perverse step. We have seen, that there is no rational medium between deism and atheism—no secure ground on which the man, who has advanced to the former stage, can ever make a stand, unless he will retreat. He is on the steep declivity of a precipice ; and, instead of attempting to reascend, he will probably plunge downward, till he sinks in the dark gulph of absolute irreligion.

The same danger, in a degree, attends every deviation from the plain truths and duties of the gospel. There are few who become infidels at once. Progress in error, like progress in vice, is usually gradual. But the motion, like that of a body roll-

ing down a hill, though gentle at first, is rapid toward the close. In the beginning, it may be checked or diverted by small obstructions ; but near the bottom it bounds with violence over every impediment.

Let the infidel review his steps. He will find, they began and proceeded after this manner. He first found himself condemned by the strict rules of the gospel, either for his general manner of life, or for some particular transgression. Conscience rebuked him ; common opinion censured him. He was solicitous to vindicate himself. He began to entertain more lax notions of morality—he grew fond of loose company and licentious books—he acquired by degrees a contempt of the severer maxims of piety and virtue ; he argued against them, and pleaded in defence of his own indulgences—he became indifferent to God's instituted worship, and spake lightly of it as a useless ceremony, or useful only in a secular and political view. But as this is expressly appointed in the gospel, he could not justify his contempt of it without condemning the gospel itself. It was, by this time, easy to entertain doubts ; and doubts soon grew into opinions. If he read the scriptures, his principal aim was to start difficulties, make cavils, find inconsistencies. He fondly communicated his objections in company where they would make an impression, and eagerly listened to the objections which he heard. The relaxation of his principles emboldened the licentiousness of his manners, and this, in its turn, contributed to a farther corruption of his principles. Thus by the reciprocal operation of his sentiments on his manners, and of his manners on his sentiments, he threw by the gospel with indifference, and his indifference soon grew to enmity ; and his enmity to the gospel naturally increased to a hatred of all re-

ligion. Thus in him were verified our Savior's words concerning the Jews, "They have both seen and hated both me and my Father."

It is probably something after this sort, that infidelity begins, advances and terminates in those who have known and hated the gospel.

It is of importance, then, that parents early instil into their children the sentiments of pure religion, and guard them against the seductions of deceivers. And it concerns all to watch against the first approaches and the smallest impressions of error.

That you may secure yourselves from licentious errors, live agreeably to the gospel. The man whose life corresponds with the truth, will love the truth: He will come to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

As friends to the gospel, you ought to make an open profession of it. They who will not confess Christ in an unbelieving generation, are charged with denying him. They who are not for him, are against him. He allows no neutrality.

Great attention should be paid to public worship. The customary neglect of this is a practical declaration, that religion is of no importance, and the means of it, of no value.

The stated preaching of the word is a principal mean of preserving the knowledge, and promoting the faith of the gospel. Where this is discontinued, or negligently attended, infidelity easily gets footing and makes progress. When we see the ministry neglected in regard of support, or attendance, we have reason to apprehend, that the gospel is retiring, and irreligion succeeding in its place.—To such societies may be applied Christ's rebuke to the church in Laodicea; "I know thy works,

that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent.”



S E R M O N I V .



God to be glorified in all our Actions.



I PETER iv. 11.

—*That God in all things may be glorified.*—

IN these words the Apostle gives Christians a general rule to direct them, and a powerful motive to animate them in performing the various duties of the religious life. “Be ye sober,” says he, “and watch unto prayer ; have fervent charity among yourselves ; use hospitality without grudging ; as every man hath received a gift, so minister the same ; if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God ; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, *that God in all things may be glorified.*”

The words in their connexion teach us, That in all our conduct we should be governed by an habitual aim to glorify God.

We all know, that God, in his own nature, is absolutely and independently glorious, and that nothing which we do can make him more or less so.

His essential glory is the perfection of his nature. It is the eternal union of all possible excellencies ; such as power, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, truth, justice and holiness. These excellencies, existing in him in the highest possible degree, and harmonizing in all their operations, constitute his real glory. This glory is infinite and immutable ; it can neither be increased nor diminished. “ With the Father of lights there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.” When God is said to glorify himself, or his creatures are said to glorify him, we are not to suppose that he acquires any real addition to his essential gloriousness ; for this would imply imperfection and change ; but we are to understand the expressions as importing some *display* or *manifestation* of his glorious perfections. “ He is not worshipped by mens’ hands as though he needed any thing, for he giveth unto all, life and breath and all things.” If he had never made any creatures, still he would have been in himself the same perfect and glorious Being, but there could not have been a *display* of his glory, because there would have been none to behold and admire it. All that can be intended by God’s glorifying himself, is his *manifesting* himself to his intelligent creatures ; and all that can be intended by *their* glorifying him is their entertaining such *conceptions* of him, and exercising such *regards* to him, as are agreeable to those manifestations which he makes of himself.

The scripture points out the various ways, in which we are to glorify God. To these we will particularly attend.

We are to glorify God by *just apprehensions* of his nature and attributes. Of the heathens the Apostle says, “ When they knew God,” or knew from the works of creation, that there was a God, “ they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their im-

aginations, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things—they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.”

We are to honor him, not only by rational sentiments of him, but also by *pure affections* to him.—“Sanctify the Lord in your hearts,” says the prophet, “and let him be your fear and your dread.” They who draw nigh to God with their mouth, and honor him with their lips, when their heart is far from him, are said to “worship him in vain.”

As by breaking the commandment men dishonor God, so by *repentance* and *confession* of sin they are said to glorify him.

To Achan, who had been detected in sacrilegious theft, Joshua says, “Give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him.” Of the enemies of religion suffering under divine judgments it is said, “They repented not to give glory to God.” Impenitent sinners treat God as if he was such an one as themselves, a God that hath pleasure in iniquity. By repentance they acknowledge him in his true character, as a God who hates sin, but mercifully forgives the penitent. He is glorious both in his holiness, and in his mercy. He is said to shew his glory, when he proclaims his name, “The Lord God, merciful, and gracious; forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; but by no means clearing the guilty.”

The gospel makes a wonderful display of God’s grace to fallen men; and they who *embrace* the gospel by *faith* acknowledge and glorify this grace. The Apostle says to the Ephesians, “God hath predestinated us to the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glo-

ry of his grace—that we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ.” Revelation opens to the view of intelligent beings a scheme of grace, which fills heaven with admiration, and which ought to fill mortals with gratitude. When we consent to and comply with this scheme, we shew forth the praises of him, who has called us to his marvellous light. When we reject it, we spurn his grace, and trample on his authority.

The *worship* of God, in his appointed way, is called glorifying him ; because it is an acknowledgment of his supremacy and our dependence—of his goodness and our obligations ; and because it is a mean of promoting sentiments of piety in our own hearts and spreading the knowledge of his name among others. “ He that offereth praise, glorifieth God.” They who “ worship him in the beauty of holiness, give him the glory due to his name.” He takes pleasure in his house, and there he is glorified. He says, “ He will be sanctified in them who draw near to them, and before all the people he will be glorified.” He requires us to perform his worship with such inward sentiments of piety, as to sanctify him in our hearts ; and with such outward circumstances of solemnity, as to glorify him before men. Paul directs the Corinthians to maintain order and decency in their religious assemblies, that heathens and unbelievers, if they should be present, might be constrained to confess “ that God was among them of a truth.”

Men glorify God by exhibiting in their lives the *virtues* and *works* of pure religion ; for by these they shew, that they believe his holy character, love his righteous precepts and rely on his gracious promises. Christ says to his disciples, “ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” Paul exhorts

Christians, to “be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise and glory of God.”

Every thing that we do to advance the *cause* and diffuse the *influence* of religion in the world, glorifies God, as it second the purposes of his goodness, and contributes to the virtue and happiness of his intelligent creatures. Our Savior says to his disciples, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Peter applies this advice to Christians in general. “Dearly beloved, have your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that, by your good works which they behold, they may glorify God in the day of visitation.” When the Apostles and believers heard, “that Saul preached the gospel, which he before destroyed, they glorified God in him.”

As holiness in general, so some *particular* virtues are said to glorify God.

The Apostle recommending *purity* of heart and *chastity* of manners, says, “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God; wherefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s.”

By *patience* and *constancy* in religion under severe trials, Christians bear testimony to its truth and importance, express in the fullest manner their own faith in it, and powerfully recommend it to the world. Hence our Lord, warning Peter of the manner of his death, is said to have signified to this disciple, “by what death he should glorify God.” To Christians, suffering persecution in the cause of Christ, Peter says, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth on you. On their part,” on the part of your persecutors, “God is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified:”

A *peaceable, condescending, inoffensive* temper and behavior among Christians do honor to religion and to its Author. The members of the church in Corinth, who were converts, some from Judaism, and some from Gentilism, were tenacious of those usages, respecting meats, days and festivals, to which they had been accustomed. In these things the Apostle directs them to be governed rather by a charitable condescension to the conscientious scruples of their brethren, than by a rigid attachment to their own opinions and customs. He cautions them, not to use their liberty in such a manner, that it would be judged and condemned by the conscience of others—not to expose themselves to censure in the use of those bounties of Providence, for which they gave thanks. And he comprises his whole advice on the subject in this general rule, “Whatever ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God; giving no offence to Jew or Gentile, or the church of God, even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”

Men glorify God, when, in cases of difficulty, trial and danger, they commit themselves to his *care*, and persevere in his *service* with a full reliance on his providence, grace and promise. When Abraham was called to go forth from his native land, he obeyed, not knowing whither he went. When he had the promise of a numerous offspring, at an age, which would naturally have forbidden the expectation, he staggered not at the promise through unbelief. When he was commanded to offer in sacrifice that very son, from whom his seed was to descend, he shewed a readiness to comply with the command, reasoning within himself, that God was able to raise him from the dead, from which he had received him in a figure; for he was born of parents, who for age

were as good as dead. Thus the Apostle says, "He was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able to perform."

Once more. We do honor to God, when we abide in the calling, which he has assigned us, improve the abilities with which he has endued us, and faithfully apply the means of doing good, which he has given us. "As every man hath received a gift, so minister the same one to another. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it, as of the ability, which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified."

We have shewn what the scripture intends by glorifying God; and in what ways men are said to glorify him.

We will now make some remarks on the subject.

1. We here naturally remark, that wickedness is ever in scripture represented, as tending not to the glory, but to the dishonor of God—not at displaying, but as reproaching his true character. To the Jews, who had profaned the sacred ordinances of religion, God says, "A son honoreth his father: If I be a Father, where is mine honor, O ye who despise my name?" To the unbelieving Pharisees Christ says, "I honor my Father, and ye dishonor me." To the hypocrites, who boasted in the law, and yet transgressed it, Paul says, "Through breaking the commandment ye dishonor God." If we speak of God's *essential* glory, this can neither be increased by the holiness, nor diminished by the wickedness of men. "If we sin, what do we unto him? If we be righteous, what receiveth he at our hands?" But if we speak of his *relative* glory, this may be greater at some times, and in some places than others. That is to say, His character is more or less

conspicuous, according to the discoveries which he makes of it, the conceptions which men form of it, and the regards which they pay to it. The adoration, praise and obedience of his intelligent creatures tend to the display of his character. Their disobedience, impiety and wickedness tend to his dishonor, by giving others wrong conceptions of him. Hence he who despiseth the poor—he who doth ought presumptuously—he who oppresseth the righteous, is said to “reproach the Lord.” God may and often does overrule the wickedness of men to display his glory. The psalmist says, “The wrath of men shall praise thee.” But this is not the natural tendency and direct consequence of wrath, or wickedness in men; for it is added, “The remainder of that wrath,” or what cannot be made to praise thee, “thou wilt restrain.” If the sins of men are the occasion of displaying God’s glory, this is only a remote, or secondary; not a direct and immediate effect of them. The evil designs of men may, by an overruling influence, be made to promote the cause of true religion, and thus to display God’s glory. Paul’s bonds for Christ turned to the furtherance of the gospel. But, in such cases, God is glorified, not by the evil designs themselves but by the virtue and righteousness, which those designs are overruled to promote. Paul was imprisoned by the enemies of the gospel, that he might be restrained from preaching it. Did this restraint tend to the furtherance of the gospel? No.—But the example of faith and fortitude, which he exhibited, and the excellent letters which he wrote in his confinement, had this effect. It was Paul’s virtue, not their enmity, which glorified God. The sons of Jacob, moved with envy, sold their brother Joseph into Egypt. Did they by their cruelty and injustice honor God, and lead the idolators of the country to form more exalt-

ed conceptions of that Being, whom the patriarchs worshipped? By no means. But God made Joseph, in this situation, a distinguished instrument of extensive good to mankind. Thus God honored himself. He manifested his own wisdom, power and goodness. The Jews rejected and crucified the Savior, whom God sent into the world; thus they dishonored God. Through them God's name was blasphemed among the Gentiles, and the way of truth was evil spoken of. But God made the crucifixion of Christ the means of displaying his mercy and bringing salvation to a guilty world. Thus he brought glory to his own name. We are to distinguish between what God does, and what men do.—He often overrules for good what they mean for evil. “But what if the Jews had all believed in Christ, and had not crucified him?—How would he have been made a sacrifice for sin? And how would sinners have been redeemed?” This is a needless question. God foresaw how the Jews would treat the Savior; and their unbelief and enmity were suffered to be the means, by which he should become a sacrifice; and there was no occasion for any other. But have we knowledge and wisdom enough to determine, that this was the *only* way, in which Christ would be made an offering for sin? Can we say, that if the Jews had generally received him, divine wisdom could have found no way in which his blood might be shed for the redemption of men? This would be taking too much upon us. God is not *dependent* on men—he is not dependent on the *sins* of men for means to accomplish his purposes. “These are not his doings. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened.”

2. If it is the will of God, that we should glorify him in all things, and if he is glorified by the holiness, and dishonored by the wickedness of men,

then we may be assured, that wickedness proceeds from the wicked, and not from the energy and influence of this holy Being ; for we cannot admit the supposition, that he should excite and dispose men to dishonor and reproach him. “ Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God ; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man ; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed.”

3. It appears farther from our subject, that an aim to glorify God will not justify us in doing evil ; for by doing evil we dishonor him, and contradict our pretended aim. Though God sometimes makes the sins of men ultimately subservient to the purposes of his wisdom, yet this effect is not their natural and direct tendency ; it does not make them cease to be sinners, nor render them less offensive and dishonorable to God. They are still, what they were in their nature. And it is not by *them*, but by the *effects* to which they are overruled, that God is glorified. “ God hates robbery for a burnt offering.” In the Apostles’ days there were some who argued “ If our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, then God is unjust in taking vengeance ; and if the truth of God hath more abounded through our lie to his glory, why should we be judged as sinners ? Rather let us do evil that good may come.” This, they slanderously affirmed, was the doctrine, or a consequence of the doctrine of the Apostles. But St. Paul discards the imputation ; and of those who thus plead, and thus practise, he says, “ their damnation is just.”

We are never to imagine, that, because God can make our unrighteousness subservient to his own glory, we therefore glorify him by our unrighteousness. We glorify him by doing his will. And to aim at his glory is to aim at doing his will.

4. We see the great mistake of those, who imagine, that true repentance implies a willingness to suffer the misery of the future world, in case this would be most for God's glory. For such a state of mind, if it were possible, would be nothing less, than a willingness to retain an eternal enmity to God, for his greater glory; and the scripture instructs us, that God is glorified by our love and obedience, not by our enmity and rebellion. It cannot be for God's glory to consign a penitent soul to misery, for this would be a violation of his promise; nor for his glory that the sinner should remain impenitent, for it is by repentance that he gives glory to God. The supposition therefore is an absurdity.—It is what the scripture never makes, and what *man* never *ought* to make. The justice of God in the punishment of sinners the penitent sees; but a willingness to suffer what justice might inflict is what he cannot feel. The language of the penitent is this; “Against thee, O Lord, have I sinned.—Thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest. Have mercy on me according to thy loving kindness; in the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Deliver me from my guilt, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness: Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, with burnt offerings on thine altar.” The penitent resorts to the *mercy*, not to the *justice* of God, for pardon. An awakened sinner, if he imagines a particular sensation is essential to repentance, will give himself no rest, till he is, or till he thinks he is wrought into that sensation; and then he will hope he has exercised repentance. But if any imagine, they feel a willingness to be made eternally miserable on any consideration, it is probable, they misjudge. If they really feel this willingness, it is cer-

tain they are in a wrong state of mind ; for this willingness to be at enmity with God, is inconsistent with repentance.

It is worthy to be observed, that the scripture never represents the future misery of sinners as being positively for God's glory ; but rather as a necessary mean of removing the dishonor, which they have done him by their wickedness and impenitence. In civil society, it is for the honor of government, that the people be virtuous, peaceable, and obedient to law, and that there be no occasion for punishment. But if crimes exist, the government is dishonored, and law must be executed. The general impunity of crimes would dishonor the government, by shewing that it was corrupt or impotent ; either not disposed, or not sufficient to secure the order and happiness of society. Punishment, however, is not absolutely for the honor of government : It is so only in a relative view, as a mean of removing the dishonor done, or preventing that which may be done by the lawless and unrighteous. Government may, in a comparative sense, be honored by the execution of criminals ; but it does not stand in a more honorable light, than if there were no criminals to be executed. So it is in the divine government. This is honored by our obedience : But if some will rebel against its authority, and trample on its clemency, its honor requires, that they be punished. It would be primarily for its honor, that all should obey it ; but if some will insult it, it is then honored by their punishment, rather than by an indiscriminate indulgence.

The correctness of the language of scripture on this subject is remarkable. When it speaks of the salvation of the saints, then it says, "God is *glorified.*" When it speaks of the punishment of the wicked, it adopts a different style. It says, He

is *just*; he is *righteous*. Impenitent sinners are said to “treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of the *revelation* of God’s *righteous* judgment.” “In that day every mouth will be stopped, and all the sinful unbelieving world will be found guilty before God.” “Their damnation will be *just*.” “God will shew his *wrath*, and make his *power* known on the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.” But “he will make known the *riches* of his *glory* on the vessels of mercy, whom he hath prepared unto glory.” “It is a *righteous* thing with God to recompense tribulation to them who trouble you—when Christ shall come to be *glorified* in the *saints*, and to be *admired* in all them that *believe*.” “The name of the Lord Jesus shall be *glorified* in them, and they in him according to the grace of God.” In contemplating the redemption of men by Jesus Christ, and the happiness of the redeemed, saints and angels in heaven ascribe “*blessing* and *glory* to him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb.” In celebrating the success of the gospel, and the conversion of multitudes to the faith of Christ out of all nations, these happy spirits sing, “*Blessing* and *honor* and *glory* unto God forever and ever.” But when the judgments of God on the enemies of the church are their theme, they speak in a different strain. They, indeed, glorify God for the *salvation* vouchsafed, and for the *protection* granted to the *saints*, in *consequence* of his judgments on the wicked; but when they speak of these judgments, as inflicted on the wicked, they call them *just*. “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, *just* and *true* are thy ways, thou king of saints.” God preserves his saints from their enemies in *ways* that are *righteous*. “By terrible things in *righteousness* he answers the faithful as the God of their salvation.” In viewing the

tendency of God's judgments to spread a conviction of the truth among unbelieving nations, the heavenly choir acclaim, "Who shall not fear and glorify thy name? For thou art holy. All nations shall come and worship before thee, for thy judgments are made manifest." The *success* of the gospel, which *follows* the destruction of its enemies, is celebrated in heaven in such language as this, "Alleluia; salvation and *glory* and *honor* and power unto the Lord our God." But the *destruction* of these enemies is thus recognized, "*Just* and *true* are his *judgments*, for he hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hands."

In the future punishment of irreclaimable sinners, God is *just*; and the final judgment will be a *revelation* of his justice. It will show, that there is no wrong, no unrighteousness in consigning to eternal misery those incorrigible creatures, who by their obstinate impenitence in sin, and their proud contempt of offered mercy are become vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. In this negative sense God will be glorified, as all imputation on his righteousness will be removed. And we cannot tell how far their just punishment may be made subservient to the virtue of God's subjects in other parts of his dominion, and may conduce in this way to the display of his wisdom and goodness. His glory, however, comes not directly or simply from their punishment: It comes rather from those holy and benevolent ends, which their punishment answers in the grand scheme of his government. But in the salvation of believers God is glorified directly. He is "glorified in the saints"—"glorified in them, and they in him." "They are found to the praise of the glory of his grace." We are not then to imagine, that God is more honored in those who perish in their sins, than

he would have been in their repentance and salvation. The scripture teaches no such doctrine. Let us never admit the supposition, that God may be more glorified in our destruction, than in our final happiness, and that consequently we ought to have no determinate choice of our own. The scripture directs us to make a full and decided choice of happiness, and to pursue it with ardor. We glorify God, when we repent of sin, believe in the Savior, obey the gospel, accept of pardon, and work out our salvation.

5. Our subject teaches us, that submission in our prayers cannot respect those things, which are essentially connected with our final salvation, but merely things which relate to the present life. When we ask for temporal blessings, or for spiritual refreshments, we are to ask with submission to the will and glory of God; for in respect of these, he has not told us, what is his will, or what will be for his glory. But with respect to the temper and practice of religion, an attendance on the means, and a compliance with the terms of salvation, he has instructed us what his will is, and how he is glorified. In the business of our salvation, the only submission to his will, the only acting to his glory, is to seek eternal life by diligence in every duty—by prayer for all needed grace, and by patient continuance in well doing. The more earnest our prayers, the more ardent our pursuit—and the more active our diligence to obtain the object, the more fully we comply with his will and the more conspicuously we glorify his name.

Finally: This subject naturally applies itself to us who are ministers of the word; and with reference to such it may have been primarily intended. We have all received gifts from God—we received from him our mental abilities, and our literary en-

dowments—we have received the precious gift of the gospel, and, I trust, the gift of the Holy Spirit in his renewing and assisting influence—we have the gift of the ministerial office, and with it the charge of an important part of Christ's church ; and for all the gifts which we have received, we are accountable to him who bestowed them. As we have received the gift, so let us minister the same, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. When we speak, let us speak not according to the inventions of men, but agreeably to the oracles of God—when we minister, let us minister not slothfully and deceitfully, but according to the ability which God giveth ; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.—Amen.



S E R M O N V.



*God's Goodness the Hope of the Penitent ; but no
Security to the finally Impenitent.*



PSALM cxix. 68.

Thou art good, and dost good ; teach me thy statutes.

THAT God *is* good, we justly conclude, because he *does* good. His works indicate what a being he is. As he is a Spirit, he is invisible to the human eye. But his *works* are visible. The Apostle says, "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." His goodness in relation to men and to other creatures in this world, we see in the ordinary course of his Providence. But in relation to the future world we learn his goodness from the discoveries only of his word. It is in respect of the life to come that David says, "God is good and does good ;" for he hence draws an argument for learning God's statutes.

We will here consider,

I. What evidence we have, that God is good to men in relation to their souls and their future life.

II. How this goodness of God is an argument why we should desire and pray to be taught his statutes.

I. We will consider the evidence, which God has given us of his regard to our souls, and care for our future happiness.

From the perfection and goodness of his nature we may conclude, that he will take care of the creatures which he has made. This care we in fact perceive to be exercised toward us, and observe to be extended to others. But that God will prolong our existence, and provide for our happiness beyond this life ; and, especially, that he will shew mercy to such as in this life, have offended him, and will, on any terms, admit them to happiness in the next, we learn with assurance only from his revelation. This teaches us, as in general, that he is good ; so, in particular, that he is gracious and merciful, ready to forgive penitent offenders, and free to receive them into his everlasting favor. It is the language of scripture, " He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.—He would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

1. This goodness of God is evident from his giving men a *revelation*, which describes the nature, proclaims the promises, and states the terms of eternal happiness.

In all ages of the world mankind have been favored, in a greater or less degree, with divine revelation. It began with Adam, was continued to his sons, handed along to his remoter posterity and often renewed, as their occasions required. We find, that God condescended to an immediate intercourse with

Adam, Abel, Cain, Enoch, Lamech and Noah, before the flood ; and with Abraham and his family, with Lot, Melchisedec, Abimelec, Job and his friends, and many others, in the ages soon after the flood. The revelations made to particular persons were by them communicated to their contemporaries, and transmitted to their descendants. After the term of human life was so contracted, that revelation could not safely be trusted to a traditionary conveyance, God ordered, that it should be committed to writing. The written revelation, from age to age, received enlargements, until it was completed by the gospel. And it is owing to the incredulity and stupidity of mankind, that revelation has not, in every age, more generally prevailed.

The holy scriptures, which have come to us, are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness ; and are able to make us wise to salvation, and to furnish us unto every good work. They contain the substance of all the special and particular revelations, which God has ever made to any of the human race. From them we learn what is most useful and important to us, and what most nearly and immediately concerns us. That which God has been most careful to teach us, we should be most solicitous to understand, and zealous to practice. We do not find, that God has ever given men a revelation to instruct them in husbandry, manufactures, mechanics, navigation, astronomy, and the arts of life. The knowledge of things relating to this world he has left them to acquire by their own sagacity, by repeated experiments and by mutual communication. Hence the progress of arts has been very slow.

Many ages past away before the use of letters was known ; and many more before the art of printing was introduced. Even agriculture, which is the

most necessary of all occupations, and one on which human life most immediately depends has advanced by moderate steps, and is still in a state of imperfection.

Things which relate merely to this life, have never been the subjects of divine revelation ; but have been left wholly to human invention and experience. Revelation embraces greater objects—things which pertain to life and godliness ; to glory and virtue ; to our preparation for, and enjoyment of a state of eternal happiness in a world at present unseen. Is not this an evidence of God's merciful regard to our highest interest ?—He has not left the concerns of the future, as he has those of the present life, to be discovered by our sagacity and industry ; but has instructed us in them by a special revelation made solely for that purpose. We see which of these God has judged to be our more weighty concerns. His judgment is according to truth.

It appears, then, that while we attend to the things of this world in preference to those of the future, we oppose the designs of God's goodness, and invert the order which he has settled. " Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the things of the present life will be added."

2. God's care for our eternal happiness may be concluded from his giving *his own Son* a sacrifice for us, that we might live through him.

The sufferings of Jesus Christ for our redemption, are often adduced in scripture, as a proof, not only of God's general goodness, but also of his compassionate concern for the salvation of our fallen race. " In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love ; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation

for our sins." Hence the sacred writers draw the strongest arguments to relieve the anxiety, and support the hopes of sinners, awakened to sensible convictions of their awful guilt. To sinners pricked in their heart, and inquiring what they must do, Peter says, "Repent and be baptized, in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins, for the promise is to you." "When ye were without strength," says Saint Paul to the Romans, "in due time Christ died for the ungodly. God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And we joy in God through Jesus Christ by whom we have received the reconciliation."

Can any thing more clearly demonstrate, and more gloriously display God's abundant mercy to sinners, and the forward motions of his grace to pardon and save them, than such a dispensation as we are under? Would he have ransomed a fallen race at so great a price, as the blood of Jesus? Would he have adopted so unusual—so singular a measure, as to send his holy and divine Son into the world, in the likeness of our sinful flesh, and subject him to all the indignities of a death on the cross—would he have made this unoffending person a sin offering for us, and appointed him to bear our guilt in his own body, if he had not regarded human happiness, and been mercifully inclined to pardon the penitent.

We know of no other cause, in which so high a character has been employed for mankind. Moses was sent to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt; and mighty works was he enabled, on that occasion, to perform. Angels were sent to rescue Lot from the

flames of Sodom ; and they not only warned him of the impending danger, but, lest he should too long delay, they laid hold on him and his family, conducted them out of the city, and bade them escape for their lives. But for the salvation of sinners he has sent one greater than Moses—greater than angels—one whom all the angels of God worship. Surely, then, he would not that they should perish, but that they should come to repentance.

His sending Moses into Egypt, and enduing him with such extraordinary powers, was an evidence of his merciful design to deliver the Jews from their bondage. His sending his angels to Sodom was an evidence of his favorable regard to Lot and his family. But we have higher and stronger evidence of his merciful concern for our guilty race. “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 ?”

In the case of the Jews in Egypt, their own consent and concurrence were necessary to their deliverance. Moses wrought miracles to convince them, that his mission was divine, and that its immediate object was their emancipation. He, at the same time, demanded their acceptance of, and compliance with the purpose on which he came to them. They could not be saved from slavery, unless they would themselves renounce it.

So it was in the case of Lot's family. The angels gave them warning of the destruction which was coming on their city ; but those only could be saved, who, regarding the admonition, left the city and fled to the appointed mountain. And so it is also in the case of sinners. Salvation is purchased by the Redeemer's blood, and offered in a gracious manner, and without distinction. But those only will be benefited by it, who penitently and thank-

fully accept it. Their guilt exposes them to the wrath to come ; there is a hope set before them ; they must flee for refuge, and lay hold on this hope.

The common blessings of providence are not bestowed without our industry. The miracles which Jesus wrought for the relief of the distressed, were usually in consequence of their earnest application, or of their compliance with some required condition. The plan of God's moral government demands, that his rational creatures own their dependence, submit to his authority and seek his favor. It is presumption then to imagine, that, because God is merciful to us, and Jesus has died for us, salvation is ours absolutely and unconditionally. This is to make the plan of the gospel inconsistent with every other known part of God's government.

3. The *various means* which God uses to bring sinners to repentance, and prepare them for happiness, farther demonstrate his goodness and mercy toward them.

When we see one use means with reference to a particular end, we conclude, that he has the accomplishment of the end at heart ; and the more various and expensive the means, the stronger is the conclusion. If we may thus reason with respect to men, the reasoning is of greater force, as it respects the Deity, all whose works are done in perfect wisdom.

Consider now the measures which God has applied to bring guilty creatures to a compliance with the terms of their own happiness. He has placed before them every motive adapted to operate on the human mind. The awful consequences of a sinful and impenitent life, on the one hand ; and, on the other, the glorious rewards designed for the penitent and believing, are exhibited to their view. Their hopes and fears, their desire of happiness, and reluc-

tance to misery, are warmly addressed. God himself stoops to argue and expostulate with them in the most affectionate manner. "Come now, and let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.—Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, eat that which is good, let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear and your soul shall live. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, who will abundantly pardon. How long will the scorers delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: Behold, I will pour out my spirit, and make known my words unto you." When all the methods of his grace fail of their effect, with what reluctance does he proceed to punishment? "How shall I give thee up?—My heart is turned within me. Be thou instructed, lest my soul depart from thee."

That his exhortations and reproofs may have a more extensive influence, he has commissioned his heralds to proclaim and spread them in the world, and urge and press them on all who will hear. "We are ambassadors for Christ," says the apostle, "as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Ministers are to speak God's word to men, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. They are to be instant in season, and out of season; to be patient toward all men; and in meekness to instruct them who oppose the truth, if God peradventure will give them repentance.

Yea, farther, God strives with sinners by his gracious spirit, which accompanies the dispensation of

his word. In reference to this heavenly influence, the exalted Savior says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Hence those convictions and awakenings of conscience, and those relentings for sin and resolutions of amendments, which sinners often feel. Hence they who continue obstinate in their guilty course, are said to resist—to grieve—to vex the Holy Spirit.

When we contemplate the various measures, which God is pursuing with sinful men, can we imagine, that he delights in their destruction ?

4. God is *patient* and *longsuffering* to sinners.

The transgressor of God's law deserves the curse which it denounces. The gospel brings an offer of pardon : But every refusal of the offer is a forfeiture of the benefit. Impenitence in sin after pardon is offered is a reiterated contempt of grace, and a continual accumulation of guilt. In the mean time, the suspension of punishment is the effect of divine patience. It is this which, from day to day, interposes to stay the uplifted hand of justice. How easy it is with God to crush, in a moment, bold and contemptuous sinners ? How many provocations to arrest and destroy them, do they give him every day ? How wonderful is his forbearance, that he still waits to be gracious, and exalts himself that he may have mercy ?

5. Many *great offenders*, by extraordinary means, have been brought to repentance, and through abundant mercy have obtained forgiveness. Thus God has displayed the riches of his grace for the encouragement of all.

Paul says of himself, " He was once a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious ; but he obtained mercy, and the grace of Christ was exceedingly abundant toward him." And he acknowledges, that " for this cause he obtained mercy, that in him, as the

chief of sinners, Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them, who should afterward believe in him to life everlasting." The Ephesians, before the gospel came to them, were led away by that evil spirit, who works in the children of disobedience ; they had their conversation in the lusts of the flesh ; they fulfilled the desires of the carnal mind ; they were by nature children of wrath. " But God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved them, even when they were dead in sins, quickened them together with Christ ; that, in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward them by Jesus Christ."

From past examples of God's mercy, every awakened soul has encouragement to apply to him for the grace of repentance and the blessing of pardon. He is the same gracious and sin forgiving God, as when the gospel was first preached. He still beholds the returning sinner, even when he is a great way off ; and still extends his gracious arms to embrace him.

This view of God's goodness, in its proper influence, would lead sinners to repentance. But some there are, who abuse this goodness to their encouragement in iniquity. " If God is thus gracious and merciful," say they, " surely those awful threatenings, found in the Bible, proceed not from *him* ; or, if they do, they must be understood in a sense quite different from the natural import of the language."

But what harm do you fear from these threatenings ? They do not arbitrarily create a danger, which without them would not exist : They mercifully warn you of a danger which really does exist. May not seasonable warnings come from a good being ? If there had been no threatenings at all, yet a

corrupt heart and wicked life tend to misery. Is your state the worse, because you are told of this? Threatenings are not intended to make you miserable, but to restrain you from making yourselves miserable. Take the warning which they bring, and they never will hurt you. Perhaps you think them too severe and terrible. But do you find, that they have too great an effect in reforming the world? Have they too powerful an influence on you? Terrible as they are, do not many sin still? Had they been more soft and gentle, perhaps iniquity would have been more bold and insolent. In short; if by them you are brought to repentance, you will never suffer from them. If you are unreformed, say not, they are too terrible; for you are not the persons to complain.

Perhaps you think, that God may have made these threatenings merely to operate as a check upon vice; and that he is too merciful finally to execute them. But certainly God has given no intimation, that he designed them merely as terrors to affright men into obedience. Such an intimation would have destroyed their effect. And if God has given no such intimation, you have no right to assume such a presumption. If God has denounced threatenings against the finally impenitent, he doubtless intended, that men should *believe* he was in earnest; for otherwise the threatenings might better have never been uttered. And if it is God's will, that we should *believe* he will execute them, certainly it must be his will to execute them, according to their import, on the subjects against whom they are pointed. For who will say, God would have us believe a lie? If it is consistent with God's goodness to pronounce such threatenings, it is consistent with his goodness to carry them into effect.

Farther ; you should always keep it in mind, that wickedness tends to misery, and must, if retained, finally terminate in it. The question, therefore, is not so much concerning God's immediate execution of punishment on sinners, as concerning their bringing misery on themselves. If you continue in your sins, and die in your impenitence, "know ye, that your sins will find you out, and your iniquities will fall upon you." "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself ; he shall be holden in the cords of his sins." It is absurd to start cavils against, and study evasions of the divine threatenings, unless you can prove, that a wicked and ungodly life, followed with a hardened and impenitent death, is, in its nature, consistent with glory and happiness.

Some, I suppose, will say, "If we are to judge of men's characters according to the tenor of the gospel, there is, and probably ever has been in the world, a much greater number of sinners, than of saints ; and it is not credible, that a merciful God will doom to misery so great a proportion of his intelligent creatures."

But do you seriously think, that the number of sinners is a reason, why God will not punish any ? If it is, then the greater the number, the stronger the reason for impunity. And consequently by promoting vice, you add to the general safety. I hope you will not *act* on such an opinion. Though the number of sinners be ever so great, and their combinations ever so strong, the wicked shall not be unpunished. If sin indulged in the heart, and practised in the life, not only deserves punishment from the justice of God, but tends to misery in its own nature, then the number of sinners is no security ; for this will neither lessen sin's demerit, nor arrest its tendency. Though thousands should, at the same time, be afflicted with a painful disease, not

one will feel his own pain alleviated by the sufferings of the rest. Vice is the disorder, as well as the guilt of the soul ; and the disorder is the same, whether many, or few are infected with it. The man tormented with envy, malice, pride, ambition and avarice, is still tormented, though thousands of others may indulge the same passions. You may as well expect, that a general famine will satisfy every man's hunger, as expect that general wickedness will prevent each one's misery. Vice will operate like itself in every one who habitually practises it ; and every one must bear his own burden. If numbers cannot turn vice into virtue, then numbers can be no defence against punishment. If it be just to punish one sinner, it is just to punish ten, or ten thousand. The number of sinners alters not the justice of the procedure. Human government may, on reasons of state, sometimes spare an offending multitude ; but these reasons cannot operate with the Deity. His power is as sufficient to punish many, as few. Though the whole human race should rebel, his throne stands firm. He needs not the services of his creatures ; and if he did, the same power which created those who now exist, could supply by a new creation the place of all who revolt.

In the divine government, the number of offenders has sometimes been a reason for more speedy and exemplary punishment ; but never do we find it to have been a reason for general impunity. When legions of the angels apostatized, they were cast down to hell ; and there is no intimation, that any of them were allowed to keep their first habitation, lest there should be too great a vacuity in heaven. When all flesh had corrupted God's way on the earth, the race was swept offⁿ by a general deluge, and none were spared, but the family of righteous Noah. A few *good* men would have prevented the

destruction of Sodom ; but the number of *sinner*s was no security to the city. Abraham, in its behalf, pleaded, that perhaps there might be *ten* just men in it, and prayed that, for their sakes, the whole might be preserved ; but he never thought of urging the *general corruption* as a reason why judgment should be suspended. God promised, that he would pardon Jerusalem, if *a man* could be found, who executed judgment and sought the truth. But he no where promises impunity to communities, on account of a universal prostration of judgment, and violation of truth.

General arguments, drawn from God's goodness, against the punishment of sinners, are utterly inconclusive ; for his goodness is free and sovereign ; and how he will exercise it, we cannot know, farther than he is pleased to inform us. It is always directed by wisdom ; and unless we can comprehend the extent of his wisdom, we cannot by our own sagacity foretell how he will dispense his benefits. If we can prove it to be *unjust* for God to punish sinners, we may conclude, that he never will punish them. But this we cannot prove : Nay, the contrary is most evident. For if sin is wrong in its nature, opposite to the character of God, and contrary to the design of his government, then it certainly *deserves* punishment, and what is *deserved* may justly be inflicted.

To know what the *mercy* of God will do, we must resort to his *word* ; for we can learn no where else. Now the same word, which teaches us, that God is merciful to forgive the penitent, teaches us also, that he is just to punish the impenitent. He would not, it is true, that any should perish ; but then he would that all should come to *repentance*, because without this they must perish. He forgives iniquities, trans-

gressions and sins ; but he by no means clears the guilty.

It is often said, " Reason, without recurrence to scripture, will teach us, that God is merciful ; and if he is merciful, then he will shew mercy." Be it so. But does your reason, without recurrence to scripture, teach you, in what *manner*, and to what *subjects* God will shew mercy ? He may be a merciful Being, and yet punish the guilty. If you argue from God's mercy, you must argue on the ground of revelation. That gives you the most exalted representations of the benefits, which his mercy has provided ; but it tells you, at the same time, on what terms these benefits may be obtained, and what will be the sad consequence of rejecting these terms.

If you argue from scripture, you must take doctrines, as they are stated there. Life and death are set before you. If you refuse the former, the latter is the consequence. The scripture gives no hope of life, but in a particular way. If departing from this way, you still hope for life, your hope stands, not in the word of God, but in your own imagination. And if you reject the scripture, because it threatens punishment to the workers of iniquity, you reject not only its threatenings, but also its promises. These are the only sure grounds on which you can hope for pardon. Without these, there is nothing to which you can resort as your security from punishment. You may boast of your reason ; but, in this case, your reason fails you ; for this, without revelation, never can assure you, that God will pardon you on any terms—much less that he will make you happy. He may be just, and he may be good, and yet not extend forgiving mercy to such as you ; and if mercy should be denied you, misery will be the consequence. Make not lies your refuge, nor

hide yourselves under falsehood ; but flee by faith and repentance to the grace revealed in the gospel, and lay hold on the hope, which that sets before you.

“ But does not the analogy of providence lead us to conclude, that all men will finally be happy ? God gives us rain and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness. His rain falls, and his sun shines promiscuously on the fields of the evil and the good. May we not, for future happiness, trust that goodness, which so richly supplies our present wants ?” Doubtless you may : But then be as wise in relation to the former, as you are in relation to the latter. God gives you a harvest in its season ; but in order to obtain it, you must prepare your ground, sow your seed, and guard your field. With the same care sow the seeds, and with the same diligence cultivate the fruits of righteousness, and you will have a sure reward. The grain, which you reap, is of the kind with the seed which you sow. In the moral husbandry the case is the same. Sow to the spirit, and of the spirit you will reap everlasting life ; but if you sow to the flesh, you will of the flesh reap only corruption. Sow in righteousness, and you will reap in mercy ; but if you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind.

You see every year, that you are on probation for a harvest ; and are you not, in this life, on probation for the happiness of a future life ? Your favorite argument from analogy certainly leads to this conclusion.

God is good ; but still you see misery in this world. If your argument could prove, that there will be no misery in a future world, it must equally prove, that there can be none in this ; but fact refutes the argument as it respects this world, and hence shews that it is inconclusive with respect to

the other. If the slothful man suffers poverty, or the intemperate man loses his health, or, in a fit of intoxication, breaks his bones, will you say, God is unkind in not preserving him from these evils? No; for they are the effects of his own vices. So are the miseries which men suffer in the other world. You see, that God's goodness does not always exempt men from the painful effects of their iniquities here: Where then is the ground on which you conclude, that his goodness will prevent all misery hereafter? Your argument from the analogy of providence turns full against you: It compels you to this conclusion that this life is a probation for futurity, and that according to the use which you make of it, your future condition will be happy or miserable.

Some, perhaps, may imagine, that the merciful God, who would not that any should perish, will grant to them who die impenitent, a second probation, in which they may retrieve the miscarriages of the first.

But had the inspired writers any such idea? The apostle to the Hebrews, speaking of the grace of the gospel, asks, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Surely he thought, that the neglect of salvation in this life would cut us off from the hopes of an escape in the next. "Behold now is the accepted time," says St. Paul; "behold now is the day of salvation." He speaks of no other day provided for the succor of those who now receive the grace of God in vain.

Besides; were a future probation to be granted, who can be sure, that he should make a better use of that, than he now makes of the present? What advantages could sinners enjoy in another world, superior to those which they enjoy in this? Our Lord has warned us, that "such as hear not Moses and the prophets, would not be persuaded though

one should rise from the dead." Such as despise the revelation of God—the glorious gospel of his Son—would continue impenitent, though spirits were sent to them from the other world; and probably would continue impenitent still, though they were sent among spirits to the other world.

What arguments could prophets, or apostles, or even angels in the heavenly world, use with sinners, superior to those which have been used with them on earth, and which still the gospel uses. If the apostles now in heaven were commissioned to undertake the conversion of ungodly spirits in hell; what could they do more, than repeat over and over the old arguments, which these impious beings had heard on earth an hundred times before. Sinners, who here spurn these arguments, would not be persuaded, though one were sent to them from the dead, or though they were sent to the dead.

You think, perhaps, that if there is really a future punishment, and wicked men had some experience of it, they would be reclaimed. But this is by no means certain. Habit has great power in this world. If it be carried to the other world, it may be as powerful there. Why is not the drunkard, the thief, or the gambler, reclaimed by his experience? He suffers a thousand miseries, which the honest and virtuous man escapes. But "though the fool is brayed in a mortar, with a pestle, among wheat, yet his foolishness departs not from him." Will not habit be as obstinate in another world? "He who is filthy, will be filthy still."

There are some, it is probable, who, in the neglect of their present probation, comfort themselves with the hopes of another. Now admitting that they should have another, what hinders, but that they may neglect *this*, and still comfort themselves with the hopes of one probation more? May they not ex-

pect a third probation after they have abused the second, with as much reason as they now expect a second to follow their abuse of the first ?

The scripture gives them no intimation of a second : They expect it only because they think it hard to suffer for their sins. But this ground of hope, such as it is, will always remain. They will always think it hard to suffer. Improve then your present probation. Let the goodness of God lead you to repentance.

This thought introduces the other branch of our subject, which was,

II. To shew, that the goodness of God is a reason why we should desire and pray to be taught his commandments. “Thou art good—teach me thy statutes.”

David here prays, not merely for the communication of doctrinal knowledge, but especially for the efficacy and influence of this knowledge on his heart and life. This is the teaching which is the burden of his petitions throughout this psalm. “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law ; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight. Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness.”

The goodness of God is a reason, why we should pray for this spiritual teaching.

As God is good, we may conclude that his commandments are good. None but such can proceed from him. Whether we can see all the reasons, in which his commands are founded or not ; yet, if we know they are *his*, we know they are good—perfective of our nature, and conducive to our happiness. David says, “I esteem thy precepts con-

cerning all things to be right ; therefore I hate every false way." On this ground we may receive and obey all positive institutions, as well as moral injunctions ; for as they come from a wise and good Being, they must have a benevolent and useful tendency, and be designed and adapted to make us virtuous and happy. If we believe, that the sabbath, public worship, the preaching of the word, baptism, and the holy supper, are ordinances of God, we may, at once, determine, that they are good and useful ; for no ordinances but such would be appointed of God.

As God is good, we should desire to be taught his statutes, for *these*, being divinely impressed upon, and wrought into our hearts, will make us good. God's commands are agreeable to his nature. If we know and love them, observe and obey them, we are then conformed to the divine character, and partakers of the divine nature. To be like God, is to be good and to do good. " Love your enemies," says our Lord, " do good and lend, and ye shall be the children of the highest, for he is good to the evil and unthankful. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

As God is good, our disobedience is highly aggravated, involving in it the guilt of stubbornness and ingratitude. His mercies should persuade us to present ourselves living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him, which is our reasonable service ; for if, under them, we indulge a hard and impenitent heart, we treasure up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath.

As God is good, we may be assured of his gracious attention, when we pray for the teachings of his spirit. From the known goodness of earthly parents, to which God's goodness is infinitely superior, our Lord teaches us to conclude, that our heav-

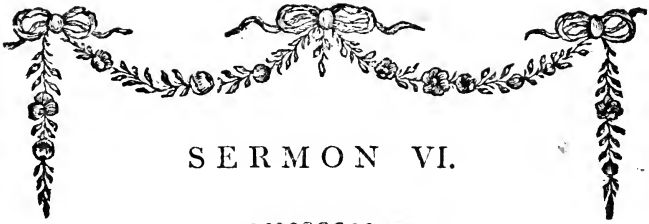
only Father will give good things ; yea, even his HOLY SPIRIT to them who ask him.

As he is good, he must love and approve goodness in men. Doubtless then he will favor and encourage it ; and will graciously regard their humble prayers, when they seek his teachings. Thus David prays, "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God. Thy spirit is good ; lead me in the land of uprightness."

You see now, in what a favorable situation you are placed with respect to your future happiness.—That God is good you have abundant evidence from the continual exercises of his goodness which you see and feel ;—especially from the provision made for your eternal salvation—from the means which he uses to awaken in you a sense of its importance—from his patience toward you in waiting for your repentance—and from the many instances of his mercy to sinners in ages past, which were recorded for an example unto ages to come. Even the threatenings of his word are instances of his goodness ; for they are intended, not to bring misery upon you, but to turn you from that course, in which you are bringing misery on yourselves.

If God is good, then learn and choose his commands, and pray for the teachings of his spirit, that you may learn them experimentally, and choose them practically—may see their excellency, feel their power and taste their sweetness—may be conformed to them in your hearts, and governed by them in your lives.

Then will you not be ashamed, when you have respect to all God's statutes. Great peace have they who love his law, and nothing shall offend them. The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and the reproofs of instruction are the way of life.



S E R M O N VI.

The Spirit of the Lord not Straitened.

MICAH ii. 7.

O Thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord Straitened? Are these his doings? Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?

THE Jews, in a time of great degeneracy, are threatened by the prophet with desolating judgments. Under their calamities, the prophet foretells that they would complain with doleful lamentations, as if all their miseries were the effects of God's severity. To silence their complaints he reminds them of their character and distinction as God's peculiar people, who had enjoyed the highest privileges, and lived under the security of singular promises. And he expostulates with them, "Is God's spirit straitened?" Is his hand shortened that it cannot save you? "Are these" calamities "his doings?" Are they the genuine effects of his government? Are they not rather the fruits of your own iniquities? Attend to, and comply with the warnings of his prophets and the instructions of his messengers, and you will be in no danger; for

“do not his words do good to them who walk uprightly.”

In these words of the prophet there are three things which deserve our attention.

I. That the spirit of the Lord is not straitened.

II. That the evils which fall on sinners are not God's doings:

III. That God's words will do good to them who walk uprightly.

I. Our first observation is, “that the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened.” The question in the text is a plain negation. It contains its own answer.

The observation may be applied both to the providence of God in the government of the world—and to the grace of God in the conversion of sinners. In both applications we will illustrate and improve it.

First. By *the Spirit of the Lord* we may understand *his providence* in the government of the world. This is never straitened. To Moses in a distrustful hour God says, “Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now, whether my word shall come to pass or not.” He by the prophet Isaiah demands of the unbelieving Jews, “Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot save? Or have I no power to deliver?” The same prophet says, “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and your sins have hid his face from you.” Parallel to these are the words of our text; and they express the irresistible power and immutable wisdom of God to accomplish the deep counsels of his will, and to carry into effect the vast scheme of his providence.

1. The words express the *boundless influence* of God's presence, and *extent* of his government.

His spirit is not confined within any limits. It fills the universe.—He is a God at hand, and a God afar off—above all, through all, and in all. All creatures are under his eye—all worlds are moved by his hand—the whole creation is sustained by his arm.

Men often form designs which they cannot execute. They have neither sagacity to foresee, nor prudence to avoid, nor ability to remove the obstructions, which meet them in the process of their works. Their plans of operation puzzle and perplex them. One movement interferes with another. They are entangled in their own devices.

But God's spirit is not straitened. The scheme of his government is immensely great. He has created innumerable worlds. Many our eyes can see ; more are discovered by artificial aids. All these are but a part of his ways. How little a portion is heard of him ? The depth of his wisdom, the extent of his creation, the thunder of his power, who can understand ? The world in which we dwell we know to be peopled with an infinite variety of living creatures. It is reasonable to suppose, that other worlds are as populous as this. Revelation teaches us, that there is an innumerable multitude of spirits rising in a regular gradation above us, to what height we cannot know. Observation shows us, that there are creatures sinking from grade to grade below us down to the very borders of nothing. So far as we can trace the works of God, there is a mutual connexion ; nothing subsists alone and by itself. One species of creatures is supported by another. All are supplied by the productions of the earth. The fruitfulness of the earth depends on the seasons—and these are regulated by the sun. And who knows

but this connexion runs through the universe? How vast then must be the scheme of God's government? Yet he takes care of every part, and makes each subservient to the whole. There is no error, confusion or interference in his works. We sometimes imagine, that we see disorder in his system; but if we could comprehend the whole in one view, and discern the relation of one part to another, all would doubtless appear harmonious and beautiful.

2. God's power and influence are no more *shortened in duration*, than straitened in extent. His dominion is everlasting.

The existence of Deity is without beginning; and we cannot conceive a time so remote, as to exclude the possibility of *created* existence. We know, however, that it could not be from eternity. But though all creatures had a beginning, yet revelation assures us, that there are many which will have no end. In this important rank we ourselves are placed. The divine government is a plan designed, not for a few days, or years, or ages, but for eternity. It looks forward beyond the duration of earth and skies—beyond the bounds of time. “And the spirit of the Lord is not straitened.” He has wisdom to direct all the movements, and power to execute all the purposes of this stupendous scheme.

We may form great designs, and leave them unfinished. Our ability may be unequal to the execution; or we may lose the ability which we now possess; or we may be removed into another state of existence before our plan is brought into operation; or we may change our mind and relinquish our purpose on conviction that it is impracticable or inexpedient. In a thousand instances our projections are thus rendered fruitless and abortive.

But with God there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. What his soul desires, that he performs.

None can resist his will. With him is everlasting strength. As his existence, so his perfections are immutable and eternal. The scheme of his government will always be conducted with the same invariable wisdom, justice and goodness.

3. None of God's creatures are *overlooked* or *forgotten*. His providential care extends to all. He preserves man and beast. Without him a sparrow falls not to the ground. The hairs of our head are numbered.

Men, deeply engaged in a great design, are unmindful of smaller things. They have not capacity to take up and arrange various matters at once.— Their main purpose often miscarries by a neglect of particular circumstances, which, though apparently inconsiderable, are still essential to the object principally in view. But God's providence regards all creatures, superintends all events, and directs all the circumstances attending them. To him there is no high or low, great or small. The things, which we esteem trifling, may be great in their connexions, and interesting in their consequences. The perfection and rectitude of his government depend on his constant care of every creature among his numerous subjects, and on his exact inspection of every occurrence throughout his wide dominions. David says, "Thou hast searched me and known me; thou knowest my downsitting and my uprising; thou compassest my path, possessest my reins and knowest my thoughts afar off. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, how great is the sum of them! They are more than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee. This knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high; I cannot attain to it." But to the perfect, allcomprehensive mind of the Deity it is easy and familiar. His spirit is not confined to a few objects. It compasses the whole extent of

creation, pervades all space, animates every living thing, and imparts understanding to every rational being. Wherever we go, his presence surrounds us. Whatever we do, his eye beholds us. He is not far from every one of us ; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.

4. God's providence is not restrained by our *unworthiness*. "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He sends rain on the just and on the unjust. He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

Human goodness is discouraged by ingratitude. When its benefits are disregarded or misapplied, it is soon weary of well doing. But God is patient and longsuffering. "He waits to be gracious, and exalts himself that he may have mercy." Our obstinacy may divert the course, but our unworthiness will not hinder the exercise of his benevolence.— "He deals not with us after our sins, nor rewards us according to our iniquities. As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy to them who fear him." "He would not that sinners should perish, but that they should come to repentance." When he gives up the incorrigible to the consequences of their own perverseness, his compassion is moved within him.

The riches of his goodness we behold in the world around us ; for he opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. His constant bounty we experience in ourselves ; for he daily loads us with benefits. But the glory of his grace is displayed in the gospel, which teaches us, that, in his compassion to a guilty world, "he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

5. God is not straitened by any *difficulty* or *opposition* in his way. All things are possible with him.

He who made the heavens by his word, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth—he who spake, and they were created, who commanded, and they stood fast, must be able to carry into execution all the counsels of his will and purposes of his wisdom, in every part of his boundless dominion, and in every period of his endless reign. Surely we may, with the most perfect security, put ourselves under his protection, and trust the care of his providence. We may with the greatest confidence call on his name and rely on his promises. What he has promised he is able to perform. “He can do for us abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

How delightful the thought that we are under the government of this great and good Being! In whatever part of the world we dwell, and in whatever period of time we live, we are within his dominion and under his care, and his goodness extends to us. Whatever afflictions attend us, or dangers threaten us, he can protect and deliver us. His mercy is not straitened, his arm is not shortened, nor is his ear heavy. Great and precious are his promises; but they were not too precious for him to make, nor are they too great for him to fulfil. Though difficulties may seem to lie in the way of their accomplishment, yet nothing is too hard for him. We observed,

Secondly, That the expression, “The spirit of the Lord is not straitened,” may be applied to his grace in the conversion and salvation of sinners.

If we believe, that there is a divine influence directing the motions of nature, and overruling the events of the world, we must believe, that there is also a divine operation in forming the human mind to virtue, and in preparing it for the happiness of futurity.

To acknowledge God’s hand in supporting and preserving our bodies, and, at the same time, to ex-

clude him from all concern in recovering our souls from sin and guilt, would be a palpable absurdity. It would be to suppose, that in smaller matters we are dependent, but in greater we are self-sufficient. However difficult it may be to conceive, how God influences our minds without controlling our liberty, yet certainly this may as well be done in the concerns of religion, as in the concerns of common life. There is no more difficulty in the one case than in the other. If we deny a divine influence in forming the soul to holiness and to a meetness for heaven, because we cannot conceive how this is consistent with the freedom of moral beings, we must, on the same principle, deny that he exercises any kind of moral government over the rational creation, for there can be no government without a superintendency over men's actions.

The scripture teaches us, that the conversion of sinners is the work of God ; but a work adapted to their rational and intelligent nature. This work is in a peculiar manner ascribed to the *Spirit* of God ; and in this " his Spirit is not straitened."

1. The influences of the Spirit are not *confined* to *this* or *that* person, or *description* of persons ; but extend, in some kind and degree, to all who enjoy the benefit of revelation. Where God sends his word, he sends his Spirit to accompany it ; and every person is doubtless made a partaker of it. God's Spirit strove with the inhabitants of the old world, while the ark was preparing. The Jews, in their corruptest state, had the Spirit working among them. Hence Stephen says, " Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears, ye do *always* resist the Holy Ghost ; as your fathers did, so do ye." The gospel is called " a ministration of the Spirit." They who heard the gospel are said to " have received the Spirit in the hearing of faith." The

Savior speaks of himself as “standing and knocking at the door of sinners, that they may hear and open to him.” Though every one under the gospel is not brought to a saving repentance, yet there is reason to believe, that every one, at some period or other, is under the awakening and convincing influences of the spirit. And they who continue impenitent, and finally perish in their guilt, are such as have rebelled and vexed the Holy Spirit. They whom God gives over to their own hearts’ lusts are such as hearkened not to his voice, and would not obey his calls.

2. The spirit is not restrained to any particular *time* or *place*.

There may, indeed, be more plentiful effusions of the spirit at some times and places, than at others. But these effusions are not so limited, but that all may seek with hope to obtain a share in them. “If any man thirst,” says our Lord, “let him come to me and drink.” This spake he of the spirit, which they who believe in him shall receive. “Ask,” says he, “and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find, for God giveth his holy spirit to them who ask him.” “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance.”

3. The Spirit is not straitened by men’s *unworthiness*. If he was, all must despair of his influence.

Every sinner in whom the Spirit of God effects a saving change, is utterly unworthy of this favor; for he has not only transgressed the law of God, but often resisted the grace of Christ. Some, however, are more unworthy than others. They have continued longer in sin, have more grossly violated the commands of God, and have more perversely opposed the grace of Christ.

But the Spirit has often wrought effectually, even in such as these. "Where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded." Paul ranks himself in this class. He says, "I, who was before a persecutor, a blasphemer and injurious, obtained mercy; and the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

4. The Spirit of God can overcome the greatest *obstinacy*.

The carnal mind is enmity against God; but the word preached is mighty through God to cast down imaginations, demolish strong holds, and captivate every thought to the obedience of Christ. The work of conversion is compared to a new creation, and to a resurrection from the dead, not only because it makes a great change in the subject, but also because it is effected by the powerful grace of God. Paul says to the Ephesians, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. By grace are ye saved through faith. Ye are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works."

5. The operations of the Spirit are not confined to the *time* of the sinners *conversion*, but are continued for the completion of the work. He who begins the good work, performs it to the day of Christ. He supplies the convert with grace sufficient for him—with grace to help in time of need. The believer is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. When he is weak, then he is strong by the power of Christ resting upon him. Whatever difficulties attend his religious course, he is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

6. The Spirit is not straitened in his *way* and *manner* of working. He divides to every one severally as he will.

Conversion, in its general nature, is the same in all, who are the subjects of it ; but the manner in which it is produced, is attended with great variety. In some the work is more gradually, in others more speedily accomplished. In some it is accompanied with greater terrors and awakenings ; in others it proceeds by more soft and gentle steps. In some it is followed with clearer evidence of its reality ; in others darkness, doubt and fear longer remain.—Some have severer conflicts with corruption and temptation ; others obtain a more easy and decided victory over their enemies, and sooner find the ways of wisdom to be ways of pleasantness.

There is also a great variety in the means by which the Spirit awakens sinners to conviction and repentance. Some are excited to serious thoughtfulness by severe affliction, or sudden danger ;—some by a seasonable admonition in private, or by a pertinent word in public. Manasseh was brought to repentance by means of his captivity ; the jailer was awakened by an earthquake ; Lydia's heart was opened in hearing the word ; the Jews were pricked in the heart by Peter's solemn reproof.

Once more : The Spirit is not straitened in the *kind* of assistance, and the *measure* of grace, which he affords to the saints.

There is what the Apostle calls “ a supply of the Spirit.” Hence Christians are exhorted to be “ filled with the Spirit.” “ It hath pleased the Father, that in Christ all fulness should dwell ; and of his fulness believers receive grace for grace ;” or grace in that degree and variety, which their necessities require.

The humble Christian receives grace to direct him in his doubts, comfort him in his afflictions, support him in his temptations, preserve him in his dangers, sanctify him more and more from his pol-

lutions, and confirm the virtuous principles of his heart.

In these respects the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened.

What wonderful encouragement have sinners, conscious of their guilt, to engage in the great work of their salvation ! A conviction of their numerous transgressions, a sense of their vast unworthiness and of the perverseness of their hearts, and a recollection of their past abuses of God's grace; need not dishearten them, for the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened. Even their present conviction is an encouragement. The grace of God which has awakened them, can complete the work begun. Only let them now take heed to themselves, that they resist not the Spirit, but comply with his friendly motions, and attend on the means appointed for their obtaining a supply of grace.

Let none make their own experience the rule by which they judge others, nor the experience of others the rule by which they judge themselves. We are not to conclude, that this or that person is a stranger to the grace of God, because he cannot give a detail of religious exercises exactly corresponding with our own ; nor to conclude that we are in a state of sin, because we have never known all those feelings, which we have heard some others relate. For the Spirit of the Lord is not confined to human rules ; but he operates variously as he chooses. His fruit, however, is substantially the same in all in whom he dwells. And if we find in ourselves that temper, which the gospel calls the fruit of the Spirit, we may conclude, that we have been the subjects of a spiritual change, whether we can distinctly recollect the time and manner of it, or not. If we see others, who, in the general tenor of their conversation, appear to be governed by the precepts of the gospel,

we are to regard them as real Christians, even though the manner of their conversion should not precisely accord with ours, or even though they should be unable to recollect any distinguishing circumstances of the change.

Let Christians be animated in the religious course, and proceed with constancy and zeal. Though they may foresee many dangers before them, and feel much weakness within them, yet they may be strong in the Lord ; for his Spirit is not straitened. The Spirit who dwells in them, is greater than their enemies, who are in the world. And nothing will be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord.



S E R M O N VII.



*The Sins and Miseries of Men not God's Doings,
but their own.*



MICAH ii. 7.

O Thou, that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord Straitened? Are these his doings? Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?

THESE words are an answer to the complaints of the Jews under the calamities which they suffered, and under the apprehension of sorer calamities with which they were threatened. These, the prophet observes, were not owing to the want of power, wisdom or goodness in God, for his Spirit is never straitened; neither were they his doings, but their own. God's government never hurts them who walk uprightly, but always ensures their happiness.

We have already shewn, in what respects it may be said, "The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened." Hence the prophet infers,

II. That the evils which men suffer are not God's doings but their own. The illustration of this truth is what now lies before us.

The scripture indeed teaches us, that “we receive evil as well as good, from the hand of God—that when there is evil in a city, the Lord hath done it—that he forms the light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil.”

Some of the calamities which befall men seem to be more immediate operations of the divine hand. There are others which result directly from their own follies and vices. The latter, however, as well as the former, are, in scripture, ascribed to God’s providence, because, in the constitution of his government, there is an established connexion between vice and misery. But still there is a sense, in which it may properly be said, “The evils which we suffer are not God’s doings.” For they are not the genuine effects of his original government, but the unhappy consequences of our perversion of it.

This is the language of the prophets; “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself—Thou hast procured this evil to thyself in that thou hast forsaken thy God. Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. Know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord. Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter; because it reacheth to thine heart.—Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God.”

From the perfection of God’s moral character we may justly conclude, that he did not create rational beings to render them miserable, nor institute a government for the sake of spreading confusion and wretchedness among them. Our Savior has taught us, that God, from the *foundation* of the world, prepared a glorious kingdom for the righteous; but *hell* was prepared for the *devil* and his *angels*. When

God founded the world and placed man upon it, he prepared superior mansions for the reception of this new race, after their trial should be finished; but he prepared no hell for the punishment of the rebels of this race. The benevolence of his government was such, that not rebellion, but obedience was to be presumed. When some of the angels revolted, a hell was prepared for them. And when man, contrary to all reason, departed from God, and went over to the party of rebellious angels, he was justly doomed to that place of punishment, which had been already prepared for *them*. Man's hope of deliverance was founded on a new constitution.

If we believe God to be a most perfect Being, we must believe, that he is infinitely *good*; for goodness is essential to a perfect character. Whatever other properties a moral being may possess, if he is without goodness, we view him with entire disapprobation. Without *this* there can be no moral excellency. The nature of goodness is to will and choose the happiness of others. Hence, then, we may conclude, that God's government is framed and administered in such a manner as tends to the happiness of his subjects.

God's goodness, however, is not a blind, mechanical impulse, which does good in particular instances, without regarding the general happiness; but it is always guided by unerring wisdom, which discerns and chooses what is proper to be done. And on the other hand, his goodness is accompanied with *justice*, which never injures one for the superior happiness of another, nor injures a few for the happiness of a greater number. Goodness presupposes justice, and cannot exist without it. To do *wrong* to some for the greater benefit of others, is not goodness, but wantonness. If, among *sinner*s

equally unworthy, God grants to some the favors, which he withholds from others; or if, in his sovereign wisdom, he shews mercy to some, and, for the general good, inflicts *deserved* punishment on others, here is no injustice to the latter, but grace to the former, and goodness to many. Here is the *particular* election, of which the scripture speaks; and here may be applied the apostle's metaphor, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor?" But to make the *innocent* miserable, on the whole, for the sake of increasing the general happiness, is contrary to all our ideas of justice; and this surely God will never do. Justice is an essential attribute of the Deity; and to violate this cannot be for the general good.

God exercises over his creatures a government adapted to the *natures* which he has given them. As he has endued us with the faculties of deliberation, reflection, choice and action, so he governs us in a manner which leaves room for the exercise of them. Inanimate bodies are put in motion, and, as is generally supposed, are *continued* in motion, by his immediate impulse. Intelligent creatures are to be guided by rational motives and arguments. God marks out to them the path which leads to happiness; places before them proper motives to pursue it; offers them moral assistances, and allows them a space of probation. On him they are dependent for happiness and all the means and helps to obtain it. But whether they will seek the happiness offered them in the use of the means provided for them, and in the improvement of the assistances afforded to them, is referred to their own choice. If forsaking the path of righteousness, they choose and follow a course of wickedness, destruction and misery are before them. But are these God's doings? Are

they not their own? God has made to them the promises and stated to them the terms of eternal life; he has urged their compliance with these terms; he has warned them of the awful consequences of their refusal. Does not his government tend to happiness? Is any thing wanting but their cordial submission to it? What is it that exposes them to misery? Is it God's government, or their opposition to it? The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to his law. Hence to be carnally minded is death. To be spiritually minded will be life and peace.

We see even in the present life, a connexion between vice and misery on the one hand, and between virtue and happiness on the other. Much the greater part of the troubles incident to men, are the fruits and consequences of their irregular appetites, perverse passions and unreasonable actions. And the greatest enjoyments in life are those which spring from virtuous tempers and heavenly hopes. There are, indeed, many afflictions resulting from a state of mortality, which no man's wisdom or virtue can prevent. But these make not the principal part of human misery: And even these are the fruits of sin. The mortality of our race is the consequence of our general apostacy. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passes on all men, for that all have sinned." And this mortality, which is the effect of sin, is a necessary mean of its cure. Death, in its various forms, is a useful admonition of the evil of sin and of our guilty state, and an urgent call to repentance and newness of life.

Death was not a part of the original constitution under which man was placed; but was introduced by his violation of that constitution. Is it then God's doing? Is it not the work of man? God, in-

deed, threatened it as the punishment of sin; but man by the commission of sin brought it into the world.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven. But it is revealed only against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. It is only for these things' sake, that the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. If they fall under the threatened punishment, is this God's doing? Have they not procured it to themselves?

The misery of sinners in the future world will greatly, if not principally, arise from their own perverse tempers and dispositions. And whatever positive punishment may be inflicted, it will be no other, than what they deserve, and what they have been warned to avoid. Now if, in this probationary state, they contract and retain a temper, which naturally tends to misery, and carry this temper with them to another world—if they obstinately pursue a course, which they know must issue in misery, and perversely refuse a compliance with the terms on which deliverance is promised; must they not ascribe their destruction to themselves? Can they say this is God's doing? Will not every mouth be stopped?

But some, perhaps, will say, "God could prevent the misery of sinners. If it is his will, that they should be happy, why does he not make them so? Why does he not conquer their obstinacy? Is his spirit straitened?"

But do you wish to be treated as *inanimate* creatures; and not as rational beings? Can you say, that in this respect the spirit of the Lord is straitened? Can you say, God withholds from men that kind and degree of moral influence which it is proper for him to afford them? Bring the inquiry home to yourselves. Has he not given you all things

which pertain to life and godliness? Have not competent means of instruction, and persuasive motives to repentance been vouchsafed to you? Have you not often felt a conviction of the reasonableness and importance of religion? When you have done evil, have you not opposed the dictates of your own conscience, and the strivings of God's spirit? What more then would you have? God has given you necessary information, placed before you pertinent motives, and awakened your conscience to feel their importance. If after all, you still go on in a guilty course and pursue it to your death, whose doing is this?—Is it God's doing, or your own? The spirit of the Lord toward you has not been straitened; but you have rebelled and vexed it.

We pretend not to say, how much God can do for you. We presume not to determine, that he never by his spirit overcomes hearts as obstinate as yours. But has he not done as much for you as from his goodness you could expect, and much more than from his justice you could demand? From *this* you could demand nothing. Are you not then inexcusable? And if God should glorify his righteousness in your condemnation, what ground is there of complaint? And if he should make your deserved condemnation the means of promoting the happiness of other intelligences, will not his goodness to them be displayed in his righteous severity to you?

From the observations, which we have made on the nature and design of God's moral government, we may rationally conclude, that he is not the origin or efficient cause of moral evil; but that "wickedness proceeds from the wicked." However difficult it may be to account for the first introduction of sin into God's creation, piety forbids us to say, that *he* was the author of it. Those calamities which

fall on the wicked, the prophet says, "are not God's doings," because they are the natural fruits, or, at least, the just punishment of their own sins. Now if their sins themselves were the effects of God's direct influence on their minds, there would be no ground for this distinction. All would be God's doings.

God is sometimes said to harden and deceive men, and to send them strong delusions. But however we understand these expressions, they have no reference to the introduction of sin and error into the world; for the persons, whom God is said to deceive and harden, are described as *previously* corrupt and vicious. He is never said to have deceived or hardened those, who before were pure and innocent. God is often said to do that which he *permits* to be done—to do that which is the consequence of his withdrawing from men his forfeited restraints—to do that which he foretells *will* be done—to do that which, through the perverseness of men, is the consequence of the means which he used for quite other purposes. None of those expressions therefore need to be understood as importing the infusion of error and wickedness into men's hearts by God's direct efficiency. Such an idea we dare not admit. And we think there is no passage of scripture that necessarily leads to it, or really favors it.

But does not the apostle say, "God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he *hardeneth*?" And is not this a general expression, extending to all God's creatures, the *innocent* as well as the corrupt? No; it is not. For the apostle refers only to the human race; and he had before proved, that all, both Jews and Gentiles, were under sin. He is here speaking only of those, who were already sinners, and is shewing God's sover-

eignty in the exercises of mercy toward those who were all worthy of condemnation. And we doubt, whether the expression, "whom he will he *hardeneth*," is by all rightly understood. It stands opposed to *shewing mercy*; and therefore can only intend *withholding*, or *not shewing* mercy. This the antithesis, as well as the apostle's argument, requires. In the book of Job, it is said of the Ostrich, "She is *hardened* against her young ones, as if they were not hers." The Hebrew word imports, "She treats them without tenderness"—or she neglects them. The Greek translators have used the same word, which the apostle uses in the text under consideration; and if it were there rendered in the same manner as it is here, it would be, "She *hardeneth* her *young ones*." But evidently the meaning is, "She *hardeneth herself* against them," or she leaves them without care. And thus, undoubtedly, we should interpret the apostle's words before recited. "God shews mercy to whom he will, and whom he will he leaves without shewing mercy." The expression therefore only imports God's sovereignty in the exercises of his mercy toward men already sinners—not his efficiency in originally making men to be sinners.

Some have imagined, "that sin is a necessary part of God's universal plan—That his wisdom has devised a scheme for the display of his own glory and the promotion of the general happiness—that this scheme could not be carried into full effect without a certain mixture of moral evil—that in order to produce the greatest possible sum of virtue and happiness, there must be a proportion of vice and misery—that, for the accomplishment of this great end, the production of the highest good, God saw it necessary that there should be just so much sin as there is, and will take care that sin neither

exceeds, nor falls short of the proper quantity—that the whole moral character of God is comprised in *benevolence*, which aims at the greatest happiness—and so far as sin and misery in some, are necessary to create virtue and happiness in others, it is consistent with the divine character to produce them. Hence God's efficiency in the production of sin is an exercise of perfect holiness, because it is an exercise of infinite benevolence.

However plausible such reasoning may appear, it is certainly attended with great difficulty, and leads, or seems to lead to consequences which we dare not admit. It represents the Deity as having formed a plan which he could not accomplish without calling in vice to his aid; and as being so embarrassed in his design, that to effect it, he is constrained to adopt measures, which, without this necessity, would be contrary to his moral character. But surely the spirit of the Lord is not so straitened, that the vices and miseries of mankind should be his doings, or should be necessary to produce the quantum of happiness which he intended.

The theory above stated, if we are not deceived, divests the Deity of the *righteousness* of his character, as it respects *individuals*. If God regards his intelligent creatures only in the general mass, then particular beings can have no dependence on, or security from his fidelity and justice; because they cannot know, but that their misery may be necessary to effect the great sum of happiness intended; and then it will be just to make them miserable. Yea, our whole race must be as void of security, as the individual. For we probably constitute but a small part of the intelligent creation; and how shall we know, but that we are all absolutely doomed to vice and wretchedness, from Adam down to the last generation, for the sake of increasing the general

virtue and felicity of God's rational subjects? To talk of God's promises is vain; for what are promises from a being so straitened as this scheme supposes? Necessity excuses every thing. The benevolence of the end justifies all means. God may, if the general good requires, as well impose on our understandings, as harden our hearts—as well draw us into error, as into vice. All the promises, which we find in the scriptures; yea, the scriptures themselves may be wholly delusive, and only contrived to deceive mankind, or a part of mankind, in order to increase the great sum of knowledge, virtue and happiness in the universe. There is no more difficulty in supposing, that delusion, than that wickedness is produced by God's efficiency; and we may as well conceive that error is produced by the display of miracles before men's eyes, as that wickedness is created by a divine energy on their hearts. What evidence have we then of the truth of revealed, or even of natural religion?

This philosophy, if we mistake not, confounds the difference between moral good and evil. The essence of virtue, on the theory under consideration, consists in benevolence, or good will to beings in general. Whatever tends to happiness is, for that reason, virtuous; and whatever tends to misery is vicious. If then what we vulgarly call vice, or sin, not only tends, but, in the divine establishment, is really necessary to the greatest happiness of the moral creation, it ceases to be sin. It is virtuous and good—it is friendly and beneficent. It cannot *deserve* punishment. If they who practise it are made to suffer misery, it is not because they *deserve* misery for any evil or harm they may have done; but because their particular misery will be a general benefit.

It is vain to say, "They deserve misery, because they had a wrong *intention*;" for this very intention is a part of the great benevolent plan, and is as necessary as the action; for without it the action could not exist. If the latter is necessary, the former is so; and there is no more evil in the one than in the other. And perhaps too this intention, which we call evil, may be owing to ignorance of the great scheme. Let mankind once learn, that all sin, so called, tends ultimately to general happiness, and perhaps there will be room for a benevolent intention to have full play. The man who cheats his neighbors and revenges his enemies, will rejoice in the thought that his own avarice and malice, and the miseries which by them he brings on his fellow creatures, will all contribute to the general increase of happiness. If such consequences really follow from the philosophy which we have mentioned, we must conclude it to be not only a vain, but an impious philosophy.

There is no doubt, but the wisdom of God often overrules the sins of men for the advancement of his own glory and the general good. "He makes the wrath of man to praise him." Shall we then conclude that these sins are necessary to the accomplishment of God's great scheme? Shall we say, that God could, in no other way, and by no other means, bring equal glory to his name, or equal happiness to his creatures? This would be taking too much upon us—This would be arrogant and presumptuous—This would imply that the spirit of the Lord is straitened. Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God *cannot* be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." His lust is *his own*: It is not from God. If it was, surely there would be no

ground for the distinction between being tempted of God, and being tempted and drawn away of lust. No man is tempted to evil by God, in the manner in which men are tempted of their own lust. "Do not err my beloved brethren, Every *good gift* and every *perfect gift* cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, or shadow of turning." But sin proceeds not from this pure fountain. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

To account for the introduction of sin into God's moral creation, I know, is extremely difficult. I suppose, it is to men impossible. But before we can prove, that God must necessarily be the introducer, efficient and author of it, we must demonstrate that no intelligent being can originate his own volitions, but the universe is a system of fatalism. This, we hope, cannot be proved. If the volitions of the Deity are selforiginated, and not the effect of extraneous influence, then it is not inconsistent with the nature of an intelligent being to originate his own volitions. There is in this nothing which involves a contradiction. God's infinite power can do every thing, which is possible in nature, or which implies no contradiction. He may, then, so far as we know, create intelligent beings with a capacity of originating in themselves some ideas, thoughts and volitions. If he can make such beings, who knows but that he has made such? And if there are some such intelligences, how do we know but that *we* are such? And if we are such, it is possible we might sin without any special and positive influence from the Deity.

It will perhaps be objected, that this hypothesis makes the creature independent. But this objection, we think, is founded in imagination; not in truth. The creature still owes his existence and all

his powers to the Creator. He still depends on the Creator for the support of his being, and the preservation of his faculties. His volitions and actions are still subject to the control of a superior power, which can turn them as the rivers of water are turned, and overrule them to an issue which baffles human foresight. The Psalmist says, "The wrath of man shall praise God, and the *remainder* of that wrath he will restrain." This wrath of man is not infused or excited in him by God's energy in order to his own praise; for here is more wrath in man, than *can be* made to praise God. After all the praise that can be educed from it, there is a remainder which must be restrained. Is this *remainder* the operation of God? No—nor the principal. The wrath of man is properly his own. As far as it *can* be made subservient to God's glory, to that end it will be overruled. The residue will be laid under such restraint, as divine wisdom shall see to be necessary.

The origin of moral evil in the universe, had it been important for us to know it, would doubtless have been taught in revelation. Since we find no account of it there, we may conclude it does not essentially concern us. With respect to our own race, it may indeed be important to know, what we are, and how we became such. And here the scripture is not silent. We are instructed, that by the first man sin entered into the world, and that by his disobedience all are become sinners. If we inquire, how the first human offender was drawn aside; we learn that it was by the artifice and influence of a wicked, apostate spirit called the serpent. If we still inquire, whether this was the first sinner, and how *he* was corrupted—with whom, and in what manner sin first began; the scripture on these ques-

tions gives us no answer, and we can find none elsewhere.

On the question concerning the introduction of evil we need go no farther, and we *can* go no farther, than our Savior has gone. He says, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man, who sowed good seed in his field; and while men slept an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him; Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said to them, an enemy hath done this." In the explanation of this parable Jesus says, "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the *devil*." In tracing the introduction of evil, our Lord goes no farther; and here our proud inquiries must be stayed. Had the householder judged it necessary, that his servants should know, where this enemy got his seed, or how he became so malicious, he would, on so fair an occasion, have instructed them farther on the subject. He said no more upon it, because no more needed to be said. With this his servants were fully satisfied. It would be well, that we should terminate our inquiries, where these modest servants terminated theirs. They ask, as was natural, "Whence came the tares?" They never once suspected, that their master sowed them, as some servants have since suspected. They hear, that an enemy has done the mischief. They pursue the matter no farther; but turn their inquiry to another subject, which immediately respected their own duty. Let us imitate their humility and obedience.

We see sin in the world, and we feel ourselves involved in the common guilt. Whatever difficulties we may find in accounting for its origin, let us ascribe righteousness to our Maker. Sin is not his doing. His nature is contrary to it—his precepts forbid it—his government opposes it—the methods of his providence are adapted to stop its progress—his Son came to redeem us from it—his Spirit strives against it. Let it be our concern to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the Spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. With this view let us attend to his word, which is given, not to amuse us with empty speculations, but to direct us in the government of our lives, and guide us in the way to happiness.

III. This thought naturally introduces our third observation, That “God’s words do good to him that walketh uprightly.”

God’s word is designed to do us good, and is well adapted to this end. “It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.” It is not intended to make us philosophers, but to make us saints—not to furnish us for disputation, but to furnish us unto all good works. It teaches us all that we need to know in relation to our present duty and our future glory. When we hear and understand it, receive and obey it, then it does us good.

It does good to sinners, when it awakens them from their carelessness, convinces them of their sins, excites in them resolutions of amendment, and produces a real and permanent repentance.

It does good to saints, when it discovers to them their remaining corruptions, purges them more and more from their sins, brings them to a more intimate acquaintance with God and themselves, gives them a more humbling sense of their infirmities and

imperfections, warms their pious zeal, strengthens their holy purposes, makes them more watchful against temptations and more circumspect in their walk, comforts them in their worldly troubles, and enlivens their heavenly hopes.

They, to whom the word does good, are described as "walking uprightly." The Apostle James says, "Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Saint Peter gives the same advice. "Lay aside all guile and hypocrisies and envies and evil speakings; and as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Our Savior has taught us, that the word which brings forth fruit to perfection, "is received in a good and honest heart." The honest and upright will hear the word as they have opportunity; and when they hear it, they will attend to it with humility and meekness. They will hear it, not to amuse the mind and pass the time, much less to cavil against it, or apply it to others; but to know themselves, learn their duty and improve in holiness.

When they hear what is peculiarly adapted to their own case, they will not be disgusted at its pertinence, nor repel the application which conscience makes; but will humbly take it home to themselves with an honest intention to become wiser and better. Among the many properties of God's word, which David admired, this is one, "Hereby is thy servant warned—who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." The upright compare themselves with the word, that they may be convinced of, and reclaimed from their errors, and confirmed in their holy faith and virtuous purposes. They read and hear it with a teachable spirit and with a desire of religious improvement. And they will be

careful to practice what they learn. "Be ye doers of the word," says Saint James, "and not hearers only.—He who is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, shall be blessed in his deed."

While the upright converse with the word, they will pray, that it may do them good. They will examine themselves, that they may know their wants, may discern and apply what is pertinent to their case, and may receive edification and comfort. To such the word does good.

If you complain, that the word preached is not profitable, let me beg you to inquire, whether it be mixed with faith, meekness and humility—whether you hear uprightly, for conviction, rather than amusement—for practice, rather than speculation. If the word does you no good, examine whether there is not in yourselves some cause of its unprofitableness. If you neglect to hear it, or if you hear it with prejudice, or with careless and unfeeling hearts, or without selfapplication, without prayer, without even an intention to walk agreeably to it, there is cause sufficient, why it does you no good.

You are, indeed, dependent on the grace of God for the efficacy and success of his word. But know, "The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened." Seek God's blessing humbly, and, no doubt, he will grant it freely.

Do you think the word is not dispensed in a manner the best adapted to your edification? Remember still, "the Spirit is not straitened." It is not confined to a particular mode of preaching. "Who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, as the Lord gave to every man?" The grace of God can render the word profitable, whether it be preached by the one or the other. Glory not in men. Depend not on the works which they may do for you. Do your own duty, and improve

the advantage which may be derived from their labors ; and then all things are yours. Walk uprightly, and the word, though feebly dispensed, will be mighty through God. “ As the rain cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither again, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater ; so shall God’s word be that goeth forth out of his mouth. It will not return to him void, but will accomplish that which he pleaseth, and will prosper in the thing whereto he sendeth it.”

Now the Lord make his word and his grace abound toward us, that we may always, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound in every good work, and in all Christian hope, comfort and joy.



SERMON VIII.

The Prophecy concerning the two Witnesses explained.

REVELATION xi. 3—13.

And I will give power unto my two witnesses and they shall prophecy a thousand two hundred and threescore days clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies: And if any man will hurt them he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and power over waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit, shall make war against them, and shall overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people, and kindreds, and tongues and nations, shall see their dead bodies, three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell on the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth. And after three days and an half, the spirit of life from God entered into them; and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon those which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven, saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: And the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

THE words now read contain an important period in the grand prophetic scheme of this book, which extends from the time of St. John to the final judgment of the world.

This scheme is naturally divided into seven periods; those of the *seals*; the *trumpets*; the *vials*; the *thousand years*; in which Satan shall be bound; the *short space*, in which he shall be let loose again; the *general resurrection and judgment*; and the *happy state* of the righteous, and the *miserable state* of the wicked, which follow the judgment.

The period of the seven *seals* shows the state of the Christian church under the heathen Roman empire, and is supposed to end under the reign of *Constantine*, when the church was relieved from persecution, and brought under the protection of government. The seventh seal has no appropriate events, but only introduces the period of the seven trumpets. This period is supposed to extend from the time of Constantine, to the time, when the Christian church received a new form by the rise and establishment of the papal superstition. This, as an *ecclesiastical* establishment, began about the year 600; but it became a *political* establishment about 150 years afterward. As the seventh seal introduced the trumpets, so the seventh trumpet introduces the vials.

But before John proceeds to describe the contents of the vials, he gives four distinct representations of the state of the church, from the rise to the downfall of the papal or idolatrous power, which, he says will continue 42 months, or a time, times and half a time, i. e. three and a half years, or 1260 days. These all designate the same space of time; for three and a half years, are 42 months, or 1260 days, according as the length of a year was then reckoned. This space comprehends the whole period of the seven vials.

One of these general representations of the state of the church is the mensuration of the temple of God, and the abandonment of the outer court and the holy city, to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles for 42 months. Another is the prophecy of God's

two witnesses for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. The third is the flight of a woman into the wilderness, where she is nourished, and protected from the dragon 1260 days. The other is the rise of a terrible beast out of the sea, which should make war with the saints, and commit great destruction in the earth for the space of 42 months.

These are distinct representations of the same period, which ends in the destruction of the enemies of the church, and in her exaltation and glory.

After John has given these general views of the state of the church, during this period, he goes back, and resumes his subject. He now relates the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which brings on the stage seven angels with their vials, to be poured out in their order. These vials are particular representations of the events, which were to take place, during the period, which he had more generally described. The last vial brings destruction on the great mystical Babylon, and opens the way for the introduction of the happy state of the church.

This is a general view of the scheme of prophecy in this book. An attention to this scheme will help us to understand the book, when we read it.

The words, which I have chosen for the subject of our meditations are one of those general representations of the state of the Christian church from the rise to the destruction of the papal power, containing the space of 1260 prophetic days, or so many literal years.

I design to explain this important description, and then to make some practical observations upon it.

In the verses next preceding those, which I have read, John says, "There was given me a reed like unto a rod. And the angel stood, saying, Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple, leave out and measure it not; for it

is given to the Gentiles : And the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”

The Christian church is here described by an allusion to the ancient temple, which, besides the sanctuary where the Jews assembled for divine worship, had a large exterior court, into which Gentile proselytes were allowed to enter. John’s measuring the inner court, and leaving the outer court unmeasured for the Gentiles, who shall profane this, and tread under foot the holy city, signify to us, that God will preserve for himself a church, in which the purity of faith and worship will be maintained ; but that, in some periods, it will consist of a small number only ; for the greater part of nominal Christians will apostatize from the truth, and fall into such abominable corruptions, that they may justly be ranked among the heathens.

Yet, in this time of prevailing error and wickedness, God promises, “I will give power to my two witnesses, who shall prophecy a thousand, two hundred, and threescore days, clothed in sackloth.”

The two witnesses are they who shall faithfully maintain the truth of religion, and the purity of worship in those degenerate times, and shall boldly testify against the errors and vices, which threaten the extinction of religion.

These witnesses are called *prophets*, which is a name often given to the ministers of religion ; and they are said to *prophecy*, which is a term used in the New Testament, for preaching the gospel.—Ministers are therefore principally intended. And as they are to prophecy 1260 prophetic days, or so many literal years, we must understand by them, not two particular men or churches, but a succession of faithful ministers through that long and trying period.

They are called *two* witnesses to signify, that, though their number, compared with a degenerate world, will be small, yet, it will be sufficient to up-

hold the true religion, and save it from being lost in the general corruption. By the law of Moses, and by the law of Christ, the testimony of two men is sufficient to verify a matter in question. It is here therefore signified, that in the darkest ages, there shall be competent evidence of the truth of the gospel.

“They shall prophecy in *sackcloth*,” which is a token of sorrow and mourning. The great prevalence of corruption, and the malicious opposition to the truth, in this period, especially in some parts of it, will be matter of deep lamentation to the real friends of pure religion.

Christ has promised, that he will have a church, in the world, and ministers in his church, as long as the world shall endure. Here is a new promise, which he made to the church after his ascension, that even in the most discouraging seasons, there shall be a competent number of witnesses to proclaim and defend the truth, and to testify against error and vice.

This promise has been made good. Since the days of the apostles, no time can be found, in which there was not a true church, and faithful ministers.

In those ages, in which the papal superstition was most prevalent, there were those who openly condemned it, and bare witness to the truth.

The character of these witnesses is next described. “These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.” Here is an allusion to the description, which, in the book of *Zachariah*, is given of *Joshua* and *Zerubbabel*, who were employed in finishing the temple, and in establishing the church in those difficult times which followed the captivity. The prophet saw a candlestick of gold with seven branches, and seven lampson them, and two olive trees by it with pipes from them to the lamps. He inquired of the angel, what were the two olive trees by the candlestick, and what were the

branches, which through the golden pipes emptied the oil out of themselves. The angel answered, "These are the two anointed ones," Joshua and Zerubbabel, "who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

A candlestick in the book of the revelation, denotes the church; and a lamp is an emblem of the light of heavenly truth. The oil which supplies the lamp signifies the communication of divine grace.— This description of the witnesses, therefore, imports that, in the most dangerous seasons, there shall be a true church to which God will grant his word and ordinances; and there shall be able and faithful instructors, who, as lamps on a candlestick, burning continually by supplies of oil from a living tree, shall diffuse the light of divine truth far around.

The preaching of these witnesses shall be attended with great power, and their prayers distinguished by remarkable efficacy. "If any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies. They have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy, and to turn waters into blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."

When the adherents of Korah rose against Moses and Aaron, and assumed the work of the priests in offering incense, fire came forth from the Lord, and consumed them. So when Ahaziah sent companies to sieze the prophet Elijah, fire came down from heaven and destroyed them. In allusion to these judgments on the ancient enemies of God's prophets, it is here said, "If any man hurt these witnesses, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies." This, however, is to be understood, not of literal, but symbolical fire. It is fire which proceedeth out of their *mouths*. It is the warning of temporal judgments and eternal wrath, which they denounce against the enemies and cor-

rupters of religion, and which, however derided at present, will eventually be executed upon them.—The words of the prophets are, in scripture, compared to fire. God says to Jeremiah concerning those, who despised his warnings, “They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not he, neither shall evil come upon us; wherefore I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.” In this sense, “they have power to smite the earth with plagues.” The prophets are often said to do that, which, they foretell, will be done. God says by Hosea, “I have hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.” He says to Jeremiah, “I have put my words in thy mouth; I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to build, and to plant;” i. e. to foretell these events in my name. Ezekiel, describing a particular vision, says, “It was like that, which I saw, when I came to destroy the city;” i. e. to announce its destruction. Such modes of diction are not uncommon in scripture. When God brings on the enemies of religion those plagues, which the prophets and witnesses declare will be executed on such characters, then, in the style of prophecy, the witnesses are said to “smite the earth with plagues.”

To shew the efficacy of their prayers, John alludes to Moses, Elijah, and other ancient prophets, who were eminent for fervor and success in prayer. It is said of Elijah, “He prayed, and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months; and he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain.” This example James adduces as a proof, that, “the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much.” Moses by stretching forth a rod, turned the waters of Egypt into blood, and inflicted on the people other grievous plagues; and again by his

prayers he removed the plagues. John to express the great prevalence of the prayers of the faithful witnesses, says, "They have power to shut heaven, and to turn water into blood." He alludes to those ancient examples.

We are not to suppose, however, that saints, in their intercourse with God, *directly* imprecate judgments on the wicked: They wish judgments might be prevented, if the wickedness of the world did not require them. But they intreat of God the protection of his church against its enemies; and this protection he, in answer to their prayers, is pleased to grant her, by sending on her enemies the judgments which his wisdom sees necessary. The godly may be said to cause famines, pestilences, and other plagues, as, in answer to their prayers for the church's preservation, God inflicts on her enemies those plagues, which restrain their power and malice. "By terrible things in righteousness, God answers the prayers of Zion in her distress."

John next foretels the troubles, which shall come on these witnesses in the faithful discharge of their office. "And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast which ascendeth out of the bottomless pit, shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them."

This beast is particularly described in the 13th chapter. And the description is so plain, that it cannot be misunderstood. It can be applied to no other power, but the antichristian Roman government, which, for a long time, exercised the most horrible cruelties against the faithful witnesses of Christ.

"When they shall have finished their testimony;" some render the words thus; "When they shall perform their testimony, the beast shall make war against them." They, who thus render the passage, understand the meaning to be, that the witnesses, during the course of their ministry, shall

meet with great opposition from this tyrannical power, and shall, at times, be reduced so low, that it will seem as if their testimony were at an end. And there are several events in history, to which, they think, the prophecy, thus understood, may justly be applied. But though there is a great similarity between the prophetic description, and some historical events, yet none of them were so general, as the prophecy seems to require. Others therefore, suppose, that it designates a time, still future, when the enemies of the gospel, with unprecedented malignity, will combine their powers to exterminate it from the earth, and will so far prevail, as to flatter themselves that they have accomplished their design.— This event they suppose, will take place, when the witnesses are about to finish their testimony, or towards the end of the 1260 years, during which they are to prophecy. And this interpretation seems the more probable of the two.

Whether the war against, and victory over the witnesses are to be understood literally of a real persecution, or figuratively of such a triumph of infidelity and licentiousness over true religion, that the latter will scarcely make its appearance, are questions, which time must answer. Bishop Newton seems to suppose the latter. He says, “These witnesses, the friends of pure religion, shall be subdued and suppressed, shall be degraded from all power and authority, shall be deprived of all offices and functions, shall be politically dead, if not naturally so.” And consequently, all places of power and influence will be filled with men of opposite characters.

To express the indignity with which the professors, especially the ministers of religion shall be treated, John says, “Their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified; and they of the people and kindreds, and tongues,

and nations, shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer them to be put in graves."

"The great city," is, in the 17th Chapter, called Babylon the Great, "the Great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth;" and it must intend the Roman empire, or antichristian jurisdiction. "The streets" of the city are its public and conspicuous places. Here Christ is said to have been crucified; for he was crucified by the Roman authority, and his body, the church, was persecuted in the Roman territory. This city is spiritually called Sodom for its corruption, and Egypt for its tyranny. It is said, the dead bodies of the witnesses shall be denied the common rites of decent sepulture: And it is well known that the papal church disallows Christian burial to those, whom she calls heretics. If the slaying of the witnesses is to be understood literally, so must also be understood the denial of interment to their bodies. If the former signifies a general degradation, the latter may signify any marks of contempt. On either interpretation the prophecy teaches us, that, in the time here designated, Christian teachers and professors will have little influence among mankind, will be held in general disrespect, and will be treated with distinguished indignity.

The duration of this depressed state of the church will, according to the prophecy, be "three days and an half." We must here understand the time to be at least so many prophetic days, or literal years; or perhaps the phrase may be intended to express a short, but indefinite time.

The next words describe the triumph of the enemies of religion on their victory over the witnesses. "And they that dwell on the earth shall rejoice over them, and send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them who dwelt on the earth."

The prophets "torment the inhabitants of the earth," in the same sense as they "smite the earth

with all plagues;" i. e. by proclaiming the solemn truths of religion, and by warning the guilty of those judgments in this world, and that punishment in the next, which God has denounced in his word.

Wicked men hate the truth, because it reproveth and condemns them. All their opposition to the gospel originates in the corruption of their hearts. They point their malice against the witnesses, because these are the heralds and defenders of the gospel; these display its evidences, proclaim its doctrines, inculcate its precepts, and denounce its threatenings; these counteract the designs, and obstruct the success of evil men and seducers. This is the only way, in which they can torment those who dwell on the earth. They neither possess worldly power, nor are actuated by worldly malice. All that they do to torment men, is done in their character as witnesses, prophets, or preachers of the truth. The ancient prophets, who reproveth the corruptions of their times, were called "troublers of Israel," or disturbers of the public peace, because they tormented those who were too haughty to bear correction, and too obstinate to think of reformation. When Lot expostulated with the men of Sodom for their abominations, they thrust him back, saying, "this man will needs be a judge." When Ahab met Elijah, he said to him, "art thou he that troubleth Israel?" When Jeremiah warned the people of the judgments of God, the princes complained to the King, "Let this man be put to death; for he weakeneth the hands of the people in speaking such words to them; he seeketh not their welfare but their hurt." For the same cause, the idolatrous priest of Bethel complained to the King of Israel concerning Amos; "He hath conspired against thee—the land is not able to bear all his words." It was so in the Apostles' days. If they attempted a reformation in principles and manners, they were said to "turn the world

upside down." If they proclaimed Jesus who was crucified, to be the Lord of life, the rulers complained, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

When the witnesses shall be slain, John says, "The inhabitants of the earth shall rejoice over them, and send gifts one to another." There will be great public rejoicings, at the supposed overthrow of the gospel, as if some happy and glorious change had been effected. Thus it has been in times past. When the protestants were defeated in a general battle, and multitudes of them slain, and the rest dispersed by the army of Charles V, there were general rejoicings among the papists. After the dreadful massacre of the protestants in France, called the massacre of St. Bartholomews, in which many thousands were destroyed, there were public processions and formal thanksgivings, not only in France, but in other popish countries. So it is on the victory over the witnesses here foretold. Every advantage, which the enemies of religion gain over its friends by excluding the latter from, and raising themselves to places of power, is announced by public festivities.

And when this advantage appears complete, the rejoicings become general. If the event here foretold, is still future, as many interpreters suppose, a most gloomy scene awaits the Christian church.

But for our comfort, we are assured, the time will be short. "After three days and an half, the spirit of life entered into them," into the witnesses who had been slain, "and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.— And they heard a voice from heaven, saying to them, Come up hither; and they ascended up into heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them."

The church, by the remarkable power of God, shall be raised from her depressed condition, and the witnesses, animated with new strength and courage, shall proclaim the doctrines of Christ with greater

boldness and success, than before, to the joy of their friends, and the terror of their enemies, who will be as much surprized, as if they had seen them raised from the dead. They will now appear to be under God's special protection, and as secure from the malice of persecution, as if they were taken up into heaven. To be exalted to heaven, in the figurative language of prophecy, is to be raised to distinguished privileges. The phrase here intends, that the Christian church shall enjoy great freedom security and happiness.

This restoration of the church will be accompanied with great commotions in the political world; especially in that part of it, which has been subject to the papal jurisdiction. There will be signal calamities inflicted on the enemies of Christ, vast multitudes will be slain, and the destruction will fall with remarkable severity on persons of eminence and distinction. And so obvious will be the hand of God, that it will be acknowledged in a general repentance by those who survive the catastrophe.— Thus John describes the scene: “The same hour there was a great earthquake and a tenth part of the city fell, and there were slain of men seven thousands, and the remnant were affrighted and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

John, having given a general description of the state of the church, from the sounding of the sixth trumpet, to the time when the happy state of the church will begin, resumes the subject where, he had left it. He says, “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet.” This trumpet introduces the angels with their seven vials, which were to be poured out within the time, thus generally described under the figure of the witnesses. Upon this he says, “There were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

We give thee thanks, that thou hast taken to thyself thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, and shouldst destroy them, who corrupt the earth.”— This is a description of the happy state of the church, which shall follow on the resurrection and exaltation of the witnesses of the gospel of Christ.

In the contemplation of the gloomy scenes, through which the church of Christ has passed already, and still may pass our minds are refreshed by the anticipation of their glorious result. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of Christ, and he will reign forever and ever. It is happy for us, that the great events, which concern the church, have been described in prophecy, though in a figurative, yet in so intelligible a manner that the certain fulfilment of the predictions may be seen. By this means there is, to all attentive and discerning men, a standing evidence of the divinity of the gospel.

I have now, according to the best light, which I could collect, opened to you this important prophecy concerning the witnesses—a prophecy, which contains a period of 1260 years, and which is now drawing toward its final accomplishment. “ The vision is for an appointed time ; but at the end it will speak and not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come.”

The practical instructions which this prophecy affords us, will be the subject of another discourse.



SERMON IX.



The Prophecy concerning the two Witnesses improved.



REVELATION xi. 3—13.

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophecy a thousand two hundred and threescore days clothed in sackcloth, &c.

I HAVE endeavored, in a preceding discourse, to open to you the scheme of prophecy contained in the words, which have been read, and to shew its purport and intention. I shall now make some remarks and observations upon it.

1. The prophecy under consideration gives us an undeniable evidence of the *divinity* and *truth* of the gospel.

A little after the gospel was introduced by its Author, and preached by his Apostles, this book was written. And though it is, in some respects, a dark book, as prophecy in the nature of it will be dark, until it is enlightened by its correspondent events; yet so much we easily learn from it, that the church of Christ should meet with great opposition and violent persecution from the powers of the world, and still should be maintained and preserved. Both

these predictions we see verified, and yet both of them to human reason were utterly improbable.

In the first place, who would have imagined, that the gospel should meet with such terrible opposition? What is there in it to provoke the malice and rage of mankind?—It never meddles with forms of government, or with affairs of state, farther than to inculcate justice and fidelity on rulers, and obedience and peaceableness on subjects, and to recommend those virtues which make society happy. It breathes benevolence in all its precepts. It urges its precepts by doctrines of the most serious importance. It confirms men's natural apprehensions of a future state. It removes their doubts concerning the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. It relieves the anxious fears of conscious guilt; points out a way, in which sinners may obtain a gracious pardon, and escape the merited punishment of all their sins. It marks the path, in which mortals may arrive to eternal glory. What harm then has it done? If there may be such stupidity in men as to treat this gospel with indifference, yet who could have foreseen, that there would be in them such malignity as to oppose it with violence? But this, in fact, has been the case. And it was early foretold, that this would be the case. The prophet, who foretold this, must have been instructed by him, who knew what was in man, better than man knew what was in himself.

Or, secondly, if it had been foreknown, what powerful opposition awaited the gospel, who would have thought, that it could live through it? Its first preachers were few in number; they were aided by no civil authority, and defended by no military power; they had nothing to recommend them, but the purity of their doctrines, the virtue of their lives, the energy of their reasoning, and the evidence of

their miracles. The civil arm was, every where, stretched out against them. They collected Christian assemblies, here and there, in all countries whither they went ; but these were surrounded with enemies, who sought their destruction : And yet the church, under all these disadvantages, grew and increased. In its best times, however, it has been only a small part of the world, and has possessed no exterior worldly power. It has often been violently persecuted, but never wholly destroyed. Had half the opposition, which the church has felt, been made to any earthly kingdom, its very remembrance would have been extinguished. Many ancient and powerful kingdoms have been destroyed. The Assyrian, Persian, and Grecian empires, which once were formidable, exist no more. The Roman empire retains little more than its name. The papal dominion, which once gave terror to kings, has sunk into impotence, exactly according to the predictions of scripture. When worldly empires have been overturned and demolished, what has supported the church of God ?—It can be nothing less than the power of that Being, who has promised, that, though he make a full end of all nations, he will not make a full end of her ; and though he leave her not wholly unpunished, he will save her from utter destruction.

If we were to examine prophecy minutely, and compare it with subsequent history, we should find, that all the great changes, which have befallen the church, and all the signal judgments, which have been executed on her enemies, were long before announced, as they have since taken place.

In the first age of the gospel, there was the evidence of miracles. This evidence *we* cannot have directly ; we take it only from authentic history ; for miracles have ceased. But we have the sure word of prophecy. This is a standing testimony to

the truth of the gospel. The remarkable coincidence of predictions and events, in a long course of years, can be accounted for only on the supposition, that the former were dictated by divine inspiration, and the latter directed by divine providence. From the past care of providence to preserve the Christian church, we have a confirmation of Christ's promise, that the gates of hell will never prevail against her, but will finally yield trophies to adorn her triumph.

2. The prophecy under consideration assures us of the *continuance* of the gospel *ministry*.

The great head of the church "will give power to his *witnesses*, and they shall *prophecy*."

When Christ purchased the church with his blood, he gave pastors and teachers for the work of the *ministry*, in order to the edifying of his body, until we all come in the unity of faith and knowledge unto perfect men in him ; and he has promised, that he will be with them always, even unto the end of the world.

The gospel *ministry*, which is a manifest institution of Christ, is essential to the support and preservation of the church : If that were to be discontinued, this would cease of course. It is the stated preaching of the gospel, which preserves the knowledge, and maintains the influence of it among men. Were it never preached in public, few would read it in private ; fewer would regard it in their hearts, and be governed by it in their lives ; youth would grow up in ignorance and vice ; they seldom would hear private instruction ; or feel it, if they heard it. There are those promises of the divine blessing to accompany a faithful attendance on this institution, which are never made to other means, while this is neglected. The communications of the divine spirit, of which we have an account in scripture, were made in consequence of an observance of public re-

ligious instructions. These two cautions stand together: "Quench not the Spirit: Despise not prophesying." To neglect the preaching of the word, is to quench the Spirit. If we put away the former, God withdraws the latter.

3. We are here taught, what is the *character* of Christ's approved ministers, and what are the *duties* which he requires of them.

They, as *witnesses*, are to bear testimony to the gospel by professing their own faith in it, by exhibiting the evidences of its divinity, by defending it against the cavils of unbelievers, by exemplifying the virtues of it in their conversation, and by sacrificing, in its cause, their worldly interest, and even their lives, if occasion should require.

They, as *prophets*, must preach the word with plainness of speech, adapting themselves to common capacities: They must speak with demonstration of the spirit and with power, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God: They must declare the whole counsel of God, however disgusting any part of it may be to vicious and corrupt minds: They must reprove prevailing iniquities, and confute licentious errors, whoever may practise the former, or patronize the latter. They must hold up to view the threatenings of scripture, and apply them to the proper characters, on whomsoever the censure may fall. These things belonged to the duty of the ancient prophets; and they equally belong to the office of Christian prophets.

Ministers are here called *candlesticks*, and, elsewhere, *lights*; because they are to enlighten mankind by their doctrine and example—to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life—so to display the light of truth, and the beauty of holiness, that others, perceiving the energy of the form-

er, and beholding the excellency of the latter, may glorify God.

They are to seek supplies of grace from the living fountain opened in the gospel. Hence they are compared to lamps burning with oil poured into them by pipes from the olive trees, which stand before God.

They are to be fervent in prayer, for themselves, and for the church of God, especially in times of declension and danger. The witnesses are described as having power to shut heaven in the days of their prophecy. This figurative expression signifies, that their fervent prayers were effectual and availed much.

4. This prophecy teaches us, that in times of prevailing infidelity and corruption, there is always a *pointed opposition* to the *ministers* of the gospel.

If men wish to exterminate the religion of Christ, they will first oppose the *means* of its support ; and of these one of the chief is a learned and godly ministry. Such an opposition appears in the period, which we have been considering.

In all professions there are some unworthy characters ; and some such there often are in the ministerial profession. And the sacredness of the office ought never to protect the vices of the man who holds it. To censure a scandalous minister, when he appears to be such, is just ; but to cast indiscriminate reproach on the *order* is vile ; it is nothing less than to explode an institution of God.

To prevent the intrusion of unworthy characters into office, or their continuance in office, Christ has prescribed a particular mode of introduction and trial. And while his prescription is observed, there is little danger, that unworthy men will be patronized, unless the church in general should apostatize from gospel purity. But if men assume the office at their

own will, and exercise it at their own pleasure ; and if people countenance the usurpation by following the intruders, there is no security against fraud and imposition. The only security is an adherence to the institution of Christ. And perhaps among the ministers regularly introduced into office, there has never in Newengland been an immoral man countenanced and patronized by his brethren. Such a man on regular complaint is brought to trial, and on competent evidence is removed from office. It is the sense of mankind in general, as well as of professed Christians, that a wicked man ought not to stand in the sacred office. And this sentiment, while it generally prevails, will greatly contribute to preserve the purity of the ministerial character.

A displeasure manifested against ignorant and immoral, or irregular and disorganizing pretenders to the ministry, is certainly wise and virtuous. But to comprehend the whole ministerial order in promiscuous censure, for the faults of a few, savors too much of prejudice, not only against the order, but against the gospel, which has instituted it. Our Savior says to his Apostles, “ He that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.”

Obloquy against the ministry has ever been one main artifice of infidelity to undermine religion.— The ancient idolaters in Israel “ smote God’s prophets with the tongue.” And our Savior warns his Apostles, that “ men would revile them, and speak all manner of evil against them falsely for his sake.” The first persecutions raised against the Christian church, were directed principally against the Apostles ; and John foretells that the case would be the same, during the period, in which the witnesses shall prophecy. And history has hitherto verified the prediction.

5. We are taught in this prophecy *from whence arises* the enmity of wicked men against the stated teachers of religion. St. John says, that, when the witnesses shall be slain, they who dwell on the earth “shall rejoice over them, because these two prophets *tormented* them.”

How did these prophets torment them? Not by persecution; for they possessed neither the power, nor the authority to persecute; but merely by proclaiming those solemn truths, which condemn the practice, expose the guilt, and announce the punishment of irreclaimable sinners.

Opposition to the gospel, in whatever form it is made, proceeds from corruption of heart. Our Savior says, “He that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd: But he that doth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” He says of the unbelieving Jews, “If I had not done among them the works, which no other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and *hated* both *me* and *my Father*.” It was the plainness of his preaching, the pungency of his reproofs, and the solemnity of his warnings, which excited their malice and enmity against him. And the same causes operated to bring on his Apostles the persecutions, which *they* suffered.

This *degree* of enmity is not common to *all* wicked men; but peculiar to those, who are fixed and determined in their wickedness. There are many unrenewed sinners, who, under a serious concern for their salvation, are solicitous to know, and attentive to hear the truth. They wish to have the state of their own souls laid open to the view of conscience: They love that plain kind of preaching which is pertinent to their case, because they are anxious to

escape the wrath to come. Patience under such preaching is not a decisive proof of a renewed heart ; for it may be, and often is the effect of those awakenings and convictions which usually precede a saving renovation. And wherever it appears, it is a hopeful disposition. But they, whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil, and who, in the pride and vanity of their thoughts, feel themselves above the humbled duties of religion ; *these* employ all their reasoning to pacify their uneasy and guilty minds ; they eagerly embrace the licentious opinions, which relax the morality, explode the warnings and subvert the authority of the gospel. They hate to hear the precepts which require purity of heart and life, and the doctrines which announce destruction to the wicked and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity. If the gospel is defended by arguments, which they cannot gainsay, and its truths are urged with an energy, which they cannot repel, they are disgusted and offended ; or, in the language of our Apostle, they are *tormented*. “ Their ear,” as the prophet says, “ is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken : The word of the Lord is to them a reproach, and they have no delight in it.” If men oppose religion, it is because they are condemned by it : If they embrace licentious opinions, it is because these tend to quiet their guilty fears : If they disseminate corrupt principles, it is that they may be fortified against self reproach, and screened from general censure. The zeal of wicked men to corrupt others, is not direct malice toward those, whom they corrupt : It is a desire to strengthen their own suspicious cause, quiet their restless minds, and repel their merited infamy. If we would then hold fast the faith, we must maintain a good conscience ; for, as the Apostle says, “ some, having put away a good conscience, concerning faith have made ship-

wreck.” “Let us take heed, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.”

6. Another observation, which here presents itself to us is, that the Christian church is *meek, humble and peaceable*. So she is represented in this prophecy. She suffers persecution from her enemies; but does not persecute them in return. Her deliverances are effected by the hand of God; not by her own hand. The main instruments of her defence are the excellency of her religion, the purity of her works, and the fervor of her prayers. These weapons of her warfare have proved mighty through God to confound the devices and defeat the power of those, who sought her overthrow.

The enemies of the gospel have often accused it, as being the occasion of much contention, violence and bloodshed among the human race. But if it has been the occasion, it has been an *innocent* occasion of these evils; for it does no injury, offers no provocation, allows no cruelty, seeks no revenge; but its spirit is patience and forbearance, benevolence and love. If zealots, assuming the name of Christians, have made use of persecution to enforce a conformity to their own faith, they have departed from the spirit of the gospel, and imbibed the spirit of the world.

To discredit the gospel, some have alleged, that, until this made its appearance in the world, religious persecution was unknown; that among heathens the different sects tolerated one another, and lived in peace. But this pretence is contrary to the truth of fact.

Persecution for religion was known as early as the time of Cain. “He slew his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother’s right-

eous." Abraham fled from his idolatrous countrymen and kindred, that he might safely worship the one true God. The idolatrous kings of Israel filled the land with the blood of the prophets and of the worshippers of the Supreme Jehovah. Daniel and his pious friends were by pagan authority doomed to death for their firm adherence to the institutions of the divine law. Antiochus, king of Syria, exercised a most cruel persecution against the Jews, for their stedfastness in the religion of their fathers, and their rejection of the heathen superstitions. Socrates suffered death in Athens, on an accusation, that he asserted the unity of the godhead, and denied divine honors to the gods of his country. The Jews, though forbidden to mingle with heathen nations, yet were not authorized to spread among them promiscuous destruction on account of their idolatries. A *Jew*, indeed, who apostatized to idolatry, and endeavored to draw his brethren after him, was to suffer death—not simply because he embraced a false religion, but because he rebelled against the constituted government of his country; for that government was founded in the acknowledgment of one true God; and from him its laws were immediately given. Therefore an attempt to introduce the worship of pagan divinities, was an attempt to subvert the national government, as well as the national religion. And a crime of this nature has, in all nations, been made capital.

The persecutions, which Christians first suffered, were begun, not by violent measures on their part to propagate their religion, but by the jealousy of the pagan priests and magistrates, and the resentment of the Jewish rulers, who felt themselves condemned by this religion. These persecutions, though begun by Jews, were aided and sanctioned by the Romans. For 200 years the Christian church was, at turns,

persecuted by the heathen Roman empire. When the government of the empire fell into the hands of *Christian* rulers, persecution ceased; but returned again, when the main body of nominal Christians degenerated into pagan idolatry.

Persecution for religion has generally been the work of heathens, or of Jews under the government of heathens, or of nominal Christians who had adopted the superstitions of heathens. Nothing therefore can be more unjust, than to ascribe religious persecution peculiarly to the gospel.

At the time of the reformation there were bloody wars between the friends and the enemies of that great work. These were national wars, and they were begun by the catholic powers. On the part of the protestants they were wars of selfdefence.

Different sects of Christians have often been too intolerant toward each other, and in some instances have carried their intolerance to a degree of violence and cruelty. But this was not a dictate of the religion which they professed, but a dictate of worldly pride and false zeal, which their religion had not fully corrected.

It has sometimes been insinuated by the uninformed, or the uncandid, that sectaries in Newengland have suffered persecution, and even death, merely on account of their *opinions*. I will not say, that undue severity has never been used in matters of opinion. But I believe, that, in Newengland, there has been no instance of capital punishment for opinions only. Some sectaries, it is true, have suffered death from the hand of government; but they suffered as irreclaimable disturbers of the public peace, as violent opposers of the settled government; not as sectaries in religion.

Some have alleged, that wars have been more frequent since, than before the appearance of the gos-

pel, and are more frequent among Christian than among heathen nations. But this is far from being the truth. The state of the world was generally a state of warfare in the ages before the gospel, until near the time of Jesus Christ, when the Romans had so far subdued all surrounding nations, that none had power to make war. Since that time, wars, so far as we can learn, have been much more frequent among savage and barbarous, than among civilized and Christian nations. Christianity, in its proper influence, would prevent all war. It has not yet done this ; but still, with its partial influence, it has greatly meliorated the condition of mankind. It has mollified the rigor of government, and rendered it more rational and lenient. It has made war itself less ferocious and horrible, the condition of captives more safe and tolerable, and conquest less injurious to personal liberty and property. And whenever the gospel shall have its full spread and its genuine influence, it will diffuse peace and happiness through the world.

7. We are taught the great *efficacy* of the *prayers* of good men. John says of these witnesses, " They have power to shut heaven and to smite the earth with plagues, as often as they will." The words allude to the power, which the prayers of Moses and Elijah had with God. When they prayed for the protection of God's faithful servants, he answered them by terrible things, which in righteousness were inflicted on their enemies.

The scripture not only asserts in general, but in many particular instances shews, that fervent prayers avail much. When Abraham interceded for Sodom, God condescended to his last request ; that if ten righteous men were found there, it might be spared. When this city was to be destroyed, and Lot was warned to escape to a certain mountain, he

entreated, that he might find safety in a little city nearer than the mountain ; and the destroying angel said, “ See, I have accepted thee in this thing ; haste thee, escape thither, for I *cannot* do any thing until thou be come thither.” When Jacob wept and made supplication, it is said, “ He had *power* with God, and prevailed.” When Israel by repeated rebellions provoked the divine anger against them, it is said, “ God would have destroyed them, had not Moses stood in the breach to turn away his wrath.” While Moses was praying for them, God spake in this wonderful manner, “ *Let me alone*, that I may destroy them.” God expresses his wrath against Israel in terms of unusual severity, when he says, “ Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my mind could not be toward this people.” He signifies, that he seldom executes his great judgments on his people in opposition to the prayers of such men as these. There is a more remarkable expression in the book of Isaiah ; “ Thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands *command* ye me.”

What great encouragement we have to wait on God in prayer for ourselves, our country, and the church of Christ ! “ The prayer of the upright is delight.” If we believe, that God exercises a government in the world—that this government is intended for the good of his church—that he hears the prayers of his servants, and in answer to them sends blessings on his people—then let us “ be instant in prayer, and watch thereunto with all perseverance.”

The prophecy, which we have been considering, conveys assurance of the final triumph of the church of God over all opposition : But it gives us reason to think, that, as she has passed through many severe trials already, so there is still at least one severer trial, which awaits her, before her glorious triumph ;

and it instructs us, that her salvation, when it comes, will come by prayer. When we see a spirit of grace and of supplications remarkably poured out on the church of God, then we may conclude, that her redemption draweth nigh.

The state of the European world, has, for many years, afforded ground of apprehension, that a dangerous period is approaching. We certainly must be near the end of the 1260 years, during which the witnesses shall prophecy in sackcloth. Some calculations place the end at the distance of two centuries; others bring it within half a century. The present aspects of providence would incline us to adopt the shorter. The prevalence of infidelity and immorality in Europe renders it doubtful, whether a reformation will generally take place there without great destruction of the people. The rage of war threatens this event. The total derangement which war has made in the political system of Europe hardly allows us to hope for a permanent peace. The prophecy under consideration announces great commotions and revolutions, in which multitudes will awfully perish, and the remnant will be affrighted, and give glory to God. In the corruptions of Europe *we* have been corrupted; and in her convulsions *we* shall be convulsed. In our own depravity our danger is great: In our connexion and intercourse with Europe our situation is critical. Our safety depends on the influence of the gospel among us. If this should be lost, our security will depart. It concerns us then to admit this influence into our own hearts, and by it to direct all our conduct—to recommend religion to others by exhibiting its excellency in our own lives—to honor the institutions of God by our own faithful attendance, and to transmit to those who are coming after us that divine religion which we have received from our fathers.

And to all our endeavors for the promotion of true religion, let us add our daily prayers, that God would prepare us for the dangers and trials which await us—would pour out his Spirit for the revival of his work among us—would make known the power of his grace, and turn all hearts unto himself—would continue his gospel to us and spread it through the world—would restore harmony to our public councils, and unity among private citizens—would excite all with one consent to attend to the great interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and would afford us his gracious protection amidst the dangers of this world, and bring us to the enjoyment of eternal peace in the world above.

Will God pour upon us that stream, which makes glad his holy city—will he continue his tabernacles among us—will he dwell in the midst of us, that we may not be moved.



SERMON X.

The Renovation of all Things.

REVELATION xxi. 5.

And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

THE kings of the earth, when they perform the high acts of their regal office, appear sitting on thrones, in token of their superior dignity and power. In allusion to this token of sovereignty, God, when he makes special displays of his majesty and glory in his works of creation and providence, is said to sit on his throne. The throne of earthly kings is an elevated seat from whence they command a full view of their fellow mortals assembled before them. God's throne is in heaven; from thence *his* eyes behold the children of men. Thus he speaks by the prophet, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: Where is the house that ye build to me, and where is the place of my rest? For all those things my hand hath made, and all those things have been: But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word." A higher description of God's supremacy, and a more charming representation of

his mercy, than these words contain, cannot be conceived. He takes his seat in heaven and sets his feet on earth; here his eyes single out, as objects of his favor, not merely the rich and the great, but especially the poor and the humble.

In the beginning of this book, God is represented as sitting on his heavenly throne, creating worlds at his pleasure, directing the grand affairs of his government, and receiving the humble homage of his angels. Saint John says, "A throne was set in heaven, and one sat upon it; and the elders, who sat round the throne, fell down before him, who liveth for ever and ever, saying, 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."

In our text, the apostle still sees the Almighty seated on his throne; not, as before, creating new worlds; but renovating and perfecting the worlds which he had made. John hears him proclaim, "Behold I make all things new—These words are faithful and true—I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Accordingly the apostle says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

The mighty change here foretold will not be completed, until the close of the general judgment of the world, which is described in the preceding verses. But God is now, and from the beginning has been, preparing the way for this great renovation—this restitution or completion of all things. Jesus says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

The new heavens and the new earth will constitute a state of pure and sublime happiness. To the introduction of such a state, the works of God are gradually tending. The general system of his government is always the same. Hence it is said,

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“There is no new thing under the sun.” But as it is operating to higher improvements in knowledge, virtue and happiness among his creatures, there will be new discoveries and new events. In this respect every age produces something new: And the time is coming, when all things will be made new.

He who sits on the throne has existed from eternity, and of his dominion there is no end. Possessed of all perfections, he must be selfsufficient and completely blessed. The creation of worlds cannot increase, nor will the destruction of worlds diminish his real happiness. If it be asked then, What is his great end in creation? We can only answer in the language of the angels—“All things are created for his pleasure.”

In his infinite wisdom he has created rational beings; and in his disinterested goodness he is disposed to make them happy. All rational happiness must depend on a knowledge of the character, and a conformity to the will of God, and must summarily consist in the love and enjoyment of him.

God manifests himself before his intelligent creatures in the works of creation and providence. And that he may draw their attention, awaken their admiration, and confirm their faith and love, he often appears in works that are new.

The creation of our world was once a new thing.

There may have been innumerable worlds made and peopled, long before our globe was formed and man was placed upon it. Probably this was the case. There were intelligent beings who existed before men. “When God laid the foundation of the earth, and stretched his line upon it, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”

They had already contemplated earlier parts of the creation, and admired the wisdom, power and good-

ness of God displayed in them. But now they saw a new system adjusted, and a new order of intelligences begun. They probably looked forward to the distant increase of this new race, pleased with the benevolent design for which it was created.

God is good to his creatures: He has a desire to the works of his hands. But final happiness he will bestow on those only who are previously qualified to receive it. The necessary qualification for complete happiness is ordinarily obtained by a precedent state of trial. It is probable, that all orders of intelligences pass through a probationary period, before they are admitted to perfect and indefectible felicity. Revelation informs us, that men are on trial now, and that angels were so before them. And if there are other orders, it is reasonable to suppose, that they also have had a probation assigned them.

Our progenitors violated the law of their probation, and forfeited the promised immortality, as well for their posterity, as for themselves; and justly might the Creator have consigned the offenders to misery, and the race to oblivion.

Now the angels again beheld something new. They had themselves been on probation. They had seen a vast number of their order rising in rebellion against the throne of God. They had seen these perverse and turbulent spirits driven out from their first habitation, and bound in chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day. But they never had seen a world redeemed from guilt—they never had seen sinners pardoned and restored to favor—they never had seen a dispensation of mercy provided peculiarly for fallen and guilty creatures. Here was a work of grace, which filled them with wonders; and still they desire to look into it.

The first human pair had broken the law of God, and by this law they stood condemned. But mercy

interposed and a Savior was promised. This Savior, in some future time, was to appear, and redeem sinners by his own death. On the ground of the atonement which he should make, the offenders were respited, pardon was offered, repentance was accepted, and the promise of immortality renewed.

The dispensation of grace was, at first, but imperfectly discovered. Enough was revealed to be a foundation of hope; but not so much as would satisfy the desires of the conscious offenders. Who the Savior is that shall one day appear—at what time he will come—how he will effect the deliverance of sinners—what blessings he will procure for them, they can but imperfectly learn from so general a declaration as this, “The seed of the woman shall break the head of the serpent.”

But, from time to time, God wrought something new to inform their minds and confirm their hopes. The patriarchal revelations cast great light on this scheme of divine grace. The Jewish dispensation improved and brightened preceding revelations. The ministry of the prophets brought to the world new and glorious discoveries. In the fulness of the time appointed the Savior came.

Now God performed a new thing—such a thing as neither saints nor angels had seen before. “Without controversy great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” The glorious Son of God descended from heaven, assumed a human body, dwelt on earth, conversed with men, wrought wonders before their eyes, lived in most perfect innocence, displayed the highest virtue, endured the contradictions of sinners, suffered death as a criminal, miraculously rose from the dead, visibly ascended into heaven, and was made

head over all principalities and powers. There he intercedes for them who come to God in his name—there he sends down spiritual influences on believing souls—thence, in some future period, he will come to judge the world.

After his ascension, the plan of grace was more clearly illustrated, and more extensively displayed by the ministry of his apostles, unto whom this authority was given, “that they should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world had been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

This plan is still receiving new light from the dispensations of providence. Every age witnesses to the truth of the gospel in the fulfilment of the prophecies which it contains. The changes and revolutions in kingdoms, states and empires, are preparing the way for the glorious reign of truth, and the long and extensive prosperity of the church.

The day is coming when he, who sits on the throne, will make such mighty alterations in the state of the church and of the world, that both may be called *new*. This happy renovation the prophet Isaiah describes under the figure of a *new heaven* and a *new earth*. “Behold,” says the Almighty, “I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy.” That this is a description of the glorious state of the church in this world, is manifest from the words which follow. “I will rejoice in Jerusalem and in my people, and the voice of

weeping shall no more be heard in her. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. As the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the works of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble, for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." This is plainly a description of people living on earth—not of spirits dwelling in heaven.

From this and other representations, which the sacred writers give, of the new state of the church, we learn, that in that happy period, there will be general peace, perfect security and great plenty in the world—that all nations will receive and profess the gospel—that its influence on the hearts and lives of mankind will be much superior to its influence in any preceding age, and that this state of things will be of long duration.

But this new state of the church will be only preparatory to a state still more glorious—the state described in this chapter of the revelation where my text is, and in the next following.

The descriptive language of the prophets, especially of Isaiah, is exceedingly bold and strong. In representing the happy state of the church on earth, he anticipates its more glorious state in heaven. Saint John, in describing the heavenly world, could find no language more expressive—no figures more sublime, than those, which Isaiah had applied to the former occasion; he therefore takes the same phrases and images and applies them to the church in heaven. That by the *new heaven* and the *new earth* in this chapter is intended the state of the church in the world above, after the judgment, is evident from the order of the book of the revelation. The principal part of the book is occupied in detailing the corrup-

tions which should attend, the calamities which should befall, and the protections which should distinguish the church of God for a long course of time. In the twentieth chapter, John describes the renovation of the church on earth, and her consequent security and happiness, under the figure of Satan's being bound, and the martyrs raised from the dead to reign with Christ a thousand years. At the close of this period, he says, Satan will be loosed, and will go forth and deceive the nations, and will gather them together from all quarters to make war on the saints. This is a figurative representation of a great apostacy from the true religion, and of the return of the spirit of persecution. The next foretels the signal destruction of these enemies of the church by some remarkable interposition of divine power. Immediately upon this event, he introduces the general judgment of the world; after which follows, in this chapter, the description of the new heavens and the new earth. So that the renovation of all things, mentioned in our text, must intend that glorious state of things which follows the general judgment of the world.

There is, indeed, a similarity between the church on earth and the church in heaven. The apostle speaks of the whole family in heaven and earth. Both are under the same head even Christ, and both are employed in the worship and service of God. Love is the bond of union among the members of the church above, and this ought ever to unite the members of the church below. Religion, in its general nature, is the same among the saints in heaven and on earth. But still there is in many particular respects, a vast difference between these two conditions and characters of the church—a difference so great, that in the new Jerusalem, in the holy city, God says, "I make all things new."

1. The church in heaven will be new in respect of the *number* of its members.

The churches which we see on earth are little societies formed here and there for the service of God. In heaven there will be nations of them who are saved. In the general assembly above, there will be collected all the saints—all the true believers, who have lived on earth from the days of Adam, and who will live to the consummation of all things. These will be a great multitude, which no man can number; and with these will be united an innumerable company of angels.

A spacious temple crowded with devout and humble worshippers elevates, expands and solemnizes the mind. How majestic the scene, when saints and angels, in multitudes without number—in throngs beyond conception, shall assemble together in heaven—shall fill its immense and glorious courts—shall press around the throne of God to pay him their humble devotions.

Here we meet in little temples made with hands. In the heavenly Jerusalem there is no temple; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. When we come into a place sequestered for the worship of God, we feel our minds impressed with the idea, that God, in some eminent and peculiar sense, is there. But in heaven the glory of God will be every where conspicuous, and every mind will feel itself embraced with his presence and filled with his influence. *There* will be no need of temples dedicated to his worship: Heaven will be all temple, and every soul will be all devotion.

2. We now dwell in earthly bodies. The flesh cramps the efforts of our mental powers, impedes the ascent of our spiritual affections and chills the ardor of our kindling devotions. But flesh and blood will **not** inherit the kingdom of God. All things there

will be new. These earthly, gross, animal bodies, will become pure, refined and spiritual. These vile bodies will be changed, and fashioned like to Christ's glorious body.

3. It will be a new thing, and as happy as it will be new, to find ourselves freed from sin, and mingling with those, who, like us, are made perfect in holiness. Into heaven nothing enters, that defiles, or works abomination. The fearful, the unbelieving and abominable will be separated from among the just and pure, and detrued into the dark and dismal abodes of guilt, misery and despair. How happy the saints above, who feel no impurities and corruptions within, and see none without—who have no cause of repentance for iniquities of their own, and behold nothing to disgust them in the manners of others.

“The Son of man shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things which offend, and them who do iniquity—and shall cast them into a furnace of fire—then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father.”

4. It will be a new thing to see all united in love. Here on earth are Christians, who profess the same religion, acknowledge the same Redeemer and hope for the same heaven; but how divided in sentiment about the smaller things in religion—how distant in affection for the circumstantial differences—how apt to contend about trifles—how hasty to judge and reprobate one another—how active, in the heat of uncharitable passion, to set up altar against altar—how much more zealous to strengthen the cause of a party, than to promote the great cause of the Redeemer and the general interest of Christians?

In heaven we shall see all things new. There will be no interfering passions, separate interests and party designs—no evil surmises and unfriendly insinuations. There will be one common interest, and one universal spirit of love to unite the whole. Jews and Gentiles, yea, angels and men will all meet in one assembly. Angels will not disdain to mingle with saints before the throne of God. Filled with reverence of him who sits on the throne, they will forget, or overlook the little distinctions between creature and creature—between angel and man.—These distinctions will vanish in the presence of him, who filleth all in all.

5. The saints, while on earth, experience a sensible delight in communion with God, and in the stated and occasional exercises of piety and devotion. But this delight is often interrupted by the infirmities of the flesh and the avocations of the world.

In heaven things will be new. There the saints will be continually before God's throne, and will serve him day and night; and they will not intermit their holy exercises for rest or refreshment, for they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, and Jesus who is on the right hand of the throne shall feed them with celestial food, and shall lead them to the fountains of immortality and joy.

6. Here we need the word of God to instruct and quicken us. We need threatenings to awaken us, promises to allure us, and precepts to guide us. We need sensible representations to affect the mind through the eye, and living sounds to reach the heart through the ear. But in heaven things will be new.

There we shall be all eye—all ear—all intellect—all devotion and love. We shall see God face to face ; know as we are known ; dwell in him, and he in us. “ I heard a voice,” says Saint John, “ The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people ; his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads.”

7. Here we need the vicissitudes of day and night for labor and rest. The light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. The night, though favorable to repose, is, however, a gloomy season. The gloom we endeavor to dispel by artificial lights. But in heaven there is no need of a candle, for there is no night there ; and no need of the sun, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and Jesus is the light thereof.

8. Here we have our seasons of sorrow and affliction. Our joys are transient. Our bright and happy days are interrupted with dark and stormy nights. Our smiling and cheerful suns are obscured by scowling and angry clouds. Death is stalking around—we see his frightful footsteps—we hear his hollow voice. We tremble for our children and friends—we mourn the loss of brethren and companions—we have no security for our most pleasing connexions—we are doomed to suffer the anguish of their dissolution. In heaven things will be new. All friendship there will be the union of pure and immortal minds in disinterested benevolence to one another, and in supreme love to the allglorious Jehovah. Holy souls will mingle together in a manner new and ineffable. Their affections will all concentrate in the same spiritual objects, and their friendly feelings will be transfused into each other. The benevolence of each will embrace the whole system of

virtuous intelligences, and will suffer no interruption or abatement from the incursion of malevolent passions ; for these will be unknown there. This union will never be dissolved. “ God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.”

While we contemplate this grand and wonderful renovation, let us remember, that, in order to our entering into the new heaven, we must experience a similar renovation here on earth. “ If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away ; all things are become new.” “ We must put off the old man, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

He who sits on the throne says, “ Behold, I make all things new.”

The citizens of the new Jerusalem must be new creatures. They must be made new, as well as the city which they inhabit. “ Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Nothing can enter thither which defiles.—They only who are pure in heart shall dwell with God. “ Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? Who shall stand in his holy place ? He who hath clean hands and a pure heart.”

While we lament the corruptions of the world, let us look forward and rejoice in the persuasion that truth and virtue will hereafter triumph.

Let us pray for the general spread of the gospel—for the enlargement of the church—for the revival of pure religion—for the extinction of error and vice, and the subversion of the kingdom of satan in our world.

Let us attend to our own spiritual state ; see that the new creature be formed in our souls ; and be watchful to promote its growth, that, whatever may be the state of the world, in our day, we may be admitted hereafter into the new heaven above, and may rejoice forever in that which God creates.



S E R M O N XI.



Reflections on the Story of the Ethiopian Eunuch.



ACTS viii. 39.

—*And he went his way rejoicing.*

THE person here spoken of is the Ethiopian eunuch, who having been instructed by Philip the Evangelist in the nature and evidences of the gospel of salvation, had received it by faith, and had testified his faith by baptism in the name of Christ. The story, as related in the latter part of this chapter, may usefully employ our present meditations.

Philip, who had been preaching in Samaria with great success, was directed by an angel to “arise and go toward the south, unto the way which goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert.” This Gaza was a town near the country of the Philistines, and sometimes possessed by them. It lay southwest from Jerusalem, in the way toward Ethiopia, a country which is south of Egypt, and is often mentioned in scripture. Philip, by travelling south from Samaria, would naturally cross the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. A part of the country between Jerusalem and Gaza is called a desert. Philip, in

obedience to the heavenly command, arose and went. At this time, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch, or officer under Candace, the then reigning queen of Ethiopia—one who had the charge of all her treasures, and who had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning to his own country, and riding in his chariot.

God's wisdom orders the times and circumstances of men's conduct in such a manner, as will best accomplish the purposes of his goodness. Philip must set out on his journey at such a moment, as to fall in with this officer on the road, and communicate to him those instructions which concerned his salvation. Neither Philip, nor the officer contemplated the interview which took place, nor probably had any knowledge of each other. The interview and its consequences were ordered by divine providence, not by human contrivance. God sends us blessings, which we never sought, and sends them in ways, which we should never have devised. The first awakening, and the consequent conversion of sinners may be owing to some circumstance in the course of divine dispensations, which never entered into their thoughts. True religion in their hearts is wrought by the word of truth, which word is accompanied with the energies of the Holy Spirit: But their opportunity to hear a pertinent instruction or admonition, and their disposition to regard and apply what they hear, may be owing to a providential occurrence, or internal influence, which was not of their seeking. Some pious book may be put into their hands, some judicious advice may be given in their hearing, or some affliction may fall upon them, which awakens their attention, and brings them to a real amendment. Philip had cause to bless God for making him, without a previous design of his own, an instrument of eternal good to

the officer of Ethiopia. The officer had cause to acknowledge the grace of God in sending the Evangelist to teach him the way of salvation, when he himself had never applied to such a teacher, nor perhaps asked God to send him one.

This officer was a man of great authority—the chief treasurer under the queen of Ethiopia; a country, which, lying south of Egypt, must have been at a great distance from Jerusalem. But distant as it was, he had been up to Jerusalem to worship.—He believed one God, received the Jewish scriptures, and embraced the religion taught, and observed the festivals appointed in them. He was a Gentile proselyte, and therefore was permitted to worship at the temple. His wealth and dignity did not raise him above the thoughts of religion, and his distance from Jerusalem did not induce him to neglect the instituted ordinances of God. Would this man who took a journey of several days for the privilege of worshipping the true God in Jerusalem, have neglected the privilege, if it had been brought into Ethiopia, and placed within an hour's walk of his own door? Must not the Christian, who lives in habitual neglect of God's worship, or who attends it only occasionally, or is detained from it by trivial inconveniences, be made ashamed of himself, when he sees the diligence and zeal of this Gentile proselyte? Our Savior says to the Jews, "The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with the men of this generation; for she came from far to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold a greater than Solomon is here? May not many of the present generation draw a similar warning and reproof from the eunuch of the south? He came from far to hear the law and the prophets: But, behold, the instructions of Christ and his apostles are here. He came from far to attend on the legal worship: But, behold, a

more perfect, gracious and inviting dispensation is here.

“The Eunuch was now sitting in his chariot, and reading the book of Esaias.”

In the Jewish festivals a part of the religious exercise was reading the law and the prophets. The lesson, which the Eunuch had heard, in his late attendance at the temple, was probably taken from the prophet *Isaiah*. He might now, for his better information, be reviewing the portion of scripture, which had before been publicly read. This was wise and pious. We are not to imagine, that our attendance on the service of the sanctuary excuses us from the *private* exercises of devotion. We must attend to both in their time and place, and thus make each subservient to the usefulness of the other.

The Eunuch had a copy of the scriptures in his own possession for his private perusal; and this he carried with him, when he went abroad; and he spent some of his time in conversing with it. He had attendants in his charriot; for if he had guided it himself, he would not have been in a situation for reading. He read aloud; for Philip heard him as he walked by the chariot. He read for the benefit of his attendants, as well as for his own. The religious householder wishes to communicate the knowledge, and impress the sentiments of religion on those who are under his care. The Eunuch acted in conformity to that precept of the Mosaiac law, given to parents, but applicable to all heads of families, “Thou shalt diligently teach my words to thy children, and talk of them, when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

“The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot; and Philip ran thither to him.” The chariot had not reached the junction of

the roads, when Philip saw it ; and, by running, he came into the Eunuch's road a little ahead of him. " And he heard him read the prophet Esaias. And he said, Understandest thou what thou readest ? "

" Hear and understand, " is a direction which Christ gives to all. The scriptures in general are plain. They who read them with serious attention and a practical design, will understand them in those things which immediately relate to their duty and salvation. " If any man desire to do God's will, he will know of Christ's doctrine, whether it be of God. " There are " some things, " however, which are " hard to be understood. " These we must never interpret in a sense, which contradicts plain things, or which encourages vice, and weakens the obligations to duty. As long as we are guided by the things which we do, or may understand, we shall suffer no inconvenience from a few obscure passages ; for the darker parts of scripture contain no essential doctrine or precept, but what we may find distinctly taught in the plainer parts.

The passage, which the Eunuch was reading, was a prophecy in Isaiah concerning the Savior. And prophecy is in its nature obscure, until it is explained by the event. He had just been at Jerusalem. He there had doubtless heard much said concerning one *Jesus*, who had been crucified by the rulers, and, according to the report of his disciples, had risen again, and ascended to heaven. Amidst the controversy at Jerusalem concerning this extraordinary person, he might be in perplexity, what opinion to form. He felt his need of instruction, and rejoiced in an opportunity to receive it. When Philip asked, if he understood the prophet, he modestly replied, " How can I, except some man should guide me ? " He probably supposed this man to be one of the dis-

ciples of Jesus, and he wished to hear from him the nature and evidences of this new religion, which now made so much noise in Jerusalem; and he desired the man to come up and take a seat with him.

The place of scripture, which he had been reading, was very pertinent to the present state of his mind, and naturally introduced such a discourse as he needed to hear. The words were these; "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb dumb before his shearer, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation," or in his sufferings, "his judgment," the justice of a fair trial, "was taken away from him. And who shall declare his generation?" Who shall describe the wickedness of the people, who condemned him to death? "For his life was taken away from the earth."

The Eunuch here makes a judicious inquiry; "Of whom, I pray thee, speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?"

He considers Isaiah as a *prophet*; and in reading this passage, a question arose, whether it might not be a prediction of the patient sufferings and quiet death of some extraordinary man, who should appear in the world, and be unjustly and cruelly persecuted and put to death by his own nation. Probably he might apprehend, that the person described by the prophet was the same, who had lately been crucified at Jerusalem. And he desired the Evangelist to explain the passage. How pleasant must be the work to instruct a man of this serious and candid disposition? A seat in the chariot was a relief to Philip's body; an interview with the rider was a refreshment to his mind.

"Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

We may think, it would have been a privilege, if Luke in his history had recorded at large Philip's

sermon from this text. And certainly, if it had been transmitted to us, it would have been well worthy of our perusal. But, then, we have no special need of it; for we have the doctrines which Christ taught, when he was on earth, and we have the letters, which his apostles wrote to the churches after his ascension. And if Philip preached Jesus, as Luke says he did, he preached the same doctrines, which are every where else taught in the gospel. And by reading the gospel, we shall learn every thing which Philip taught the Eunuch.

Besides; We know the text, from which Philip preached, and we have the book and chapter in which it is found. We know too, that the apostles were correct and rational preachers, who always kept to their text, and adapted their discourses to the occasion and the audience: It is, therefore, no difficult matter to know the drift and substance of this sermon.

His first intention was to prove to the Eunuch, that Jesus was the son of God: For this, in the result, the Eunuch professed to believe. He had before received the scriptures of the Old Testament, as divine. From them Philip argued in proof of Christ's divine mission and character. He stated the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and testified that these had been minutely accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth.

He then, as we may naturally suppose, opened the nature of the gospel scheme.

The prophecy under consideration, would lead the Evangelist to represent to his proselyte the fallen and guilty condition of mankind—the great purpose of Christ's death, which was to make atonement for sin—the mercy of God to pardon sin through this atonement—the way of pardon by repentance toward God, and by faith in his Son—the ascension and

intercession of Jesus—the consequent effusion of the divine Spirit, and the success and spread of the gospel among the Gentiles; for all these things are expressly mentioned by the prophet in the chapter, which was now opened before them.

From the Eunuch's request to receive baptism, we must conclude that Philip taught him the necessity of professing his faith in Christ, and the institution of baptism, as a token of relation to Christ, and as a vow of obedience to him.

What a happy discovery was now made to this honest and inquisitive Gentile? A new scene was opened to him. His anxious doubts were removed, and obscure prophecies were made plain. He now saw divine mercy extending its richest blessings to Gentiles. He saw pardon reached forth to him. He saw a Savior to whom he could commit his immortal soul, and in whose grace and power he might trust for everlasting life.

Can you wonder that he rejoiced? Rather wonder that thousands now hear the same things with cold indifference. If he had gone his way regardless of this wonderful scheme of salvation, who would not have condemned his stupidity? But how many hear salvation through a dying Savior preached from sabbath to sabbath, and feel no solicitude to obtain a share in it?

Some will plead in their excuse, that their hearts are in God's hands; and if they are ever turned, he must turn them. But, tell me, who are they, whose hearts God turns to accept salvation? Are they such as neglect it? or, Such as seek it? Attend to the case of this Gentile. God by his kind providence sent Philip to instruct him, and he blessed the instructions which were given. But what had the Eunuch been doing before? He had faithfully attended on such means as he enjoyed. He went up to

Jerusalem to worship, to hear the scriptures read, and to learn from them the acceptable will of God. When he was in private he read the scriptures by himself. When he met with a minister, he asked him to explain the scriptures to him. This is the man, for whom God so wonderfully interposed to bring him to the knowledge and faith of the gospel.

In him was verified an observation, which our Lord often made, "To him who hath," or improveth what he hath, "shall more be given." If you expect the grace of God to work in you, or to do for you, in any respect, more than it has done, you see what the Eunuch did: Go, and do likewise.

To proceed with our narrative: As Philip and the Eunuch went on their way, "they came to a certain water: And the Eunuch said, see, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"

Christ commissioned his Apostles to "disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and teaching them to observe all things, which he had commanded." Baptism is a badge of discipleship to Christ, of admission into his church, and of subjection to his government. It does not denote a particular relation to this, or that church in distinction from others; but a relation to the church of Christ in general. "As many as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Relation to a particular church depends on a covenant made with that church, either explicitly by profession, or implicitly by situation and tacit consent. But all baptized persons are members of the church at large; and they are under the immediate care of that church in the bosom of which they live, unless they choose to join themselves to another. And as it is necessary for social worship and actual communion, that particular churches should be

formed, so every Christian is bound to unite himself to some church or other, if his situation allows of this connexion. The man who pretends to be a Christian, and yet lives in a state of disconnexion with the church of Christ, without attendance on ordinances and subjection to discipline, contradicts himself, as really, as he who professes subjection to the church of Christ, and yet lives in the neglect of moral duty.

The Eunuch, as soon as he embraced the gospel, expressed a desire to receive baptism, that he might thus testify his faith. "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" He did not wait to be urged to this duty. The same disposition appeared in other converts in the apostolic times. The prophets, when they foretell a revival of religion, usually mention the increase of the church as a consequence of it. When one feels the operation of true religion in his heart, he will attend to the duties of it, and apply the means appointed for promoting the power and practice of it. He will not excuse himself from a Christian profession, and from communion with the church, under a pretence, that he is not holy enough for the church, or the church not holy enough for him; for religion is neither desirous of vain glory, nor affectitious of a false humility: He will not plead his sins in excuse for the neglect of plain duty, nor cast off the restraints from sin, and the excitements to duty, with a view to walk according to the course of the world; for religion seeks not to be conformed to this world; but to prove what is acceptable in the sight of God. It is meek, peaceable, candid, charitable, attentive to the calls of duty, watchful against sin, humble for conscious imperfection, and desirous of improvement.

To the Eunuch's question, Philip answers, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" be

baptized. The Eunuch professes, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

We cannot suppose, that the Evangelist required, or that the Eunuch made a declaration of a *certain knowledge* of his own *gracious sincerity*. This is to be proved by those fruits, which could not yet be made to appear either to Philip, or to the Eunuch. But the latter might know, whether he believed Jesus to be the Son of God; and consequently, whether he believed the religion, taught by Jesus and his Apostles, to be divine; and whether it was his present purpose to be governed by this religion. There is a great difference between knowing our present views and exercises, and knowing our habitual state and character. Of the former we may be immediately conscious: The latter is known by experience. The Eunuch was baptized on that knowledge which he had of himself in this interview with Philip. The evangelist did not advise him to delay his baptism, until he could prove the sincerity of his faith by its permanent effects; but upon his professing to believe in the Son of God, Philip baptized him immediately; for he supposed, that a man might know what he believed to be true, and what he intended to do. In this manner the apostles uniformly and invariably conducted in admitting persons to baptism and the communion of the church. They were not such inconsistent instructors, as to direct weak and doubting believers to acquire stability and assurance, before they used the means of these acquirements. If believers must give diligence to ascertain their sincerity and establish their hope, they must apply the necessary means for this purpose. And where shall they find them? Must they withdraw from the church to find them? or seek them there?

A man who is conscious, that he does not believe the gospel to be true, nor regard it, if it is true, certainly is not qualified to enter into the church; nor has he any *serious* desire to come into it; nor can it be a case of conscience with him, whether he ought to come into it. If he asks the question, it is merely for speculation, or controversy; not with a wish to know, or intention to do his duty. And let the question be answered either way, he still follows his own corrupt inclination. But the man who believes the gospel to be divine—who views it as important—who resolves to walk agreeably to it, and who desires the aids of God's grace, and the counsels and prayers of his fellow Christians, that he may obey the precepts and secure the blessings of it—this man ought to come into the church, and attend on the ordinances of Christ, though he may still have many humble doubts concerning his habitual sincerity and saving conversion.

There are some pious and humble souls, who, by conscientious, but mistaken scruples, are detained from the fellowship of Christ's church. These honest scruples a gracious God will treat with indulgence, and a candid Christian will treat with tenderness. But the man, who feels no inclination, and seeks no preparation to enjoy this fellowship, lies under the continued guilt of contemning a divine institution.

They who excuse themselves from the communion of the church by alleging its laxness of discipline and impurity of manners, betray their own insincerity; for an honest zeal would induce them to join the church, that they might strengthen the things which remain, and reform those which are amiss. Nothing is more selfcontradictory, than to complain of prevailing evils, and still leave the evils to prevail. If I discover my neighbor's house on

fire in the night, my retiring to a distance, and there standing a silent, inactive spectator, neither calling for the assistance of others, nor affording my own, would be no evidence, that I wished the flame extinguished, or the family saved.

But of all men, he shews the grossest inconsistency, who, after he has explicitly covenanted with a church for fellowship in worship and discipline, withdraws from it on account of offenders, whom he has never sought to reclaim. If he knows that there are offenders, he is the person first bound to reprove them, and, in case of necessity, to call for the concurrence of others in the pious work of reformation. If he, in such a case, is silent, he becomes partaker of their sins. And though he should withdraw from the church, he carries his guilt with him : He cannot leave that behind him for his brethren to bear. Every man must bear his own burden ; and the burden of guilt contracted in one place, cannot be thrown off by removing to another. The Christian best shews, that he cannot bear them who are evil, when he shuns the practice of evil himself, and endeavors to reclaim transgressors by the application of the means, which the gospel prescribes.

We will return to our narrative. When the Eunuch learned from Philip, that there was nothing to hinder his being baptized, “ he commanded the chariot to stand still ; and they went down into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch, and he baptized him ; and they came up out of the water.”

Some, to prove that immersion into water is essential to baptism, have adduced this passage ; but very impertinently ; for it imports nothing more than going to, and returning from the water. If the persons stepped only within the margin of the water, they might be said to go into it, as properly as if they went to any supposed depth. Philip is said to go

into, and come out of the water, as well as the Eunuch, and there is no intimation, that one was buried in water more than the other. The passage therefore leaves it undetermined, whether the Evangelist baptized his proselyte by dipping him in the water, or by putting water upon him. The advocates for immersion, in order to prove the *necessity* of this mode, must shew, that the word *baptism*, always signifies immersion, and is *never* used in any other sense; and that the apostles, in baptizing, uniformly practised immersion, and never admitted any other usage. This they cannot shew; for the word, usually at least, signifies putting water upon the subject; and it is certain that the Apostles sometimes baptized in this manner. I will not, however, take upon me to determine, that no other mode was ever used; nor do I feel any scruple in administering baptism with a greater or less quantity of water, as the subjects may desire. To grant to our fellow Christians this liberty is but a small indulgence. In differences much greater than this the Apostles advise Christians to mutual condescension and forbearance.

When Philip and the Eunuch returned from the water, "the spirit of God caught Philip away, and the Eunuch saw him no more; and Philip was found at Azotus;" or Ashdod, as it is called in the Old Testament. It is not necessary to suppose, that Philip was transported by an angel through the air to Azotus. Probably all that is intended is, that Philip, by the direction of the spirit, parted from the Eunuch, and turned to go north toward Azotus, so that the Eunuch, who was going to the south, had no farther interview with him.

It is probable, the Eunuch solicited his company to Ethiopia, to preach the gospel for the conversion of the Gentiles in that country. This is implied in

the expression, "The Eunuch saw him no more." He wished for his company longer, but could not enjoy it. A visit to Ethiopia, was not consistent with the order which the Evangelist had received. This required him to preach in other places. He made no stop, until he came to Azotus. There he began his service, and, passing along, he preached in all the cities, until he came to Cesarea. There he took up a house and made a considerable stand; and there, some time afterward, Paul's companions found him, and lodged with him. It is said, in the xxi chapter of Acts, "They who were of Paul's company came to Cesarea, and entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, and tarried there many days."

When the Eunuch was baptized, and Philip had left him, "he went his way rejoicing." And great cause he had for rejoicing.

He rejoiced in the wonderful scheme of salvation, which was now discovered to him. Of this he had before but an imperfect knowledge, such as might be collected from the types, figures and prophecies of the Jewish scriptures. Now the scheme of divine grace was opened to his understanding, and he saw the prophecies fulfilled in the Savior who had actually come into the world. He beheld an atonement made for human guilt, pardon offered to the chief of sinners, and the terms of salvation clearly stated.—All former doubts, whether God would forgive sin, in what way sinners might come to God, and whether Gentiles, as well as Jews, might obtain mercy, were fully removed.

He rejoiced in the wonderful steps, which God had taken to bring him to a knowledge of the gospel scheme. He reflected with gratitude on the happy moment, when he met with Philip, who, by God's

special direction come and instructed him in the things relating to his eternal salvation.

He rejoiced in hope, that he had sincerely embraced the gospel, and obtained a share in the salvation which it revealed. Whatever hope he may have had before, he had a new hope now ; for now he saw where to place his faith, and he felt the operation of this faith inclining him to comply with a gospel institution, and strengthening his resolution in the service of God.

It may be asked, Whether he was not a good man before he saw Philip ? Certainly he discovered a serious, candid, open mind ; nor do we know, but his heart was pious. But whatever his religious character might be, God saw it to be important, that he should understand and believe the gospel ; and for this purpose an Evangelist was sent to him. But what if he had refused to hear Philip, to receive the gospel, and to profess his faith ? Would you, then, have called him a pious man ? There were many good men under the Jewish dispensation ; but these were looking for redemption ; and they embraced it, when it came. We will not say, that none can be saved without the gospel revelation ; for many were saved before it was given : But we may say, that they, to whom the gospel has come, cannot be saved in disobedience and unbelief ; for this is a case, which our Savior has decided. " If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. If I had not come and spoken to you, ye had not had sin ; but now ye have no cloak for your sin. Ye have seen and hated both me and my Father."

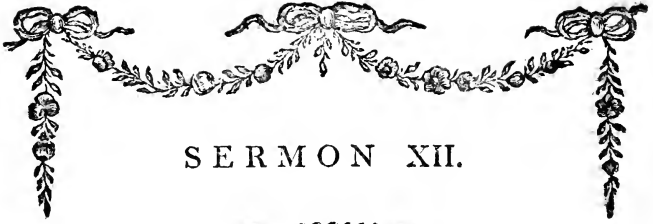
The Eunuch might rejoice in the hope of communicating to his countrymen that gospel which he had now embraced. Some of the early fathers say, that, having now received ordination from Philip,

with the gift of the Holy Ghost, he returned home and preached the gospel among the people of Ethiopia. But if he returned only in a private capacity, he would give his neighbors information of the things, which he had seen, and heard and believed, and thus would prepare their minds to receive the knowledge of the truth.

Benevolence is an essential part of the religion of the gospel. This benevolence interests itself in the general happiness, and rejoices in opportunities to promote it. The Eunuch, anticipating the glorious tidings, which, on his return, he should communicate to the people of his country, and the happy effects, which these tidings might produce among them, went on his way rejoicing.

True religion in the heart is a spring of the sweetest joy. It gives peace to the conscience, appropriates the divine promises, begins the comforts of hope, and anticipates the glories of heaven. Possessed of this, whithsoever we are called, we may go our way rejoicing : We may rejoice in tribulation, for this will work for our good : We may rejoice in prosperity, for this is sent in love : We may rejoice in times of darkness, for God's favor will give us light : We may rejoice in works of duty, for God's commandments are not grievous : We may rejoice in acts of charity, for these are profitable to men : We may rejoice in death, for we shall rest from our labors, and our works will follow us. How many live in anxiety about the uncertain events of time ? How many through fear of death are always subject to bondage ? Embrace the gospel in your hearts, submit to its precepts, lay hold on its promises, accept the offered salvation, and make sure your title to it by abounding in the fruits of faith ; then may you rejoice in all condi-

tions : God is your God ; his favor is your portion ; his throne is open for your approach ; his ear is attentive to your prayers ; his spirit is ready to your assistance ; all events are working for your good ; death, when it comes, will be gain ; and heaven will be your eternal home.



S E R M O N XII.

God to be Worshipped in the Beauty of Holiness.

A Sermon preached at the Dedication of the MEETINGHOUSE in the Second Parish in Westspringfield, June 8, 1803, and inserted in this volume by particular desire.

PSALM xcvi. 9.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

WHEN king David had brought up the ark of God from the house of Obbedom to Jerusalem, and the Levites had set it in the place, which the king had prepared for it, they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings; and David blessed the people in the name of the Lord. And on that day he delivered this psalm, to thank the Lord, into the hands of Asaph and his brethren. The substance of the psalm is an exhortation to praise God, to call on his name, to seek his mercy, to make known his works, and to *worship him in the beauty of holiness.*

These last words will be the subject of our present meditations.

David here expresses his pious sense of the obligation, which he and all men were under to worship God. He calls not only on the tribes of Israel, but also on the nations of the earth, to fear the Lord,

sing praises to his name and shew forth his salvation.

One reason, why he recommended to his own people an attendance on God's worship in the sanctuary, was, that "they might shew forth his glory among the heathen, and his marvellous works among all people," and thus make it manifest to the world, that "the Lord is great and greatly to be praised, and to be feared above all Gods."

One end of social worship among the professors of religion is to spread the knowledge, and introduce the practice of religion among others. The Apostle exhorts Christians to decency and order in their worshipping assemblies, that the unbelieving and unlearned might be convinced, that God was there of a truth.

The external *form* of divine worship consists in offering prayers and praises to God, in hearing the instructions of his word, and in attending on his appointed ordinances. The internal *essence* of worship consists in correspondent affections and exercises such as faith, love, gratitude and reverence toward God, humiliation for sin and resolutions of new obedience, and peaceableness and "benevolence to mankind.

If we believe there is a God, who is glorious in his nature and beneficent in his works, on whom we depend for all that we want, to whom we are indebted for all that we have, and to whom we are accountable for all that we do, then we must confess our obligation to love and fear him, to seek his favor and rejoice in his goodness, to imitate his character, and do good as we have opportunity. If we ought to entertain pious affections to God, and friendly dispositions to men, then we are bound to attend on the external forms of social worship, because these

are necessary to awaken and keep alive such affections and dispositions.

How it is with pure spirits we cannot say : But to us, who dwell in bodies, some sensible representations and outward ceremonies are necessary to excite and preserve in the mind suitable dispositions and exercises. It is through the avenues of sense, and the organs of flesh, that the soul receives all its notices, sentiments and impressions.

If there were no such thing, as the external worship of God, there would be no knowledge of him, regard to him, or thoughts about him, among our fallen race.

We find by experience, that our social regards much depend on social intercourse. We have a more sensible affection for the friends and relatives who are near us, and with whom we are daily conversant, than for those, though equally worthy, who dwell at a distance. The case is the same with our *religious* affections. They are enlivened and preserved by actual communion with God. They languish and decline, when this communion is intermitted or neglected.

Consult your own experience, my Christian brethren. Do you not find, that the piety of your hearts rises and falls, in some measure, with your devotional duties ? If by any means you are drawn into too frequent an omission, or too long an intermission of the duties of the closet, the family, or the sanctuary, do you not perceive an alteration in the religious state of your minds ? Does not your love and fear of God, your sense of his presence, your thankfulness for his mercies, your apprehensions of futurity, your zeal for the gospel, your concern for the salvation of others, greatly decline ? And do not the cares of the world crowd in, and occupy the place, which these graces have almost deserted ? But

when you resume your neglected duties, and attend upon them with your former constancy, do you not find your hearts habitually enlivened, and your pious sentiments and affections revived? Your observance of the instrumental duties of religion is the thermometer, by which you may nearly determine the degree of warmth in your hearts.

Consult your observation. Is it not generally true, that they who treat with indifference the instituted worship of God, are equally indifferent to other religious duties? Are they, who condemn the former, zealous for the latter?

The forms of worship are not the *essence*, but they are the *means* of religion. The strictest observance of these, if we go no farther, will not avail to our acceptance with God; for he requires mercy, truth and justice, as well as sacrifice. The former are the weightier matters. But without the latter, we never shall attain to the former. The means are useless, if we disregard the end: But the end will not be accomplished without the means. God has appointed the ordinances of his worship, not as substitutes for, but as instruments of piety and charity. With a regard to these we must use and apply the instruments.

As our text teaches us our obligation to worship God, so it instructs also, *How* we are to worship him. *In the Beauty of Holiness*. This may be understood of the *place*—the *manner*—the *temper*—and the *consequences* of divine worship.

1. It may be understood of the *place* of worship. "Worship the Lord *in the glorious Sanctuary*." So it is rendered in the margin.

This is then a command to *prepare* a Sanctuary for the worship of God; for, in David's time the temple was not built, though great preparation was made for it. People, living within a convenient

vicinity, are bound to associate for the stated worship of God, and to have a house, in which they may assemble on the days which God has appointed for that purpose.

And in a house built for God, there ought to be not only capacity and convenience to accommodate the worshippers, but also dignity and elegance to assist and express a regard for God's institutions. The ancient tabernacle, and, afterward, the temple, both of which were built under divine direction, were rich and beautiful, as well as commodious. The Psalmist says, "Beautiful for situation is mount Zion. Out of Zion the perfection of beauty hath God shined. I have desired to dwell in God's house, that I may behold his beauty, and inquire in his temple." This is called "the beauty of Israel, the joy of the whole land; the hill in which the Lord desires to dwell, and in which he will dwell for ever." As the structure of the temple was noble, so its inward furniture was comely and elegant.

He who formed our nature with a taste for beauty, with a love of order, and with an admiration of grandeur, well knew, that such properties in the place and utensils of worship, contributed to inward piety and devotion; and that, on the contrary, meanness, inelegance and disorder naturally tended to damp the fervor of devotion, and repress the emotions of piety.

2. The beauty of holiness may express the *manner* of worship. As the place should be beautiful, so the attendance should be full and constant, and the demeanor grave and sedate. All things should be done decently and in order. The apostle speaks of the *whole* church in Corinth, as coming together into *one place*. He cautions Christians not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. When he preached in Antioch, "almost the whole city

came together to hear the word of the Lord." And while he ministered in Ephesus, "all they who dwelt in Asia, heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." The instruction, which the king, in the parable, gave to his servants, when he had prepared an entertainment for his guests, was, "Say to them who have been bidden, Come, for all things are ready—go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

Christ loves to see a full house. When he comes to inspect the assembly, all should be found in their places. None should absent themselves without cause. They who, being called, would not come to the king's supper, were not only excluded from it by his command, but slain by the sword of his armies. Why this severity? Because from neglecting his invitation, they proceeded to violence against his servants. They, in the first instance, refused to come to his house, and then they conceived a hatred against those who had called them. They wished there were no such servants of the king, no such places for the entertainment of his guests. This is the usual progress of irreligion. It begins in the neglect, and grows into a contempt of the institutions of the gospel; and ends in opposition to, and slander against the regular and faithful preachers of the gospel.

3. The beauty of holiness may respect the *temper of mind* with which God's worship should be attended. "God is a spirit; and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." "Holiness becomes his house for ever." When the king came in to see the guests at his table, he observed one sitting there, who had not on him a wedding garment. All the festivals of rich men, in ancient times, garments, as well as food, were prepared for

the guests. So in the house of God there are means of holiness, as well as offers of salvation. They who come thither, are called to be holy. "Christ gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify it with the washing of water by the word. The king says to the unworthy guest, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" The white raiment is the righteousness of the saints. Christians, under the means which they enjoy in God's house, are to improve in holiness; and with a view to their improvement, they are to attend on these means. If, when Christ comes to inspect the attendants on his ordinances, they are found, like the men of the world, full of pride, covetousness and earthly affections, and destitute of sobriety, charity and heavenliness, they will fall under an awful condemnation. They will be judged worthy of a sorer punishment, than if these privileges had never been granted them.

There is a beauty in holiness. It is God's image, and of great price in his sight. It is the richest ornament of the soul. Knowledge, learning, easiness of temper, cheerfulness of spirit and sociability of manners are agreeable qualities. But a man may possess these, and many other natural and civil accomplishments, and yet be a lover of the world, and an enemy to God. While he is esteemed among men, who look on the outward appearance, he may be abomination in the sight of him, who seeth not as man seeth; but looketh on the heart. The real beauty of the intellectual mind is the image of God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness.

To worship God in the beauty of holiness, is to worship him with a holy temper and for holy ends.

Particularly: We must worship him in *sincerity*; draw near to him with the heart; pray to him with inward desires; confess our sins with godly sor-

row; give thanks with sentiments of gratitude; and hear the word with selfapplication.

We must worship God with *humility*—with a sense of dependence, and with hope in his mercy. This is the language of true devotion; “Behold I, who am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.” “I abhor myself.” “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

We must worship God with *faith*; for without this it is impossible to please him. The belief of his power, wisdom, mercy, constant providence, and faithful promises, must be our encouragement to come before him. When this faith is strong and active, we shall get near to his throne, bring glory to his name, and receive comfort to ourselves.

We must worship him in the exercise of *charity to men*. One principal end of *social*, in distinction from *private* worship, is the promotion of peace, harmony and benevolence. If we attend it with a view to this end, we shall not, in our attendance, indulge a spirit inconsistent with this end, but with one mind, as well as one mouth shall glorify God.

“Let all your things,” says the Apostle, “be done with charity.” Even our common actions—not only our alms deeds, but our secular labors, must be performed with a benevolent spirit. We are to labor with our hands, that we may have to give to such as need. If our worldly labors, much more our social devotions, should be accompanied with this temper.

When we stand praying, we are to forgive, if we have aught against any man. In hearing the word, we are to lay aside all malice, guile and envy, and as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby. In singing praises,

the peace of God must rule in our hearts. In a word; we must, in all things which relate to the worship of God, be like minded one toward another.

And, as all blessings come to us through Jesus Christ, and as our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God only through him; so whatever we do in word or in deed, we must do all in his name, praying and giving thanks to the Father by him.

When we worship God in sincerity, humility, faith, peace, union and love, and with a view to promote these graces in our fellow worshippers, as well as to cultivate them in our own hearts, then we worship him in the beauty of holiness.

4. Divine worship thus maintained is beautiful in its *effects* and *consequences*. It contributes to improve the mind, soften the manners and adorn the life, to spread religion and restrain vice; to advance the happiness of families, and meliorate the condition of society. A community of Christians, thus united in the worship of God, and acting under its influence, will conduct all their affairs with discretion. They will do nothing through strife and vain glory, but every thing in lowliness of mind. They will condescend to one another in differences of opinion and collisions of interest, and will seek each the profit of many rather than his own. Cemented by love, like an edifice fitly framed in all its parts, they will be builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit, and thus grow into an holy temple in the Lord.

May the beauty, which we have described, shine forth conspicuous among you, my Brethren and Friends. May it appear, with distinguished lustre, in this Sanctuary, which you have builded for God, and which you, this day, consecrate to his worship and service. From hence may it spread its rays to

all your dwellings, and display its charms in all the actions of your lives.

A Society of Christians, united on religious principles in erecting a temple for God, and assembled, with devout zeal and fraternal affection, to dedicate it to his service, is a spectacle acceptable to God and approved of by men.

We, who from other societies have assembled with you this day, partake in your joy, that you have proceeded in this design with such cheerful harmony, and have accomplished it with so happy success. And we join with you in your prayers, that God will dwell in this house, and make it the place of his rest. May God's work appear unto you, and his glory to your children; may the beauty of the Lord be upon you, and may he establish the work of your hands. May the Lord now arise into his resting place, the Lord, and the ark of his strength—may he here send his word with power—may his ears be attentive to your prayers—may his ministers be clothed with salvation, and his saints shout for joy—may his face never be turned away, but his mercies be remembered for ever.

My Brethren, your society is small in number: But it is respectable for its antiquity: Make it more respectable for its piety, peace and good works. Within your present limits some of the first settlers of this ancient town made their location. Here was a considerable proportion of the first members of the church, and here lived the elder of the two first deacons.

The undivided south parish in this town, as it existed, when it was incorporated, 46 years ago, contained about 75 families, of which rather more than half were on the ground now comprised within the limits of your parish. In number you nearly equal, in ability you far exceed the whole parish, as it was

at that time. The people were then, for a season, united in affection and design, though they differed in some religious sentiments. And they found themselves competent to erect a meetinghouse, and to settle and support a minister. The situation of the meetinghouse, on ground far remote from most of the inhabitants, contributed to dissolve the society. That parish is now become two; and you constitute one of them. No such circumstance attends you now, as that which existed before. Let a zeal for God animate your hearts, and mutual charity unite your abilities, and you will be a happy people. You occupy a pleasant and fertile soil in a populous and inviting part of the country; and your settlements are so compact, that you are under better advantages, than many societies, for an attendance on public worship, and for the education of your children. There is a prospect, that you may still increase in number and wealth. If you should harmonize, as becomes Christians, in the social exercises of religion, there will doubtless be accessions to your number from abroad.

Consider, my brethren, that the maintenance of social worship is God's express command. This certainly was your object in erecting the house, which you now dedicate to him. Consider also, that every Christian society is bound, by God's appointment, to have an able and godly minister, who may lead in the religious solemnities, dispense God's word and ordinances, and conduct the common prudentials. Consider farther, that the minister called to take the oversight of a people, is to devote himself to the duties of his calling, and consequently to be supported in his calling by those, to whom he ministers. The priests, who attended at the altar, were partakers with the altar; and so hath the Lord or-

dained, that they, who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.

You must act, my brethren, as one body ; for you are not sufficient for two. If from any unhappy cause you should be divided, neither part could enjoy a stated ministry, without subjecting themselves to a burden, which they would be unwilling to bear, or subjecting the minister to embarrassments, which he ought not to feel. As you have one house, so you must have one minister, and *one table*.

With respect to the *subject* and *mode* of baptism, I am sensible, you have different opinions. But, I believe, none of you entertain the idea, that the existing difference is, on either side, subversive of the foundation of religion. If you can have charity for one another as godly persons, you ought to treat one another as such. And surely you do not treat one another as such, if you will not commune together at one table.

The churches founded by the Apostles consisted both of *Jewish* and *Gentile* believers ; and both were tenacious of some of their former usages. In this case Paul recommended condescension and forbearance. And as it might be a question, how far Christians ought to condescend, the Apostle gave them a rule, by which they, and all succeeding Christians ought to govern themselves. The rule was this, that *they should receive those whom God had received, however weak they might be in the faith*.

If then you reject from your communion those, whom, you think, God has received to his favor, you depart from that plain line, which the Apostle has marked for you. An opinion, or usage, which does not disqualify men for communion in heaven, does not disqualify them for communion on earth.

You say, perhaps, "that you will admit dissenting Christians to join with you in religious conferences, in social prayer and in hearing the word; and thus you shall comply with the Apostle's rule." But would you not admit *heathens* to as much fellowship as this? The apostolic rule respects the manner, in which *Christians* should treat one another. If you reject pious persons from the Lord's table, you do not receive them as *Christians*, and consequently you do not comply with the rule above mentioned.

Some will say, "If we receive to our communion those who retain what we deem an error, we make ourselves partakers with them in that error." But why, any more, than if you pray, or hear the word with them? As long as you adopt not the error in your own practice, your communion with them in ordinances will not make you partakers of the error. Our Savior's example will direct your conduct. The Jewish church, in his day, admitted many errors, which he condemned; but he had communion with that church in all the festivals which God had appointed. Was he partaker of their errors?

Attend to the example of the Apostles. It appears from the 15 and 21 chapters of the Acts, that the *Christian* church in Jerusalem, which consisted wholly of *Jews*, and the *Jewish* believers in those churches, which consisted partly of *Gentiles*, practised the circumcision of *infants*, and that they did it with the approbation of all the Apostles. It appears also that they did not practise this, as a rite of the *Mosaic* law (for it was not such, and when any used it as being such, the Apostles always condemned it;) but they practised it as a seal of the righteousness of faith, or of the covenant of grace. And yet the *Gentile* churches, which did not circumcise

their infants, had communion with this church, and this had communion with them, and the apostles had communion with them all.

But some say, "We think the dedication of children to God in baptism is a plain institution; and how can we receive as Christians those who neglect it?" If it appears that they neglect it in perverseness, you cannot receive them, nor will they ask you to receive them. Their contempt of one known institution, will be accompanied with an equal contempt of all others. But if you have reason to hope, that they act conscientiously, and that they err only through weakness of faith, or want of light, and not with a perverse and contemptuous mind, they are the persons, whom the Apostle directs you to receive.

Some, perhaps, will say on the other hand; "Baptism is a prerequisite to the supper; and we think infant baptism a nullity; and for us to receive those who have been baptized in infancy only, is to receive unbaptized persons." But you ought to consider, that they have had what *they* suppose to be Christian baptism. They do not treat baptism with contempt. They reverence it. And if they do not conform to your practice, it is because they think, they ought not. Therefore impute their supposed error to weakness, not to perverseness. You well know, that Christ did not, in all cases, require baptism as a prerequisite to communion at his table. His first disciples partook of his supper, at the time when he instituted it; and yet it is certain, that they had not received *Christian* baptism; for this was not instituted, until after Christ's resurrection. If they had received *John's* baptism (of which we have no evidence) yet this was not *Christian* baptism; for some of John's subjects were *afterward* baptized in the name of Christ. But they had doubtless been

circumcised in infancy. And as they had received the seal of the covenant then in use, no other external ceremony was required in order to their admission to Christ's table. This example will certainly justify you in receiving some who have been baptized only in infancy.

This is not a time, nor place to decide on the different opinions and usages of Christians: All that I intend by these examples is to shew, that a difference, which effects not the substance of religion, ought not to interrupt the communion of different sects.

If there be any Christian societies, which ought to put on candor and condescension, *this*, methinks, is one. Your cooperation in building this house, and your union in dedicating it to God, indicate an intention to be *one people*. But if you should be so unhappy as to divide upon that ordinance, which was instituted to be a mean and a bond of union, you can no longer be one. In both the denominations existing here, doubtless there are godly people, who will not easily forego the privilege of commemorating their Redeemer's death in the ordinance of the supper. If either of these should exclude the other, the Christians excluded will feel an obligation to seek the privilege by themselves, or in some church which will receive them. And a division in the church will tend to a dissolution of the society.

I have no disposition to set up one class of Christians above another—to pronounce one infallible, and another perversely heretical: But I wish to see among all good Christians the arms of charity extended to embrace one another—to see the strong bearing the infirmities of the weak, and each studying, not merely to please himself, but to please his neighbors for their good to edification; for even Christ pleased not himself.

It was with sensible pleasure, that I lately read the result of a large assembly of ministers, in one of our southern States, who were convened for the purpose of forming a union among Christians of different sects. The ministers convened were *Presbyterians, Baptists* and *Methodists*. After joint prayer and friendly conference, they unanimously agreed, that their different sentiments and usages ought not to interrupt *Ministerial* or *Christian communion*—that the churches of the several denominations ought to harmonize as churches of the same denomination—that members from a church of one denomination, on recommendation from the church, of which they were members, ought to be received to *stated*, as well as *occasional* communion, in the churches of either of the other denominations—and that they would use their influence to extend this charitable intercourse. This resolution seems to have originated in the remarkable attention to religion, which had been lately awakened in those parts. And it is certain, that where real religion prevails, brotherly love will abound, and that a just regard to, and concern for the great interests of the gospel will absorb the zeal of particular sects for their respective peculiarities.

And here I cannot forbear to communicate to you the excellent sentiments of Mr. *Hall*, a distinguished Baptist minister, in his preface to a sermon lately preached at Cambridge in England. Speaking of the opposition made to the gospel by modern Deists and Atheists, he says, “ At such a crisis as this, is it not best for Christians of all denominations, that they may better concentrate their forces against the common adversary, to suspend for the present their internal disputes, imitating the policy of wise states, who have never failed to consider the invasion of an enemy as the signal for terminating the contests of

party? Internal peace is the best fruit, which we can reap from external danger. The momentous contest at issue between the Christian church and infidels may instruct us, how trivial, for the most part, are the controversies of its members with each other; and that the different ceremonies, opinions and practices, by which they are distinguished; correspond to the variety of feature and complexion discernable in the offspring of the same parent, among whom there subsists the greatest family likeness." He adds; "May it please God so to dispose the minds of Christians of every visible church and communion, that Ephraim shall no longer envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim, and the only rivalry felt in future shall be, who shall most advance the interests of our common Christianity, and the only provocation sustained shall be that of provoking each other to love and good works."

These sentiments deserve our general attention; and surely you cannot think them unworthy of your particular attention in a situation so delicate, as yours; and on an occasion so serious, as the present.

To this advice of an eminent preacher, I will add that of an inspired apostle in a case similar to this under consideration.

Saint Paul thus addresses the Corinthians, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there be no divisions among you—for it hath been declared unto me, that there are contentions among you. Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephass, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?—I have not baptized in my own name?" The apostle here teaches them, that, as they were *baptized in the name of Christ*, they were all one

body, and so members one of another: If then they made the different circumstances of their baptism a cause of disunion, and a badge of distinct sects, they perverted one great design of it; and their pretended baptism into Christ, was only baptism into a *sect*.

Some of you, my brethren, think that adults only are subjects of baptism, and that immersion is the proper mode of administration. Others are persuaded, that the children of believers are proper subjects, and the affusion of water a scriptural mode of baptism. But whatever be the manner, or the age, in which you received baptism, ye were all baptized in the name of *Christ*, not in the name of a *sect*. "Endeavor then to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; for there is one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of you all."

You all plead for liberty of conscience in this matter. Let all enjoy it. If you exclude Christians from your communion, because they were not baptized just as you were, you deny them the liberty which you claim; you erect in Christ's kingdom a despotism, which the benevolent spirit of his religion abhors; you introduce a species of persecution into his church; for you inflict the highest punishment known in his kingdom on earth, exclusion from Christian privileges, merely for a supposed error in the circumstances of an institution, when still you believe, the heart is right.

My brethren; you are assembled to dedicate this house to God. But what is it that you dedicate to him? Not merely stone and timber, naked walls and empty seats. With the house you dedicate yourselves, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable.—This is a reasonable service. If this house is in future to be the Lord's, use it, as the Lord's, for his glory, and according to his will. Here maintain and

attend his instituted worship and ordinances. Here seek your own and the common edification in knowledge, charity and holiness. You now stand by God's altar to make a covenant with him. The covenant is, that you will walk in his commandments, and keep them with all your hearts. Abide in this covenant, and depart not from it all the days of your life. Here renounce all the vanities of an ensnaring world, and all the licentious opinions and manners of a guilty age. Choose the Lord to be your God, Christ to be your Savior, the Spirit to be your Sanctifier, and the gospel to be your guide. If it seem evil to others to serve the Lord, yet for yourselves and you houses resolve, that *you* will serve him. Cultivate religion in your hearts, display it in your lives, maintain it in your families, transmit it to your children.

You erected this house, not merely for yourselves, but for those, who shall live when you are gone. But what benefit will they receive from it, if they come forward into life without a regard to God and his word? Whether they shall grow up in ignorance and vice, or in knowledge and virtue, will much depend on the education, which they receive from you. Instruct them in religion at home, injoin their attendance at the sanctuary, exhibit to them the beauties of religion in your conversation, commend them to the grace of God in your prayers.

My dear young friends; Look on this house: See what your fathers have been doing. They certainly aimed at your edification and salvation. Let not their pious and benevolent intention be defeated. Reverence the sanctuary of God; worship him in the beauty of holiness; cultivate an acquaintance with his word, seek salvation through his Son; make your souls your chief care, and religion your daily practice; subscribe with your hands to the Lord;

and cease to hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge. If you hear any speak lightly of your bible, disrespectfully of your Savior, contemptuously of God's sabbath and ordinances; turn away your ears with pious indignation; and say to all such evil doers and vain talkers, "Depart from us; we will keep the commandments of our God." Attend to the counsels of your parents; seek instruction from their lips; join in the family devotions; pray in your closets; be conversant with the scriptures; and, as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. In a word, make religion your early choice; then will you rejoice all your days, your end will be peace, and your eternity will be glorious.

It is probable, I shall never speak to this assembly again. What I have spoken is from the fulness of my heart. May it be seriously received, candidly reviewed, and faithfully applied.

And the Lord give you understanding in all things.



S E R M O N XIII.



The Importunate Friend, or the Efficacy of Prayer.



LUKE xi. 5—10.

And he said unto them, which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him: And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

AS Jesus was praying in a certain place, one of his disciples, affected, no doubt, with the prayer which he heard, requested his Lord to teach them to pray. On this occasion Jesus gave them that form, which is commonly called *the Lord's Prayer*, and which is recorded in the verses preceding our text.

When he had taught them in what *manner* they should pray, he judged it proper to place before them such a *motive* to the duty, as was suited to operate on their minds. The motive is taken from the power and goodness of God to answer prayer. And what other motive can we need? We all have our wants; and wants which we feel. Now if we believe, that God is able and ready to supply our wants, what should hinder us from applying to him? If we need a favor, and may have it for asking, what more reasonable than prayer? Can we desire the favor on easier terms?

The great hindrance to prayer is unbelief. We do not fully believe, or sensibly realize that our prayers will avail; and therefore we pray with coldness, or but seldom, or perhaps not at all. To convince us that God will answer our importunate prayers, Christ refers us to our experience of *human* goodness. If there is goodness in men, there is more in God; and if our earnest petitions will prevail with them, much rather will they prevail with him.

To illustrate this argument, our Lord states a familiar case. You have a friend in your neighborhood, to whose goodness, in cases of necessity, you have been wont to resort. You go to him at midnight, and ask the loan of a little bread to refresh a friend, who has called upon you at an unseasonable hour, and at a time too, when you happen to be unprovided for his entertainment. The case is not of the most urgent kind. If you had been burnt out in the night, your friend, on the first notice, would open his door to you. If robbers had broken in upon you, he would immediately fly to your defence. Or if your children were starving for want, he would not hesitate to send them a supply. But all which you plead is, that a friend has called upon you at a

late hour, and chooses some refreshment now, rather than wait till morning.

Your neighbor hears your story, and begs you not to disturb him on so small an occasion. It is midnight, when sleep is sweet and profound : His doors are shut, and he chooses not to open them at this time of night : His family too are in bed, and he cannot rise without disturbing them, as well as himself. And he tells you not to trouble him any farther. But you do not desist : You feel a desire to obtain a supply : You repeat, and press your application, and at last prevail. Now though he will not rise and give you on the score of friendship, yet, because of your importunity, he will rise, and give you as much as you need.

You place much confidence in human goodness. If you need any thing which a neighbor can easily spare, you go and ask it of him. If your request is not promptly granted, you repeat it, in hope that importunity will succeed. Why then will you not apply to God ; and apply to him often ? Why will you not be fervent in your application ? You certainly have a better prospect of success at his throne, than at your neighbor's door.

That we may perceive the force of this argument, let it be considered,

1. That there is infinitely more goodness in God, than there is in men.

There is, indeed, some goodness in men ; else there would be an end of all mutual confidence. Natural compassion will prompt men to relieve distress, even in a stranger, and sometimes in an enemy. Friendship will do more : It will encounter difficulties, and run hazards in discharge of its offices. Parental affection will do much more than common friendship. But our Savior says, that parents, with all their goodness, are but evil in comparison with

God. "If ye, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them, who ask him?"

God manifests his goodness in his common providence. "His tender mercies are over all his works." "The whole earth is full of his riches." Can we doubt of success in applying to that Being, whose kindness and bounty are every where displayed before us? Consider the fowls of heaven, and the beasts of the field. God hears them when they cry, and feeds them when they are hungry. Will he not much rather hear our humble prayers, and satisfy our reasonable desires?

A still more wonderful proof of his goodness has he given in the grand scheme of our redemption by Jesus Christ. "And he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

2. God sustains a nearer and more important relation to us, than man sustains to man.

In the parable under consideration, the applicant hoped to succeed on the foot of friendship. God condescends to own us, not as friends merely, but as children. He is our Father in a more eminent sense, than any human being can be. He has not only brought us into this world, but given us our existence—created us from nothing. If a man will voluntarily do offices of kindness for particular friends—if a parent will attend to the urgent necessities of children; surely God will have a desire to the works of his own hands.

3. We are encouraged to prayer by the commands and promises of God.

The man, who applied to his neighbor for bread, pleaded no invitation before sent to him—no promise previously made to him. We may plead both.

“ Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you.” “ Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find.” God hath not said to us, “ Seek ye me in vain.” “ None that trust in him shall be desolate.”

4. God can grant our requests without trouble to himself.

The man in our story could not relieve his friend's wants without some disquietude and selfdenial. It was midnight, his doors were shut, and his children were with him in bed ; and he says, trouble me not. And yet he was prevailed upon by importunity. God clearly discerns our wants. He hears us in every place, and whenever we call. He does good to us with infinite ease to himself. There is no night in heaven. He never slumbers nor sleeps. The door, which leads to his throne is opened at our call. There is with him a full sufficiency for all his creatures. He gives without diminishing his store. He can do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask ; and for as many as ask he can do the same, without withholding from us. May we not place confidence in such a Being ?

5. The things for which we pray are more important in themselves, and more necessary for us, than that, which the man requested of his friend.

This was not a remedy for sickness, or food for his children, but refreshment for a traveller. The things which we ask of God, are direction in duty, defence in temptation, mercy to pardon our sins, and grace to fit us for heaven. These are matters of indispensable necessity. If one neighbor will give another the *conveniences*, which he asks ; may we not believe, that a God of infinite goodness will hear our prayers, when we seek the things which are really *needful* ?

In every view of the case, we have vastly more encouragement to go to God in prayer, than the man in this parable had to go to his neighbor for bread. He succeeded by importunity. Surely our importunity at the throne of God will not be rejected.

We have stated our Lord's argument. We will now attend to the instructions, which the story suggests.

1. Our Savior here recommends *importunity* in prayer. This implies *earnestness* and *perseverance*. *These* will usually accompany each other. The man in the parable repeated and urged his request, after he seemed to have met with a denial. Thus he prevailed. We are directed to pray always, and not to faint; to continue instant in prayer, and to watch thereunto with all perseverance. In the application of the parable, our Savior says, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." To express earnestness in prayer, Christ uses the metaphor of *knocking*, in allusion to his preceding story of the man, who called and knocked at his neighbor's door, until he gained admittance.

It will, perhaps, be asked, "Does not God know our wants? And is he not infinitely good? What need then of *importunity* in prayer?" But as well may it be asked, What need of *any prayer*? If we are dependent on God, our supplies must come from him. And if we believe our dependence, our desires must be directed to him. If we ought to desire the things, which we need, we ought to direct our desires to God, from whom comes every good gift; that is, we ought to pray for them. If the things which we desire, are great and important our desires should be earnest, and our prayers urgent and persevering. To express warm desires in a cold, indifferent prayer, is impossible. Where there is

earnestness of desire, there will be perseverance in prayer. As long as the mercy is withheld, and hope remains, the application will be continued.

God has so constituted things in this world, that the diligent use of means, in conjunction with prayer, is necessary to our obtaining the gifts of providence and of grace. Where means are in our hands, we are not to expect the end merely by prayer, without using the means. And the same earnest desire, which awakens importunate prayer, will excite our diligence in the duties, which ought to accompany it. If there is indifference in the former, there will be negligence in the latter.

If you ask, "What need of importunity in prayer?" you may as well ask, what need of diligence in your labors? You say, "God is good, and will do good without importunate prayers." Why do you not also say, God is bountiful, and will supply your wants without your diligent labors? Certainly he could as easily feed and clothe your bodies without your labors, as save your souls without your prayers. His goodness does not induce you to relax your labors for obtaining the things of this world; why should it supersede your prayers for obtaining the things of another world?

The truth is, God has required diligent labors, and fervent prayers, and both are useful in their place: And we are not to expect his favor in the neglect of the one, more than in the neglect of the other.

2. We are here taught, that our prayers should be for such things, as we *need*.

To illustrate God's goodness in hearing prayer, Jesus relates the story of the man, who in compliance with his neighbors importunity for bread, gave him as much as he *needed*. He here signifies, that the things which we may ask and expect from God, are

only such as we need. He cautions his disciples, not to take anxious thought for meat, drink and raiment; "for" says he, "your heavenly Father knoweth, that ye have need of these things; seek ye first the kingdom of God, and these things," i. e. the things which ye need, "shall be added."

With respect to worldly things, we are incompetent judges, what we do need. We may, however, ask the things, which we *think* we need; but we must ask them with humble submission to the wisdom of our heavenly Father. With respect to spiritual blessings, we know, or *ought* to know, what we need. And these things we are to ask with importunity. We need the pardon of our sins and the salvation of our souls—we need grace to lead us into truth, to assist us in duty, to sanctify us from our pollutions and to prepare us for heaven. These things we cannot seek with too great diligence, nor ask with too great importunity. Submission to the will of God, in seeking these, is to seek till we find.

3. We may remark here, that no time is unreasonable for applying to God in prayer.

The man, in our story, applied to his friend for bread, at midnight, when the doors were shut, and yet by importunity he obtained his object. "Ask," says our Lord, "and ye shall receive."

The throne of grace is always easy of access.—The door which leads to it, is readily opened to them, who knock. We need not wait for a more favorable time: Any time is favorable when our circumstances direct us, and our hearts incline us to prayer. David prayed at morning, noon and night; his eyes prevented the night watches; at midnight he arose to commune with God.

Are you under any affliction? Wait not to see what you can do, or what men can do for your relief: Repair to God immediately; he is a very

present help in trouble. Are you pressed with a sense of sin? Go, confess your sin to God. Wait not to know whether your repentance is sincere; but go with that sense of sin which you feel, and pray for that grace which you need. If God has wrought in you this sense of sin, you may ask him to perfect the work which he has begun. The present time is the accepted time. If you have desires of pardon and grace, you may express them in prayer. If it is not criminal to *have* the desires, it cannot be criminal to *express* them. Do you think they are too languid to be directed to God? Prayer perhaps will enliven them. If you wait to enliven them without prayer, perhaps you will lose them for want of prayer.

You fear, that you are not in a state of friendship with God, and that your prayers will not be regarded. But will you never pray, until this matter is ascertained? A prayerless person is not a friend of God.

They who love God supremely, and are reconciled to him in their hearts, have, indeed, a peculiar interest in his favor, and special assurance of success at his throne. But he who hears the ravens when they cry, may, and often does, hear the cries of sinners in their trouble, especially in that trouble, which arises from a conviction of their sins, and from a fear of the wrath to come. The same grace which awakens them to prayer, attends to the prayer which they make. The householder arose and gave his supplicant the bread which he needed, not because he was his friend, but because of his importunity. In order to judge, whether we may pray with hope of success, we are not to wait till we can ascertain our habitual friendship with God; but we are to inquire, whether we have real desires of the things which we ask, and whether these are such things as

we need. If we are convinced of our past enmity to God, and desire to come into friendship with him, we doubtless have encouragement to call on his name.

4. We may farther remark, how familiar and convincing is our Savior's manner of instruction.

He never deals in dry and abstruse reasoning; but draws his arguments from nature; he appeals directly to our experience and our feelings. The single argument in our text, taken from common humanity, has more force to convince a serious mind, that God will hear prayer, than a whole volume of nice and refined speculations. It is an argument, not only seen by the understanding, but felt by the heart. It gives an answer to all the objections of the timorous, or the cavilling mind.

If you think prayer is needless, because God is too wise to be informed, and too good to need importunity, read this story. The power and goodness of men is a reason, why we do apply to them—not a reason why we neglect to apply to them. Or if you think your prayers are useless, because God is great and holy, and you are mean and sinful; read the story again; and apply it, as you read it. The more perfect is the character of your neighbor and the more urgent your necessity, the greater is your inclination and encouragement to lay open your case to him. Adopt then our Lord's conclusion, "Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Farther to dispel your fears and strengthen your hopes, read the argument which immediately follows. "If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? Or if he ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil know how to give good things to your

children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him ?”

5. How great is our privilege? How favorable our situation? A God of infinite wisdom, goodness and power is always near us, watching, protecting and supplying us. He holds forth to our view the richest blessings, pardon, peace, life and glory. By the voice of his Son, he proclaims, “ Ask, and ye shall receive.” Would we receive on more moderate terms? There must indeed be importunity in prayer, and diligence in other concurrent duties. But is this a hardship? Contemplate the blessings, and your own wants: Can you fail to be importunate and diligent? What? Will you think of guilt, and not be solicitous of pardon? Will you think of an eternal existence, and not be diligent to obtain happiness? Will you think of human weakness, and not be fervent in seeking grace? Think of riches and honors you may, and be indifferent. But will you be indifferent in matters which relate to eternity? If you make the required diligence and importunity a matter of complaint, you spurn the blessings which are offered you.

6. The story under consideration shews the reasonableness of religion at large, as well as of prayer in particular.

We all feel a dependence. In our troubles we resort somewhere for help. The man who wanted bread, went to a friend, who was able to supply him. And he did, as all men do. Hence our Savior teaches us, that we are much rather to make known our requests to God. And if we are to apply to him in want, we are to please him in all things.

However indifferent men are to religion, yet their consciences testify, and their feelings demonstrate its truth and importance.

No man ever discarded religion on a calm persua-

sion, that it is injurious to mankind, hurtful to their interest, or degrading to their dignity. It is the corruption of the heart, that excites opposition to it. But after all, there remains an inward apprehension, that it may be true and important, and a secret self-condemnation for the enmity which is felt.

The vilest despiser of religion would choose to be placed among honest and virtuous neighbors, and to be reputed by them, as one of the same good character. Such are the men to whom he applies for help in trouble, and in whom he confides for the redress of injuries, and for protection from wrongs; and not the men like himself. These, in his private concerns, he always distrusts.

When his friends die, he does not love to view them as numbered among the beasts in the dust, nor will he tumble them into the dust among the beasts, without any religious solemnity. There is, in his breast, a hope, which follows them to a better world. He does not attempt to console himself by a recollection of their vices and immoralities, but by a remembrance of their amiable and virtuous actions. You never knew a man, who, when he had lost a son, or a brother, would sit down among his condoling neighbors, and tell them, what comfort he felt in thinking, that this son, or brother was distinguished in his life, by gambling, dissipation, profaneness, and the arts of fraud and villany. His conversation, at this time, takes quite another turn. He details, with a sensible pleasure, the virtuous qualities, useful actions, and promising dispositions, which he had observed in this friend. And he is pleased with the voice, which echoes to his own. This is a plain evidence, that in his most serious hours, he cannot but think, there is, after death, another state, in which virtue, piety and goodness will be happy. If he soberly believed, that there

was no truth or solidity in religion—no essential difference between sin and holiness—no future retribution; but that, at death, all would cease to exist, or be alike happy; why is he not as well pleased with recounting the vices, as the virtues of his deceased friends?

There is a story recorded in the book of Acts much to our purpose. A woman named Tabitha died at Joppa. This woman was full of good works and aims deeds, which she did for the poor. Soon after her death, the apostle Peter came to the house; and the friends of the deceased took him into the chamber, where her corpse lay; and they stood by him weeping, and shewed him the coats and garments, which she made, while she was alive, to distribute among the poor. They took a mournful pleasure in contemplating and relating her past works of charity and goodness.

This sentiment is not peculiar to the godly: It is common to mankind. It is a sentiment wrought in us by the Author of nature to be a standing monitor of a future state, and of the necessity of religion to future happiness.

When we hear of the death of a person, whom we knew, it is a common inquiry, how he felt in his sickness, and what views he had of another world. If a child or near friend is taken from us, we catch hold of every pious expression which dropt from him in his sickness, and apply it to strengthen our hope, that he died in the exercise of religion. We observe, with attention, every cast of the countenance, every motion of the hand, every elevation of the eyes, which seems to indicate the exercise of devotion; and hence we encourage a persuasion, that he died in faith, commending himself to the mercy of God. Even they, who in the ordinary course of life, discover no great regard to religion, will make

such observations on their dying friends. Hence it appears, that all men, when their minds are softened, composed and solemnized by an afflicting providence, unavoidably entertain a sense, that there is a future state, and that religion is the one thing needful.

7. We will make one reflection more and conclude. How different is the treatment, which Christ gives to us, from that which we give to him !

When we knock at his door, he readily opens to us. He makes us welcome to his arms—takes us into his chambers—stretches over us the banner of his love—spreads a feast before us, and bids us eat abundantly, without money and without price. But when he comes to the door of sinners—when he knocks and urges for admission—when he calls to them, “Open the door, and I will come in and sup with you ;” do they as readily open to him ? Nay ; they often spurn him from their door. There are some, who bid him depart out of their coasts.

May he not often complain even of his professed friends. To them he calls in such language as this ; “Open to me, my love, my undefiled, for while I wait at the door, my head is wet with the dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.” But how indifferent and thankless is the answer too often returned. “I have put off my coat for repose ; how shall I put it on to meet thee ? I have washed my feet for my bed ; how shall I tread the floor and defile them, to let thee in ?”

Could such ingratitude be expected from those, who have experienced the grace of Christ in their application to him ?

Remember, my Christian friends, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Christ in the wilderness. Remember your former fears and distresses under a conviction

of your sins. Remember what earnest applications you made to your Savior, and what kind answers, in due time, you received. Remember what comfort you felt, when you could call him your Savior and friend, and could appropriate the evidences and tokens of his love. Remember your former zeal for his service, and your professed dedication to him. Has your zeal languished, and your love waxed cold? Remember, how you have received and heard—how you have resolved and promised; and hold fast and repent. If *sinner*s treat with indifference the calls and invitations of the Savior; yet who would expect this from *you*? Did you not promise, that you would be holiness to the Lord, and that all your works, like the first fruits, should be consecrated to him? What iniquity have ye found in him, that you should depart from him and walk after vanity? I beseech you by the mercies of Christ, by your own experience of his mercies, and by the promises, which you have made, that you present yourselves living sacrifices holy and acceptable which is your reasonable service.

Now the Lord establish hearts unblameable in holiness before God, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.



SERMON XIV.

*Avarice and Dishonesty covered with the Pretext
of Prudence and Charity.*



MATTHEW xxvi. 8.

—*To what purpose is this waste?*

A SERIOUS question, one would at first suppose, importing a prudent concern, lest the bounties of heaven be misapplied or thrown away. And certainly the blessings, which God bestows, ought to be received with thankfulness, and used with discretion. In the present case, however, the complaint was without foundation: It proceeded wholly from dishonesty and avarice; not from benevolence and gratitude. The occasion of it was a costly offering which a godly woman made in honor of the Savior.

As Jesus was sitting at table in the house of a friend, named Simon, there came a woman with a box of precious ointment, which she poured on Jesus' head, in testimony of her esteem of him, love to him, and faith in him. There were others at the table; but *him* she distinguished from all the rest by this peculiar token of regard. If the disciples right-

ly calculated the value of the ointment, when they said, "It might have been sold for three hundred pence," it was certainly a precious offering; for three hundred Roman pence were in value equal to about ten pounds sterling. Precious as it was, Jesus, whose frugality never suffered the fragments of a meal to be lost, did not consider this as a waste of property; for he justified the woman's conduct against those who complained of it: "Why trouble ye the woman? She hath wrought a good work upon me."

In the eastern countries it was a custom for a people, at entertainments, to pour fragrant oils on such guests as they designed to honor. To this usage there is an allusion in the fortyfifth Psalm; "God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows:" And in the twentythird Psalm; "Thou preparest my table, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over."

By pouring this ointment on Jesus, the woman expressed her sense of his high dignity, as the Son of God, the promised Redeemer, "who was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them who are bound."

Honor paid to this Savior is here called "a good work."

Neither institution, nor custom requires of us the particular offering made by this woman. And as Christ is no longer on earth, we cannot directly address him with the ceremony which she used. There are other ways, however, in which we may honor him with as much significance, and to as good acceptance, as she did. Our profession of his gospel, obedience to his precepts, imitation of his virtues, zeal in his cause, support of his worship, attendance on his ordinances, liberality to his friends,

forgiveness of enemies, and peaceableness toward all men, will be like ointment and perfume to rejoice his heart. The savor of our graces and good works will be more precious to him than ointment poured forth.

When the woman poured the rich oil on Christ's head, "the *disciples*, seeing what was done, had indignation." Mark says, "There were *some* who had indignation." John mentions only *Judas* as complaining of the waste. Judas probably was the first, who objected, and his brethren, some or all of them, soon fell in with him. Judas was a plausible creature, and by his art and address he had gained great influence among the disciples. His duplicity he covered with such a fair outside, that they all were carried away with his dissimulation. They trusted him with the stewardship of the family, and probably thought it unnecessary to reckon with him. They had full confidence of his virtue and fidelity. When Christ warned them that there was a traitor among them, none suspected *Judas*, each sooner suspected himself.

On the present occasion, his influence was sufficient to raise among his brethren a clamor against a good woman for the honor which she paid to the Savior.

There are many, besides this hypocritical disciple, who deem every thing wasted and lost, which is applied to the honor of Christ's name, and laid out in the support of his religion. It is in the Christian, as it was in the prophetic age; there are some who say, "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the sabbath that we may set forth wheat?" They call the worship of God contemptible, and they say, "What a weariness is it?" They withhold the offerings of God's house, or bring the torn and the lame for sacrifice. They

either forsake the assembling of themselves together, or draw nigh to God with their mouth, and honor him with their lips, when their heart is far from him, What are these better than the disciple, who pronounced it a waste to honor Christ with sweet ointment?

But the man, it seems, had thought of a better way to dispose of the ointment. "It might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." A very plausible suggestion. The poor, besure, ought to be kindly remembered. What is bestowed on them in Christ's name, he accepts as given to himself. Beneficence to them he has enjoined by his precepts, and recommended by his example. When he said to Judas, in reference to his intended treachery, "What thou dost, do quickly," the other disciples supposed, that he commanded Judas to buy something for the passover, or give something to the poor. It hence appears, that Christ often gave alms, and that Judas was usually his almoner. Our Lord, though he supplied not his own wants by miracles, yet sometimes wrought miracles to feed the hungry. The disciples, therefore, would naturally suppose, that alms given to the poor was property well bestowed. Now when Judas insinuated, that it had been better to sell this ointment for the benefit of the poor, than to waste it on Christ's head, no wonder if some of his honest brethren were deceived by the argument.

The truth is, the poor are intitled to our attention; and so is the honor of Christ's religion. Each is to have its place, and neither of them to exclude the other. Christ condemns the pharisees, because, when they tythed mint, anise and cummin, they neglected justice, mercy and the love of God. "These," says he, "ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

You sometimes excuse yourselves from this, and that known duty by alleging the superior importance of another. But before you rest satisfied with the excuse, ask yourselves whether you make it in sincerity, or only in pretence. To determine this question, inquire whether you are careful to perform this more important duty. If you neglect this, as well as the other, there is no honesty in your excuse. You say, that God will have mercy rather than sacrifice. It is very true; but if you will neither shew mercy, nor offer sacrifice, this rule is nothing to *your* purpose. Before you apply this as your justification in omitting sacrifice, go and shew mercy. You withhold from your Lord the honor due to his worship and ordinances, because you have the poor with you. But how much have you done for the poor? Has your liberality to them been so great, as to disable you from the service which you wish to perform for him? Did you ever think of this and that poor man, before you had occasion for an excuse from some urgent duty? And after all you can say, is it not plain, that you can help your poor neighbors quite as much as you wish, and still honor the Lord with your substance as much as he requires?

In excuse for omitting the stated worship of the Lord's day, you perhaps plead, that the labors of the preceding week oblige you to rest on this day—that distance and other inconveniences render your attendance at the place of worship very difficult—that if you employ your time in religious exercises at home, you may be as much edified and as well accepted, as if you joined in the devotions of the church.

When you endeavor thus to pacify your consciences, I advise you to inquire, whether you are consistent with yourselves. If you spend the sab-

bath in exercises as laborious, as those of the sanctuary, then it is not for the sake of *rest*, that you decline the latter. If you can break through the difficulties of distance, rough ways and bad weather, in obedience to the calls of the world, and the solicitations of pleasure, then these difficulties are not the main obstructions to your regular attendance on God's worship. If your time on the Lord's day is spent in slumber, diversion, labor, or in reading novels and romances, then no more pretend that you absent yourselves from God's house for the sake of private devotion and spiritual edification.

Seasons of occasional worship are generally disregarded. You will say, as almost every body else says, "Lectures may be useful; it is well to continue them; we should be sorry to hear that they were laid aside. But as they are not directly instituted and expressly commanded in scripture, we view them as matters of expedience only, not as matters of necessity; and when our worldly convenience will not comport with our attendance upon them, we suppose, we have a right to omit them." Be it so. But let me ask you, Do you never omit them, except when worldly convenience will *not* comport with your attendance? At the time when your business has detained you from a lecture, could you not have left this same business to receive or give a visit—to attend a festivity—to enjoy an amusement—or to gratify your curiosity in seeing a ropedancer, a lion or puppet show?—If your conduct is not consistent with itself, your pretensions are not sincere. If you omit this, or that duty, because there are others, which you esteem more important, go and do the latter; and then probably you will find that you can do the former also.

John has remarked, that Judas pleaded in behalf of the poor, "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." Judas does not ask, "Why did not the woman, instead of buying the ointment, give *her* money to the poor?" This would not have answered his purpose. But he asks, "Why was not the ointment *sold*, and the *proceeds* sequestered for the poor?" Then the money would have been put into his hands; and he could have applied it to his own use, and said, he had given it to the poor. He was capable of this duplicity. "He was a thief;" and well he knew how to peculate from the common treasury, of which he had the charge.

Many will plead the cause of the poor, when they can thus serve their own interest. The poor have always had more advocates than benefactors.

The most illiberal and selfish wretch you can find, will earnestly recommend charity to the poor, if he sees a channel by which this charity will run into his own coffers, or if he hopes, that, by expatiating on the distresses of the poor, he can decently turn off a demand made on his own purse for some public service.

All vice is so palpably wrong, that few care to avow it in its own proper colors. The man who has determined to do an unworthy action, studies to throw over it a veil, which may conceal it from the public eye. The forms of piety and charity are often assumed merely as cloaks to cover the detestable designs of selfishness and pride. The pharisees made long prayers, that they might devour widow's houses. They gave alms by sound of trumpet, that the ostentation of benevolence might prevent a suspicion of covetousness, and that the show of liberality might facilitate the success of their rapacity. Jehu proclaimed his zeal for the Lord, that he might more surely execute his ambitious and cruel inten-

tion to mount the throne, and cut off the family of Ahab. Judas seemed to have a great concern for the poor, when he was contriving to get into his hands a purse of three hundred pence. But if the woman's ointment had been sold, and the money put into his bag, the poor might have starved for him. He managed his hypocrisy however with such address as to deceive the credulity, and abuse the confidence of his honest brethren. Had they seen the avarice which lay concealed under the mask of charity, their indignation would have been directed against his duplicity, rather than against the woman's piety.

If a pious or useful design is in contemplation, which will be attended with some expense—such as erecting a decent church for the worship of God; providing a competent support for Christ's minister's, when they are depressed by a change of times; or increasing the endowments of schools for the better edification of youth; the man, who to save his own money, wishes to defeat the good design, thinks of no objections more plausible and popular, than those which are drawn from the necessities and inabilities of the *poor*. Thus the institutions, which were intended especially for *their* benefit, he labors to defraud for their dear sakes. This pretence of compassion for the poor, the miserable stalking horse of every wealthy hypocrite, has been so hackneyed from Judas's time to the present day, that a man more honest than Judas will be ashamed to take it into his service. But the man, who, to defeat a laudable design, not only pleads compassion for the poor, but endeavors, by the bugbear of expense, to alarm the poor themselves and draw them over to his party, might put even Judas to the blush. Here the traitor's hypocrisy is fairly outdone.

A hypocrite may carry his artifice so far, as to deceive himself, as well as others. “ Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” The pharisees, who did all their works to be seen of men, trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and despised others. They talked so often, and disputed so warmly, and made so much parade about religion, in order to raise their own reputation, that, after a while, they became fully established in a confidence of their own superior goodness ; and they rejected with disdain the modest souls, who were afraid to pretend to more religion than they had.

There are those, who think themselves to be something, when they are nothing ; and who seem to themselves to be religious, when all their religion is vain. Beware, then, of hypocrisy in its lowest degree ; shun every art of religious deception, lest, while you study to deceive others for your temporal advantage, you deceive yourselves to your eternal destruction.

Jesus, when he heard the complaint against the woman, rejected it with marks of displeasure, and gave his open approbation of her piety. “ Why trouble ye the woman ? She hath wrought a good work upon me.”

Be always ready to defend the injured character, and the misrepresented conduct of your virtuous, unoffending neighbors. It is not enough that you never speak evil of them : You must vindicate them from the attacks of envy and malice. If you hear a slander uttered, your silence will patronize and encourage it. Though no vice is more mischievous in its effects, yet none is more freely and frequently practised, than this of evil speaking ; for though all pretend to reprobate it, yet few have the boldness to

rebuke it on the spot; and many hear it with smiles of approbation and pleasure. Let Christians imitate their Lord's example, in frowning on the slanderer, and vindicating the innocent; and soon the malignant tongue will be put to silence, and drooping virtue will raise her head.

“Why trouble ye the woman?”—Reproach is troublesome to those on whom it falls: We feel it to be so, when it falls on us, though, perhaps, we cast it on our neighbor with pleasure. But has nobody feelings, but we? Let us put ourselves in our neighbor's place. Let us ask our hearts, how it feels, to have our well meant actions perverted—our faithful services despised—our innocent words wrested—our honest intentions misconstrued—our disinterested beneficence abused—our solicited confidence disappointed—our good names defamed?—As this feels to us, just so it feels to him. Let us treat him, as we wish all men to treat us.

Our Lord says, “She hath poured this ointment on my body against the day of my burying.”

It was the custom of the Jews to anoint the bodies of their dead, before they committed them to the grave. In conformity to this usage, Nicodemus, after Jesus was crucified, brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and took his body and wound it in linen clothes with the spices. In embalming the dead, the Jews applied a composition of aromatic ointments, which they poured and rubbed on the corpses more or less plentifully according to their abilities, and the respect they had for the deceased. After the unction they covered the bodies with a shroud, which they bound with swathes and bandages. It is said of king Asa, “They buried him in a bed, which was filled with sweet odors, and divers kinds of spices, prepared by the apothecaries

art." In allusion to this custom our Savior says, the woman had kept the ointment against the day of his burying, which was then just at hand—within two or three days. It is not probable, that she knew his death to be so near, or had a direct intention to prepare his body, by this unction, for its interment. But it was ordered in providence, that this respectful ceremony should be performed just before the time of his death; that its near resemblance to the Jews' manner of burying might give it the appearance and effect of a preparation for his solemn entombment. We may therefore understand the Savior, as speaking to this purpose; "If you think it but a decent token of respect for a deceased friend to anoint his body before you lay it in the grave; blame not this woman, who has paid the same respect to me."

To shew the unreasonableness of the suggestion, that the ointment would better have been applied to the relief of the poor, Jesus says, "The poor ye have always with you, and, when ye will, ye may do them good; but me ye have not always." It is as if he had said, "Charity to the poor, is, indeed, a great duty; but there is a time for every purpose. God has so ordered the state of the world, that there will always be poor people in it; and if you have hearts disposed to charity, you will never be in doubt for objects, to whom your charity may be exercised. But I shall soon be removed from you. Such kind of personal honor and respect as this woman has shewn, must be paid me now, or not at all. The poor you may relieve on another day: 'This day is the time to express your love to me.'"

Our Savior teaches us, that we must do every duty in its season. On this circumstance much depend the virtue, beauty and usefulness of all our

actions. There is a time for every purpose. In the day of prosperity we may rejoice.—In the day of adversity we must consider. When we are afflicted we must pray. When we are cheerful we must give praise. There is a time, when we are to join with others in the worship of God, and a time when we are to labor in our worldly calling. There is a time when we are to pay honor to Christ, and a time when we are to shew mercy to the poor. The righteous man orders his affairs with discretion. He so arranges his business, and divides his time, that every part of his duty finds a time in which it may be done, and every portion of his time finds a duty in which it may be employed.

To make the disciples more sensible of their mistake in censuring this woman, he assures them, that, how much soever they might condemn her, her piety would be celebrated through the world, and live in the memory of future ages. Eminent virtue draws the attention, and excites the admiration of mankind in distant periods of time, and in all places of the earth. “Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also that, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

Those who honor Christ, he will honor: They who despise him, will be lightly esteemed. Every thing which we do for the glory of his name, and the advancement of his cause, will redound to our honor and happiness, both in the present, and the future world. The piety of this woman is recorded to her praise in the history of the gospel; and it is spread as far as the gospel goes, and will be remembered as long as the gospel lasts.

Our zeal and liberality to support Christ's cause, when many forsake it, or withdraw their aid from it through a love of the present world—our fortitude

and resolution to persevere in his service, when few will serve with us, and many oppose and reproach us—our patience under all our discouragements from the malignity of his enemies and the coldness of his friends, will entitle us, not only to honor on earth, but to distinguished glory in heaven.

Be not weary in well doing ; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not. Be faithful to the death, and ye shall receive a crown of life.



S E R M O N XV.



The Wisdom and Importance of Religion.



PROVERBS iv. 7.

Wisdom is the principal thing ; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy gettings get understanding.

WE all know, that in the sacred scriptures, and particularly in the writings of David and Solomon, wisdom or understanding usually signifies virtue and piety. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Of this wisdom St. James has given us a complete description. “Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you ? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” “The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

Religion is called wisdom, because it is a prosecution of the best and greatest end by the application of suitable means.

As we are rational and immortal beings, designed in this world only for a *temporary*, but in the other for an *eternal* existence, the most important object that we can contemplate and propose, is the happiness of the world to come. That happiness can be obtained only by a heart conformed to the character, a will subjected to the authority, and a life devoted to the service of our Creator. This is religion, and this is wisdom.

Religion is a reasonable service. Our belief of it must be founded in an evidence of its truth and reality ; our choice of it must result from a conviction of its goodness and importance ; and our practice of it must be directed by just views of God, of ourselves, of the relations we sustain, and of the obligations resulting from those relations.

As we are guilty and impotent creatures, our religion must begin in repentance of sins that are past, and a purpose of future obedience, in an application to God's mercy for pardon, and a reliance on his grace for help. The fruits of this repentance are watchfulness against sin and temptation, and a carefulness to please God in all holy conversation.

The means of religion are the word, worship and ordinances of God. In an attendance on these we are to seek the aids of divine grace, make improvements in knowledge, and bring into operation the great motives to duty.

We are not to imagine, that the religion, which God approves, and with which salvation is connected, consists merely in devotional exercises, or merely in social virtues, or merely in sober and temperate manners. It comprehends them all : It comprehends every thing that is excellent and good. It includes rectitude of temper, love to God, faith in the Redeemer, benevolence to mankind, the government of the heart, heavenly affections, and holiness

of life. In subservience to these it requires an attendance on devotional duties.

Some, who, under religious impressions, engage with warmth in the work of their salvation, entertain too partial ideas of this work. They imagine, that what principally concerns them, at present, is to discontinue their former pleasures and amusements, and to attend on devotional exercises with unusual frequency and diligence; and they expect, that, in this way, they shall soon receive the comforts of hope and the joys of salvation. But the truth is, they ought directly to apply themselves to every thing which belongs to religion. They ought immediately to renounce not only the gross forms of vice, but every known sin—to shun every foreseen temptation—to abstain from every fleshly lust—to cultivate every virtuous disposition, and maintain every good work. They must not suppose, that only a certain set of duties is now incumbent on them, and that others are to come in by and by: They must have respect to all God's commands.—The care of their souls is their true wisdom; but this care is discharged only when they make choice of religion as it is, and take all its parts in connexion. As long as they live in the voluntary neglect of any known duty, or the allowed practice of any known sin, they are not working out their salvation; for salvation is promised to those only who devote themselves to God without reserve, and cleave to him with purpose of heart. This is the wisdom which our text recommends, and which it calls the principal thing.

In what respects it may so be called is what we are now to consider.

1. Religion is the principal thing, as it is the care of our *principal part*—our *rational* and *immortal nature*.

We consist of flesh and spirit. Our flesh is formed from the earth, and will go back to earth again ; our spirit is given by inspiration of God, and when it quits the flesh, it will return to God, and be disposed of by him in a manner suitable to the character, in which it returns. This intellectual, immortal spirit is the superior part of our composition. It is this which constitutes us men. It is in this that our superiority to the brutes, and our capacity for real happiness lies. And if any attention is due to ourselves, it is principally due to this part of ourselves.

There is a care which we owe to our bodies ; we are to consult their health and safety, and provide them with food and raiment. But the chief care is due to our souls, that they may be assimilated to the character of God, and qualified for happiness in his presence. The body, after all we can do for it, will die and return to dust : The soul, however we may neglect it, will live and exist forever. It is but little, that the body can enjoy, or can suffer in this world : The happiness of a godly, and the misery of a guilty soul in the future world, will be great beyond all conception. The body separated from the soul loses all sensation : The soul dislodged from the body acquires new sensibilities. The body laid in the grave will be received again : The soul lost in hell will never be redeemed. “ What then will a man be profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his soul ? What will he give in exchange for his soul ? ”

2. Wisdom is the principal thing, for this secures our principal *interest*.

We have an interest on earth, which deserves some attention. There is an interest proposed to us above, which demands our supreme regard.— While we dwell below, we are subject to various

wants and troubles. To supply the one and relieve the other, some care is necessary ; and all necessary care prudence enjoins and religion allows. So much worldly property as will satisfy our present, and provide for our future exigences, is desirable ; and the property which we possess is entitled to our care, that it may not be lost by neglect, nor wasted by folly. Solomon, in the text, concedes, that there are some things, besides wisdom, which we may lawfully acquire. He speaks of wisdom as the *principal* thing ; but admits that there are other subordinate things. “ Get wisdom, and with all thy gettings get understanding.” Our Savior allows us to seek things needful for the body ; but enjoins us to seek *first* the kingdom of God. Our worldly interests are useful in their place ; but contrasted with our heavenly interests they appear vain and trifling. The former are uncertain, unsatisfying and transient ; the latter are sure, complete and permanent. Those relate to the body and to time ; these to the soul and to eternity. The one we must leave behind us when we quit this world ; the other we shall find ready for us, when we enter into the future world. Of earthly goods we need and can enjoy but little ; of heavenly treasures we cannot possess too much. The increase of the former adds to our perplexity ; the increase of the latter will exalt our felicity. What we have here we cannot keep long ; what we receive in heaven will be ours forever.

3. Wisdom is the principal thing, as this comprises *every thing* that is *amiable, virtuous and excellent*.

To secure our future and eternal interest is our greatest wisdom. But how is this interest to be secured ? Not by a few acts of devotion only, but by attending to every thing which God has commanded. Reading, praying, serious meditation and

religious discourse are, in their place, means of salvation ; but these are not our whole work. That benevolence which disposes us to do good to men—that sobriety which preserves our health—that frugality which prevents a waste of our substance—that industry which makes us useful in our calling—that prudence which promotes our temporal welfare—that courtesy which renders us agreeable in the various relations of life, all belong to the business. When a regard to our salvation predominates, our worldly cares will be restrained within proper bounds : But this restraint will rather help, than hinder their success. We always pursue our worldly designs to the best advantage, when we are guided in them by the best motives.

The good Christian is as careful of his worldly goods, as the miser. He is careful not to waste, abuse or misapply them. But his care is directed to a higher and nobler end. The miser is careful of his interest out of love to the world, and for the sake of hoarding and increasing. The Christian is careful of his interest in obedience and gratitude to God and for the sake of doing good. The wisdom of the one makes him sparing in acts of charity ; the wisdom of the other prompts him to use his substance for the honor of God and the benefit of mankind. “ A good man shews favor and lends ;” and for this noble purpose “ he guides his affairs with discretion.”

The religious man is as careful of his time, as the most industrious tradesman. But he suffers not the world to occupy all his time. A reasonable part of it he devotes to the more immediate service of God and his soul. While his hands are employed in his secular business, his thoughts and affections are in heaven ; and whatever he does, he does it to the glory of God.

The worldly man conducts his business in such a manner, that it excludes religion : The religious man so manages his temporal concerns, as to make them subservient to religion. He is serving God, and promoting the interest of his soul, when he is in his shop or his field, as well as when he is in the closet or the sanctuary. For religion consists not in any particular exercises, but in doing every duty in its proper time and place, and with right views and aims. And the man whose heart is devoted to God, and filled with pious and benevolent affections, as really exercises religion and advances his spiritual interest in his secular, as in his devotional duties. In this sense we may understand the words of our Savior : “ Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold, all things are clean to you : ” And the similar expression of the Apostle ; “ To the pure all things are pure.” If we are governed by the pure principles of piety and benevolence, our common duties become parts of real religion.

4. Religious wisdom is the principal thing, because, while it secures our *main* interest, it promotes *all* our *subordinate interests*.

Do you desire competence of worldly goods, reputation among men, peace in your own minds, respect from your friends, and quietness among your neighbors ? These are best obtained by an attention to all the duties of religion, and the whole work of your salvation. Do you take thought, what you shall eat and drink, and wherewith you shall be clothed ? Your heavenly Father knows, that you have need of these things. “ Seek first the kingdom of God, and these things shall be added.” This is a divine promise. But the promise is never inverted ; seek first what ye shall eat and drink, and the kingdom of God shall be added. You need not then fill your heads with devices and your hearts with

cares, how you shall obtain property, reputation and pleasure in this world; and still secure happiness in the next—how you shall combine your different ends, and unite the interests of both worlds. Your business is plain and simple. Attend to the one thing needful, and other things will follow. Pursue the strait line of duty, and patiently continue in the good work, and all your reasonable wishes will be accomplished; for all your interests are united. If you have any unreasonable ends in view, these you must dismiss, for to succeed in them would be your greatest calamity. But if your aims are honest and virtuous, you need not perplex yourselves about the measures to accomplish them. “Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ.” This one thing you must do, and all is done.—“Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Set your face for heaven, and go on steadily in the path which leads thither, and you will find by the way every accommodation that you need. You have but one great thing to mind. Regard this as you ought, and smaller things come of course. “Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

5. This heavenly wisdom is the principal thing, for without it *worldly* wisdom will do us no good.

By prudence and diligence in our secular callings we may gain some worldly ends, but shall not obtain heaven—we may be useful in our families and in society, but shall not save our souls. A man cannot accomplish any worldly end, unless he will attend directly to that end. He cannot prosper in any profession, unless he will mind the peculiar business of that profession. How then can we expect to obtain our salvation, unless we will apply ourselves directly to that business, with which it is connected.

Salvation is not a windfall, which drops into our lap accidentally, while we are in quest of something else : We must obtain it by seeking ; and we must seek till we find. To think that we shall go to heaven only because we are prudent husbandmen, honest tradesmen, and peaceable members of society, while we never apply ourselves to selfexamination, repentance, prayer, watchfulness, humiliation for sin and the mortification of lust, is as absurd, as it would be for a husbandman or mechanic to expect that he shall grow rich and eminent in his profession, because he is a good horseman, or an expert huntsman.

Now since all our cares and labors for this world, however successful with regard to their immediate object, will never save our souls ; it may truly be said, that *these*, without an attention to our salvation, will do us no good ; for whatever we gain, if the soul is lost, all is lost, and we are not profited, but undone forever.

Besides : Our worldly goods are no farther valuable, than they contribute to happiness. They contribute nothing to happiness, unless we can use and enjoy them with contentment of mind, thankfulness to God, charity to men, and hope of heaven. And these tempers belong to religion.

6. Religious wisdom is the principal thing, as it is of *universal* importance.

There are many worldly acquisitions which are useful in their place ; but none of them is alike useful to every man. The state of human society requires various occupations, and every man in his own occupation needs wisdom or skill, that he may pursue his business with reputation and success. It is necessary that some should have knowledge in husbandry, some in law and politics, some in trade and commerce, some in diseases and remedies, and

some in mechanics, and some in this art, and others in that. And every artificer and professional man needs skill in his own art and profession : but no man needs skill in them all. The knowledge of this or that art or profession would be useless to him who pursues another of quite a different kind. The carpenter may erect a building without an acquaintance with medicine ; the husbandman may successfully manage his farm without the study of politics ; the householder may discharge his domestic obligations without understanding the controversy between France and Britain, and the citizen may perform his social duties without reading Vattel or Puffendorf on the laws of nations. The man who wants skill in his proper profession is contemptible ; and he who studies the mysteries of every profession rather than his own, is trifling and impertinent.

But religious wisdom is of common concern. It is as necessary for one as for another, and for all as for any.

This, you will all agree, is necessary for a *minister*, and an officer in the *church*. A teacher of religion, who is ignorant of the doctrines and regardless of the duties of that religion which he pretends to teach, is despicable in the eyes of all men. But why is religion more necessary in a minister than in you ? Can you be saved without it any better than he can ? Or are the terms of his salvation different from the terms of yours ? You will say, he is appointed a teacher. Very well. But if religion concerns no body but him, why should he teach it to others ? The very institution of the ministerial office shews the necessity of religion to all men.

This is alike necessary for *members* of the *church*, and for the *men* of the *world*. It is the general sense of mankind that the professors of the gospel should understand it and live agreeably to it. If any of them are profane, intemperate, dishonest, conten-

tious, or in any respect openly immoral and vicious, every one condemns them as contradicting their profession, and belieing their character. But do you imagine, that you can safely live in immorality and vice? Do you hope to be saved without renouncing your wickedness? Do you suppose, that nothing binds a man to virtue and piety, but his public profession? Remember, every religious obligation lies on you as completely as on the Christian professor. If religion is in its nature indifferent, there is no need of a profession. But if it is true and important, then you and every other man are bound to make a sincere profession of it, and to live agreeably to this profession when it is made.

Religion is alike necessary for *rich* and *poor*. As the former must be rich in good works, and thus lay up for himself a treasure against the time to come; so the latter must be rich in faith, and thus become an heir of the kingdom which God has promised. The rich man must have a heart weaned from his worldly riches: The poor man must have a heart resigned to his worldly condition. The man who, swallowed up in the cares and anxieties of this life, neglects the work of his salvation, can have no claim to heaven, for he is not prepared to enter into it. And it makes no real difference of character, whether his anxieties arise from his having so much, or having so little of the world. The poor man who is solicitous for the supplies of life, who distrusts the providence of God, and who envies his wealthy neighbors; and the rich man who is solicitous to preserve and increase his substance, who trusts in his abundance, and who despises the poor around him, both discover the same worldly spirit; and if they should exchange conditions, they would also exchange characters. Each would then feel and act just as the other does now. The rich man's

wealth will not purchase, nor the poor man's sufferings merit the kingdom of heaven. Both, before they can be admitted into it, must become qualified for it by a heart dead to the world, and alive to God. There may be some duties peculiar to the rich, and others peculiar to the poor; but the substance of religion is the same in both, and alike necessary for both. And if they are suitably impressed with a sense of the nature and importance of religion, both will be less anxious about the interests of the world.

Religion is equally necessary for the *young* and for the *old*. You who are young think, that an attention to futurity infinitely concerns the aged; for they are just about to leave this world, and go to their long home. You wonder that men, who expect not to live more than three or four years longer, can live a day thoughtless of their souls, which are so soon to pass away, and of that eternity which is just before them. You wonder that men in this solemn condition can have any solicitude about the interests of this life—about repairing their buildings, enriching their furniture, enlarging their farms, or extending their business. It seems to you, that, if you were as near to death, you should think of nothing but how to meet it, and contrive nothing but how to prepare for it. But know, my friends, what is wisdom in your fathers, is wisdom in you. You are as mortal as they. You are hastening to another world as fast as they, and, for aught that any of you can tell, you may be there as soon. You can no more enter into heaven without repentance of sin, and the choice and practice of religion, than others can. It is not age that makes religion necessary. It is necessary in its nature, and by God's immutable constitution. If this will be your wisdom forty years hence, it is your principal wisdom today. You see religion to be important to others.

But whatever reasons make it important to them, the same reasons make it so to you.

Apply then the exhortation in the text, for to you it is spoken, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all your gettings get understanding."

The word of God is able to make you wise to salvation, and to furnish you unto every good work. They who perish for want of wisdom, are the fools who despise instruction. There is a price in your hands to get wisdom; apply your hearts to acquire it. In the oracles of God you may find all that you need to know in relation to life and godliness.—Think not that religion is dark and mysterious: It is plain and simple. To understand it, there needs only diligent application and an honest heart. When knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you and understanding will keep you.—Other things you can easily learn; why not this? The rudiments of science and of business you can acquire with facility, because your hearts are set upon them. Apply your minds with the same engagedness to the doctrines and duties of religion, and to the means and the terms of salvation, and you will as easily learn them. The difficulty of acquiring the knowledge of religion, arises not from the obscurity of the subject, but from the aversion or the indifference of the heart.

You will say, "It is God who gives wisdom." This is true: So says the scripture. Therefore, "if you lack wisdom, ask it of God, who gives liberally and upbraids not, and it shall be given you." "If you cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures, then will you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

Wisdom comes to the soul by diligent attention and inquiry. Accustom yourselves therefore to serious meditation and selfexamination. Often review your conduct, search your hearts, reckon with yourselves, condemn your follies and correct your errors. Think of the dangers of a sinful, and the advantages of a godly life. Recollect what God has done for you—contemplate what still he is doing, and is ready farther to do ; what encouragements he has set before you, and what assistances he offers you. Realize the uncertainty of life and the preciousness of time. Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

The company which you keep will give a correspondent complexion to your habits and manners. He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed. Therefore shun the company of the profane, and associate with the godly. Depart from evil doers, and be the companions of them who fear God.

Stand armed for sudden temptations, and avoid such as you foresee. A prudent man looks well to his goings ; he foresees the evil and hides himself : The simple—the thoughtless pass on and are punished.

Before honor is humility. He who humbles himself shall be exalted. If you see one wise in his own conceit, well may you pity him, for there is more hope of a fool than of him. Think not of yourselves above that which you ought to think, but think soberly.

Be always attentive to hear, and forward to receive instruction and reproof. Think not yourselves too wise to be taught, too good to be admonished, or too infallible to be corrected. He who loves instruction shall find wisdom ; but he who hates re-

proof is brutish. A scorner seeks wisdom and finds it not ; but knowledge is easy to him who is disposed to understand.

To depart from evil is understanding. Immediately renounce every known iniquity, and guard against the temptations to repeat it. If you think of setting out in the way of wisdom, the first step is to turn from the way of folly. Lay aside every weight—every sin which besets you, and run with patience the race set before you.

In a word ; devote yourselves entirely to God ; yield yourselves to him without reserve and without delay—serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind. “ The Lord searcheth all hearts, and knoweth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found of you ; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.”



S E R M O N XVI.



The turning Sinner's supplication to God.



JEREMIAH xxxi. 18.

Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke : Turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God.

THE prophet in the example of Ephraim, describes the exercises of a penitent heart under a conviction of sin ; and he represents God's gracious acceptance of the prayers of penitents in his attention to *Ephraim's* prayer.

God is here introduced as saying, " I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, " Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." God sees the returning sinner, when he is a great way off, and hears his penitential complaints before they are uttered.— When David said, " I will confess my transgressions unto thee," God forgave the iniquity of his sin.

I. You here observe, first, What Ephraim chiefly bemoaned was his long *impenitence* under the means used for his reformation.

The sinner awakened to a view of his guilt, laments his sins *particularly*, so far as he can recollect them ; and for his *secret* iniquities, those which he has forgotten, or never observed, he exercises a *general* repentance, adopting the language of David, “ Who can understand his errors ? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

For secret faults David supposed a general repentance would be accepted. We must distinguish, however, between sins, which we *cannot*, and sins which we *will not* remember. The former can be confessed only in general ; the latter must be recollected and confessed particularly. The penitent cannot call to mind all his *acts* of sin—all his evil thoughts—all his corrupt affections and irregular motions : But he can remember the several *kinds* of sin, which he has practised and habitually indulged. The profane person for instance, cannot recollect all his impious speeches ; nor the intemperate man, all his excesses ; but the former may know, that he has been profane ; and the latter, that he has been intemperate. And every sinner, in order to obtain pardon, must distinctly repent of all his sinful *ways* ; but for those particular *steps*, which are not, and cannot be within his recollection, a *general* repentance is all that can be exercised ; and *this* will doubtless be accepted.

What the penitent most deeply laments is his obstinate *continuance* in sin under all the methods, which God has taken to reclaim him. He says with Ephraim, “ Thou hast chastised me ; and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.” I have been impatient under thy corrections, and perverse under thy restraints. I have increased in my obstinacy under the means used for my repentance.

In the examination of his heart and life, he sees, that his sins are innumerable. He says with David,

“ My iniquities have taken hold on me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me.” But his past *impenitence* is the most aggravating circumstance in his guilt, and the most painful circumstance in his recollection. This is disobedience continued ; and rebellion repeated and justified : It is enmity to God retained in the heart, and opposition to him renewed in practice. One wilful transgression deserves death ; more awful is the demerit of many transgressions ; more dreadful still the guilt of all these daily *repeated*, and repeated without regret. In the contemplation of this guilt, the awakened sinner sits down astonished. The language of former penitents is the language of penitents still. “ We are ashamed and blush to lift up our faces to thee, our God ; for our iniquities have increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in great trespass unto this day. We are confounded, because we bear the reproach of our youth. Remember not against us the sins of our youth ; remember us for thy goodness sake, O Lord.”

You see the madness of delaying your repentance. This delay is not only a continuance in sin, but itself a sin, which, without a distinct repentance, cannot be pardoned. To delay a present, with the intention of a future repentance, is to do that which you know to be utterly unreasonable, and extremely dangerous, and which you hope, you shall remember with remorse, and shall wish you had never done. It is to continue in sin with a deliberate purpose to condemn this presumption. What inconsistency ; what infatuation is here ? Your only wisdom is to resolve immediately, that you will not offend any more.

II. Our text teaches us, that a sinner, under a conviction of his guilt, laments his past *abuse* of the *means* used for his recovery. He says with repenting Ephraim, "I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke."

He reflects on the calls given him from the *word* of revelation. In this his guilt and danger have been represented; his hope and happiness exhibited; the terms of salvation stated; and his compliance with them urged. He wonders, that he could treat these things with indifference and neglect. He feels the weight of them, now and is astonished that he ever could make light of them.

He recollects the admonitions of God's *providence*. He has seen many cut down in the midst of their days; and some by a sudden stroke, and in an unexpected hour. He has accompanied to the grave some of his intimate friends; and some perhaps, who have been his associates in wickedness. Yea, it may be, he himself has been brought near to the gates of death, and again sent back into life. But the serious sentiments awakened in him by these providences have soon languished, and the resolutions excited by them have been forgotten. He wonders, that he was no more affected by them, when they were present, and no more influenced by them, after they were past.

He thinks on those seasons, when the *Spirit* of God strove with him; and he condemns his neglect of such favorable opportunities. He wonders at his past perverseness in rejecting, and at God's present mercy in renewing so great a blessing.

These are reflections, which wound the heart of a humble penitent.

You see then, the importance of an immediate attention to the means, which God is using with you. That the gospel is true, and its contents important,

you acknowledge—that death is certain, and the consequences of it solemn and interesting, full well you know—that you must, some time or other, think seriously of death and futurity, attend closely to the truths of God's word, and no longer postpone the concerns of your souls, you will not deny. Why then do you trifle with these things now? If ever you apply your hearts to them in earnest, your past inattention will be one principal source of your grief.

III. Ephraim, in this prayer, expresses a deep sense of his *dependence* on God for grace to turn him. “Turn *thou* me, and I shall be turned.”

Sinners, when they think of turning to God, too often forget their dependence on him; and when they form resolutions, they form them in their own strength. But when they come to a just conviction of, and actual turning from sin, they renounce self-dependence, and place their hope in God. They reflect, how often they have had serious intentions, and soon have lost them—how often they have purposed, that they would not transgress, and have transgressed again—how often they have begun a reformation, and have speedily abandoned it. This experience of the deceitfulness of the heart makes them afraid to trust it again. They now go out of themselves and run directly to God. They cast themselves as well on his grace to turn them, as on his mercy to pardon them.

Some, under a conviction of sin, are so filled with a sense of guilt and pollution, that they think it presumption to apply to God in their present condition; and imagine they must make themselves better, more fit for his notice, and more worthy of his regard, before they venture to trust in him, or call upon him. But Ephraim, you see, under the deepest sense of guilt and unworthiness, goes to God

with this request, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." The sinner is not to trust in God for pardon, in any other way than that of repentance, nor is he to ask, that God would grant it on any other condition; for on no other is it promised, or can it be received. But as repentance is a present duty, so for grace to repent he is to apply to God without delay. If he is sensible of the corruption of his heart, he must call on God to create in him a clean heart. He is not to wait, till he has done something to recommend himself to God, before he asks God to do any thing for him; but sensible that all things are of God, he must pray, that God would work in him the whole good pleasure of his goodness. Are you then convinced of your sinfulness—do you remember, that you have often made, and as often broken good resolutions—have often set out for heaven, and as often turned back? Go to God now with Ephraim's prayer—go without delay. Take with you words and turn to the Lord. Say to him, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously; heal our backslidings and love us freely."

Prayer for the grace of God to turn you, must be made with correspondent resolutions: Otherwise you ask that, of which you have no desire. Prayer is the reasonable desire of the heart directed to God. If you sincerely pray, that God would turn you, it is your desire to be turned, and you will frame your ways to turn. It is absurd to pretend a desire to do a thing, when you take no care and use no means to do it. Will you think an intemperate man in earnest, in praying for divine restraints from excess, if he immediately runs into the places of licentious indulgence? Or the profane person sincere in praying, that he may be ruled by the fear of God, if still he continues to associate with the ungodly, and sit in the seat of scorners?—They who pretend to pray at

all, often make petitions for the grace of God to give them repentance, to renew their hearts, and turn them from a sinful to a holy life. If they have any meaning in such petitions, they will converse with the holy scriptures, attend on the institutions of the sanctuary, oppose the corruptions of their hearts, shun known temptations, lay aside the sins, which most easily beset them, apply the means of repentance and holiness, and no more yield themselves to work iniquity with greediness.

Under awakenings and convictions preparatory to repentance, there will be, in many respects, an alteration in the disposition of mind, and in the manner of life. The external practice of wickedness will be renounced; many duties, before neglected, will be taken up; and they will be performed with some degree of attention. They who receive with meekness the engrafted word to the salvation of their souls, are described as having first laid apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. And whenever true repentance, or conversion takes place, there is such a view of the evil and danger of sin, and such a sense of dependence on God, that Ephraim's prayer is adopted in earnest, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." It now appears meet to be said unto God, "I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." In this change the soul comes to a full resolution against all sin, makes an unreserved dedication of itself to God, at the same time places a humble reliance on his grace, and seeks it with the earnestness of the patriarch, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

IV. We are here taught, that the conversion, which God effects in the soul, is *real* and *permanent*, and discovers itself in sensible and lasting *fruits*. When *he* turns sinners, then "they *are* turned."

Some conversions are but transient. Reformations effected *merely* by human advice, by external restraint, by motives of temporal interest, by the terrors of apparent death, reach not to the heart; and they seldom last long. The Psalmist says of Israel, "When God slew them, then they sought him; they turned and inquired after him; they remembered, that God was their rock and the high God their Redeemer: But their hearts were not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant." God complains by the prophet, that "their goodness passed away, as the morning cloud and the early dew." Their goodness was a reformation begun in trouble, and dismissed when the trouble ceased. In their affliction they sought God early: In their prosperity they transgressed his covenant.

True conversion is not merely the effect of external changes, threatening dangers, or human persuasives, though these may have their influence as means in the divine hand; but, in substance, it is the effect of divine operation on the heart, accompanying the use of external means.

When God turns sinners by his grace, renewing them in the spirit of the mind, then they are turned indeed—then they become new creatures. The fruits of Ephraim's turning are described in the words following our text; "Surely after that I was turned, I repented," or changed my manner of life, "and after that I was instructed, I smote on my thigh," in testimony of my selfabhorrence; "I was ashamed; yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

Real conversion discovers itself in the fruits, which it produces. By these we must judge of its sincerity. Nothing is to be called conversion, but that which makes us other and better men—truly humble and holy, pious and benevolent, averse to sin,

watchful against temptation, and active in duty.— And this amendment must be, not temporary, but abiding. They who in an honest and good heart receive the incorruptible seed of God's word, bring forth fruit with patience. They who continue in Christ's word, are his disciples indeed. They who engage in his service, and endure to the end, will receive the promised reward. If any man draw back, it is to perdition. In him God has no pleasure. We may observe, once more ;

V. The hope, which Ephraim expresses in his prayer, is grounded on God's covenant : “ Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, *for thou art the Lord my God.*” As such thou offerest thyself—as such I choose thee.

The great promise made in the covenant, which God proposes to us, is this ; “ I will be a God to you.” This promise comprehends every blessing, which we need—the pardon of sin, the influence of the spirit, and the happiness of heaven. Turning to God, and submitting to him as our God, is the great condition of the covenant. The penitent turning to God, acknowledges him as *his* God, in such language as this ; “ Other Lord's have had dominion over me ; but I will” now and henceforth “ make mention of *thy* name.” He renounces sin and the world, and devotes himself to God to serve him forever. He now lays hold of, and rests on the promise of the covenant. Conscious of his resolution and desire to forsake sin wholly, and to serve God in newness of life, he commits himself to him, hoping for grace to sanctify him, and for mercy to pardon him. The promises which he finds in God's word are the only ground of his hope. The covenant here stated and proposed, is his great consolation. To this he flees for refuge. Conscious of guilt he can draw comfort from no other source—

not from the law, for this condemns him—not from himself, for he has transgressed the law. Sin deserves punishment, and nothing which he can do, will cancel this desert. If punishment is remitted, it must be by an act of God's mercy. Whether God will exercise mercy in this way, can be known only from his word. His promise that he will pardon the penitent, and meet them who wait for him, is the grand encouragement to repentance, hope and prayer. "Repent for the remission of sins, for the promise is to you."

Returning sinners, in their prayers for pardon may plead God's abundant mercy, the gracious promises of his covenant, and the motions of his spirit within them, giving them these new apprehensions and desires. They may plead that he has begun a good work in them, and excited them to call on his name—that he has sent his Son to redeem the guilty, and through him has shed forth the Holy Spirit. They may plead their own impotence and misery, and his abundant mercy and grace. They may use the humble, hoping language of scripture; "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.—According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out all my sins.—Save me, for I hope in thee; in thy word do I hope.—Let thy mercy come unto me, even thy salvation according to thy word.—Remember thy word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope."

The readiness with which God accepts the sinner, thus pleading with him, we learn from his declaration in favor of repenting and returning Ephraim. "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: Therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy on him."

Encouraged by the calls and promises of God's word, let sinners, under a conviction of their impotence and guilt, repair immediately to God, confessing before him their past iniquities and resolving against them, imploring his grace to turn them, and his mercy to pardon them, and taking hold of his covenant, and pleading, "Thou art the Lord our God."

My friends ; we have been attending to a matter of serious consequence, and I am loth to part from you, before you come to a decision upon it. Some of you, I suppose, feel yourselves interested in our subject. You are convinced, that you have departed from God : You are conscious of inward corruptions and outward transgressions. You hear, with painful concern, the threatenings of God against those of your character ; you have some sense of your dangerous state, and wish to be saved from it. And you ask, "What shall we do to be saved?"—The answer is, repent and turn to God, that your sins may be blotted out : Then times of refreshing will come. You will say, "We admire, but cannot apply this promise of pardon and comfort ; for we know not, that our hearts are turned to God ; and we cannot turn them." If this is the state of your minds, then doubtless you have some *desire* to turn to God—you would think yourselves happy, if you were turned to him, and entitled to his forgiveness. Your duty then is plain : Go to God with Ephraim's petition in your hearts.

I am not now speaking to the thoughtless and secure. They wish for no advice, for they are content where they are. If one should give them advice, probably they would not take it. What they need is such a view of danger, as may awaken them from their indolence. If their danger were placed before them, perhaps they would not attend to it, nor

be alarmed by it. I wish them, however, to consider it, and lay it to heart. At present, I am speaking to persons of another description—to those who have a view of their danger, and feel a desire of being delivered from it, and brought into a different state. If you feel such a desire, and are conscious of your insufficiency to effect its object, then take with you words, repair to God, and say, “Turn thou us, and we shall be turned.” Go to him now. There is no need of delay. You may as well do this, today as tomorrow, and this hour as the next.

You ask, “How can we do this?” I ask, how can you help it? What? See your guilt, impotence and danger; and believe that God is gracious and merciful; and not go to him?—Surely you *must* go. If you forbear, I much suspect you are not in that state of mind, which is pretended. If you were sick and in danger of death, you would call upon God. And what? not call upon him in your present case?

You will say, “We can do nothing of ourselves acceptable to God.” What then? If you are in the case now supposed, you are not left to yourselves. If God has awakened in you such desires, convictions and fears, as you speak of, then you can go to him. If you have such sentiments, you can express them to a friend, or a minister; and can you not express them to *God* too? Can you not tell *him* what you feel, and what you desire?

“But will God accept us?” Go, and see. I cannot tell you, how you will pray, and therefore cannot tell you, how you will succeed. This I can tell you, God has not said to you, Seek ye me in vain. Ye shall know; if ye follow on to know the Lord.

“But will God hear our prayers, before we are converted?” This is a question nothing to your

purpose. Surely you will not think yourselves converted, before you have a disposition to pray : And if you have such a disposition, by no means suppress it, but act agreeably to it. If God has awakened serious sentiments in you, he has gracious designs in your favor ; and beware, that you do not oppose them. I cannot tell you, how soon you will find the comforts of religion. You have no right to expect these, until you feel your hearts consenting to God's covenant, and perceive yourselves walking in it. Conversion, you know, is one thing, and the *evidence* of conversion another. Conversion is the turning of the heart to God ; the evidence of this is a patient continuance in well doing ; and from this evidence result the comforts of Christian hope.—But look not for the evidence, before you have obtained the thing ; nor for the hope, before you have obtained the evidence ; nor for the comfort, before you have obtained the hope. Things must take place in their order. What is now before you is to turn to God, and to pray, that he would turn you effectually. And on this point, you must make no delay. Go to him, plead your necessity and his mercy—your impotence and his grace—your unworthiness and Christ's righteousness. Trust not in the value of your prayers, but use them as means of God's appointment. Plead his command, and take encouragement from it, but make not a merit of the work, which he has begun in you. If your desires and prayers are excited by his spirit striving with you, there is reason to hope he will regard them. Whether you are at present really converted or not, of this you may be sure, God does not abhor the work of his own spirit ; and prayers proceeding from the convictions and desires, which his spirit has awakened, are not to be ranked with those prayers which are made in pretence, to devour widows'

houses, and in mere sensuality for the gratification of lust.

God sets hope before you ; go, lay hold on it. I leave you with this advice. Humble yourselves before God, and say, Thou hast chastised us, and we were chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou us, and we shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord our God.



SERMON XVII.



*The good Man lying down in Peace, and sleeping
in Safety.*



PSALM iv. 8.

*I will both lay me down in peace and sleep ; for thou Lord
only makest me dwell in safety.*

THE Psalm, of which our text is the conclusion, is one of David's devout meditations in a time of great affliction. His piety was not an occasional exercise, but an habitual temper. He set the Lord always before him, and waited on him all the day. But there were some seasons which he sequestered more especially for serious contemplation, selfexamination and communion with God. Of these seasons the *evening* was one. When he retired from the busy scenes of life, and was composing his spirit and his flesh to rest, he reviewed the day, repented of its errors, sought God's pardon, and contemplated his presence, grace and power, and thus laid himself down in peace, and slept in safety.

David considers the season, when he lay down to sleep, as attended with some peculiar dangers ; but yet he says, that confiding in God's watchful care, he will lie down in peace.

I. We will shew in what respects the time of our sleep is a time of danger.

This is a gloomy season : If we were not accustomed to its frequent return, it would fill us with horror. The sun withdraws his cheering presence ; the night spreads her sable curtain over half the globe—the business of the day is suspended—the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven retire to rest—silence every where reigns. The distinction of objects, is, in a measure lost—We see not what is before us, and what is near us. Imagination is at liberty to create what evils it can, and to magnify beyond bounds the evils which it creates. In such a state, the mind is peculiarly susceptible of fearful apprehensions.

The night is a season, not only of imaginary, but of real dangers ; such, particularly, as the incursion of thieves and the eruption of fires. Occurrences of this kind are most frequent and most terrible in the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men. The thief cometh to kill, as well as to steal. Fire ravages without distinction, nor regards the inhabitant more than the dwelling.

In the time of sleep we are peculiarly impotent and defenceless. The evils, which, in our wakeful hours, might have been foreseen, and prevented or avoided, now come by surprise, take us unprepared, and allow us neither means to resist, nor time to escape.

Sleep locks up our senses, suspends our reason, and divests us of all power to guard our substance, or keep ourselves. If the irruption of evil suddenly rouse us, we wake in confusion, and perhaps as destitute of discretion, as we were while we slept.

Sleep, though necessary to repair and restore our nature exhausted by previous exercise, yet, considered in itself, is a dangerous condition. It is a state so nearly resembling death, that it gives name to that awful change.

Sleep is what we daily experience, and find to be as necessary as our food. But though it is familiar to all, yet who can tell what it is, or what it does—how it refreshes the body and restores the mind—whence it comes and whither it goes? We spend in sleep a fourth part of our time, and still are less acquainted with it, than with any other change which passes upon us. In every other change, our faculties are awake to examine it: In this our powers are suspended. We are not even conscious of our condition, nor competent to any rational exercise. So little are we acquainted with the nature of sleep, that it still remains a question among philosophers, whether, in that state, the mind always thinks. This is a question, which no man's experience can decide. After we awake, we now and then can recollect some wild incoherent thoughts, which we call *dreams*; but whether these were the exercises of the mind in profound sleep, or only some feeble efforts of the fainting intellect, as it was passing into a state of inaction, has been debated, nor is it yet agreed.

Concerning the nature of sleep we know but little more than this, that it is a suspension of *voluntary* motion. The vital involuntary motions, the respiration of the breath, the circulation of the blood, and the digestion of the food, are continued from the same mysterious cause, as when we are awake; but the operations, which depend on the human will, are suspended. In our waking hours, there is a connexion between our volitions and certain mental and corporeal operations. In sleep, this connexion fails.

We still may have volitions ; but they are impotent and ineffectual. What forms the connexion when we are awake ; and what breaks it when we are asleep, we cannot understand. If in this latter state, we have thoughts, they are not voluntary, but the effects of certain habitual associations formed when we were awake. The power of recollecting, comparing and reasoning, entirely ceases.

Sleep is so striking an image of death, that, if it were rare and uncommon, the sight of it would produce terror in the spectators, and the information concerning it would give anxiety to the subject. To lie for hours together incapable of forethought and reflection—of discretion and selfdefence—with the reason suspended, the senses locked up, and the limbs inactive, or moving only by a kind of involuntary mechanism, we should deem a very dangerous state. Once delivered from it, we should dread the apprehension of falling into it again. Mysterious is the method which nature takes for its own refreshment.

The scripture teaches us, that there are malignant spirits, who roam about, seeking whom they may destroy. These are called the powers of darkness, and the rulers of the darkness of this world ; probably because, in the unguarded and defenceless hours of darkness, they are most watchful to ensnare us, and most active to disturb us. It was in the night, that Satan collected his powers against the Redeemer of the world. It was then that Judas, under this infernal influence, perfidiously betrayed his master. It was then that the suffering Savior was in his greatest agony. It was then that his enemies seized him and carried him before an unrighteous council. It was then that his disciples, struck with unusual terror, forsook him and fled. It was then that the angel was sent from heaven to support him.

The Psalmist teaches us, that the angels of God are employed continually, and more especially in the season of darkness and sleep, to defend the godly against the subtle arts and pernicious designs of evil spirits. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Surely he will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. Because thou hast made the Lord thy habitation, there shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling, for he shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot. He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil.”

If evil spirits have access to the human mind, as probably they have, through the avenues of the imagination, how easy might it be for them, in our sleeping hours, when the dominion of reason is suspended, to paint on the fancy such alluring, or such horrible images, as should decoy, or affright us to some dreadful action, ruinous to others, or fatal to ourselves. Our only security from their mischievous wiles, is the care of that providence, which never slumbers nor sleeps. “The angel of the Lord encampeth around them who fear him, and delivereth them.”

A state of sleep, viewed in itself, and apart from God’s merciful protection, appears to be, in many respects, a state of danger. So the scripture represents it. Hence, to heighten the terrors of the last judgment, it usually describes them as bursting forth on a guilty world, in the time of midnight darkness,

when men lie buried in deep slumber, and thoughtless of the solemn scene.

But though night is a season of danger, yet David says, "I will lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety."

II. We will consider, in the second place, what is necessary to our lying down in peace, and sleeping in safety. David's meditations in this Psalm will give a sufficient answer to our present inquiry.

1. The first thing necessary to our peaceful and safe repose, is a state of preparation for death. This is obtained only by a life devoted to God.

David, in our context, addresses the Almighty as "the God of his righteousness;" and he rejoices in the persuasion, that "the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." Firmly believing that God would make the righteous man his care; and inwardly conscious, that this was *his own* character, he laid him down in peace, not afraid what the night would bring forth, nor anxious whether it should be his lot to sleep or die. In either case he trusted that he was safe, and that neither life nor death would separate him from the love, or exclude him from the presence of his God.

Solomon advises his son, that, if he had incautiously pledged his word for another, he should extricate himself before he slept. "My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared in the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend. Go, humble thyself, so shalt thou prevail with thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as the roe from the hand of the hunter, and as the bird from the hand of the fowler." This is excellent advice. A prudent man, in an unguarded hour, may

be drawn into a dangerous suretyship ; but when he reflects on his rashness, he will immediately endeavor to extricate, or secure himself. Will you then, let a day pass, or a night come, before you have sought God's mercy by prayer and obtained his pardon by repentance ? Will you not take as good care of your souls, as you would of your property. You may safely retire to bed when you are prepared to go to heaven. You are fit to sleep, when you are fit to die.

The scripture calls sinners to *immediate* repentance. It permits no delay. "Behold, now is the day of salvation. Bow before the Lord your Maker. Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Seek him while he may be found ; call upon him while he is near."

As long as your eternal salvation is depending, a single day's neglect is presumption and madness. You would not commit your worldly substance to the same hazard, in which you leave your immortal souls. If you knew that thieves had formed a design to break open and rob your house, you would not lie down to sleep, until you had taken every possible precaution for your security. Will you venture to pass a night under the guilt of all your sins, and exposed to the wrath to come ? You can never dwell in safety, until your sins are forgiven ; nor enjoy true peace of mind, until you have exercised repentance towards God, and proved its sincerity by correspondent fruits. They only are safe, whom God has set apart for himself ; and these are the godly. Pertinent to all is the advice which our Lord gave to his disciples : " Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men who wait for their Lord, when he shall return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh they may open to him immediately. Blessed are

those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, if the good man of the house had known, what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not suffered his house to be broken through ; be ye therefore ready also, for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh."

2. That we may close the day in peace, we must be zealous of good works, and watchful against sin. This is David's advice in our context, "Stand in awe and sin not."

The duties of religion demand our daily attention. We are not to suppose, that, by a general repentance, we adjust our accounts with God once for all, and may, in future, release our minds from all fear of his displeasure and care of our souls. When we repent of sins past, we dedicate ourselves to God for the time to come. We then begin a new life ; and in newness of life we must walk every day. This is the instruction of scripture, "Be thou in the fear of God all the day long."—"What thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."—"Do the work of every day, as the duty of the day requires." As moral and religious beings, we are to set God always before us, and daily to live under a sense of our accountableness to him ; we are to make his word our rule, and to guide all our actions by it ; we are to watch against the temptations which await us, decline such as we see approaching, and resist those which we are constrained to meet ; we are to attend on the work of our secular calling in its place, use the bounties of Providence with sobriety, husband our time with industry, and order our affairs with discretion ; we are to acknowledge God in all our ways, seek his direction in all our doubts, bless his

hand in all our successes, adore his sovereignty in all our disappointments, and preserve a temper correspondent to the aspects of his Providence in all conditions ; we are to observe and obey the various calls of charity ; to feed the hungry, guide the wandering, advise the heedless, relieve the unhappy, and in every thing do good according to our abilities and the exigences of those around us. Every day thus employed in the duties of piety and charity, may be reviewed with approbation and closed with peace.—“ Keep sound wisdom and discretion ; let them not depart from thine eyes. So shall they be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid : Yea, thou shalt lie down and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.”

But what peace or security can there be to the wicked ?—Look upon the man, who wastes the day in idleness, and spends the evening in riot—the man who neglects the support of his family, the care of his soul, the culture of his mind, and the decency of his manners—the man who strolls the streets for want of employment, and mingles with the vain and intemperate, as his chosen company—the man who sees day after day passing off useless and unimproved and himself hastening on toward another world, guilty and unprepared—the man who recollects no good that he has done in any day, and no day in which he has not done much evil—can this man lay himself down in peace ? Will his bed seem smooth, and his pillow soft ? When he perceives sleep stealing upon him, will he not start with conscious guilt ? Will he not fear to close his eyes, lest he next

should open them in the world of torment? “Deliver me, O Lord, from the wicked—from the men of the world, who have their portion in this life.—They who behold thy face in righteousness, will be satisfied, when they awake with thy likeness.”

3. That we may lay ourselves down in peace, we must close each day with selfexamination and repentance. This practice David adopted for himself; and in our context he recommends it to others.—“Stand in awe and sin not; commune with your own heart on your bed and be still.”

When the day is finished, its transactions should be called up to pass in review before us. We should inquire what we have done, and in what *manner* we have done it—what principles have governed our actions, and what objects commanded our thoughts and directed our pursuits—how far we have filled the day, and what time we have left empty—what vain imaginations have lodged within us—what idle words, in our unguarded moments, have escaped from us—how we have received mercies and borne disappointments—what progress we have made in the religious life, and what benefit we have derived from the indulgence of another day. In the review of the day, who of us will not find some omissions of duty—at least deficiencies in duty? Happy the man who is innocent from real transgressions. The guilt of our daily sins is removed by daily repentance. If repentance close not the day, we lie down under all the guilt contracted in the day. Our daily peace and comfort depend on the daily examination of our hearts, review of our actions, and renewal of our repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. That we may lie down in peace, we must commit ourselves to God in humble prayer. This is our Psalmist’s advice; “Commune with your own

heart on your bed—offer the sacrifice of righteousness and put your trust in the Lord.”

It becomes us daily to repair to that Almighty and most merciful Being, in whom we live, and from whom every blessing comes, and thankfully to express a sense of our dependence upon him. There is a peculiar fitness in our imploring his gracious care, at that serious moment, when we are yielding up our ordinary capacity to care for ourselves. It is God who guards us by day and preserves us by night. He compasses the path in which we walk, and the bed on which we repose. But during the hours of sleep, our spirit, our existence is eminently in him. We then can do nothing to our own preservation or security. The respiration of our breath, and every motion of our limbs are involuntary, and the effect of God’s continual influence. His visitation preserves our spirits. He only makes us to dwell in safety. The peace of our minds, when we are sinking away into this impotent, inactive, unconscious condition, must depend on a believing view of God’s presence, power and goodness, and a humble trust in the watchful care of his providence. “Our help cometh from the Lord.—He who keepeth us will not slumber.—The Lord is our keeper, he will preserve us from evil.”

5. David, that he might lie down in peace, reviewed his former experience of God’s goodness. “Hear me, when I call, O God of my righteousness: Thou hast enlarged me, when I was in distress; be gracious unto me, and hear my prayer.”

Converse with God, meditation on his providence and recollection of his former mercies mightily contribute to the tranquillity of our minds, the strength of our faith, and the establishment of our hope.—When Asaph felt his faith in God beginning to fail, he awakened and confirmed it by a recurrence to

past experience of God's mercies. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?—This is mine infirmity. I will remember the works of the Lord. Who is so great a God, as our God? Thou art a God that dost wonders." The contemplation of divine benefits is a proper exercise of the evening, and a happy preparative for a peaceful night. We ought to close each day with some pious and devout meditation; and no subjects can more usefully employ our concluding thoughts, than the perfections, works and mercies of God.

6. Another thing which David suggests, as necessary to our quiet and secure repose, is the exclusion of worldly passions and anxieties, and the introduction of a serene and cheerful temper. "There be many that say, who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time, that their corn and their wine increased." The Psalmist here teaches us, that they, who make the cares and solitudes of the world the last business and the concluding exercise of the day, are ill prepared for a good night's sleep. The world, thus retained in their heads and cherished in their hearts, will disturb their slumbers, chase sleep from their eyes, and turn the hours designed for rest and refreshment, into hours of vexation and weariness.—What this godly man chiefly desired, when darkness overspread the earth, and called him off from the business of the day, was, that he might enjoy a light more cheerful and refreshing than that of the sun—the light of God's countenance—the tokens of his favor, and might feel the exercises of love, hope and gratitude toward him. This, he says, will give him gladness more than the increase of corn and wine. His example instructs us, that, to prepare ourselves for safe and peaceful sleep, we must

banish unfriendly passions, tumultuous thoughts and earthly cares ; and call into their place pious, devout and benevolent affections.

Those thoughts and passions, which we indulge in our last waking moments, will probably attend us in our sleep, meet us at every waking interval, or be the first to visit us in the morning. “ A dream cometh through the multitude of business, and a fool’s voice is known by the multitude of his words. In the multitude of dreams and many words there are divers vanities.” Our security from these vanities is “ the fear of God.”

Solomon has observed, that “ the sleep of a laboring man is sweet,” because his duty is plain, his cares are few, his mind is free, and his conscience at peace. “ But the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.” “ It is vain,” says the Psalmist, “ to rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of sorrows ; for it is God who giveth his beloved sleep.”

It is the Apostle’s advice, “ Be angry and sin not ; let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil.” While we are employed in the business of the day, and conversant with the men of the world, many things may occur to disturb our passions and awaken our resentments. But we must not lie down to sleep with angry passions burning in our breasts. We must extinguish the spark, as soon as we discover it, lest it rise into a flame. Before we lay ourselves down to rest, we must look to our hearts, with as much care as we look to our fires ; and on the coals of anger, which lie glowing there, we must pour the water of sober consideration, lest, being neglected, they kindle into a consuming fire.

To indulge anger is to give place to the devil.— Sinful passion is often excited by his influence ; and

when passion prevails, we fall under his power. If we would not give him place, it must be our first care to bring our passions into subjection.

To suppress irregular motions, banish corrupt affections, and extinguish malevolent feelings should be the work of every evening ; for who would dare to lie down and sleep with his heart open to the power of the devil. We bolt the doors of our houses against thieves ; will we leave the doors of our hearts open to more dangerous enemies ? “ Let not the sun go down on your wrath, lest you give place to the devil.”

I have now taken up the several thoughts contained in this psalm, and have applied them to the purpose, for which David introduced them, to instruct us how we may sleep in peace and safety.

We see that retirement for sleep was with David a serious matter. He did not, like many, spend the day wholly in earthly cares, unmindful of God ; waste the evening in riot and dissipation, regardless of death ; and then, overcharged with cares, or stupefied with pleasures, throw himself into the arms of sleep, thoughtless as an animal : But the day he employed in the work assigned him ; and the evening he sequestered to selfexamination and repentance, prayer and praise. He communed with his heart on his bed, banished irregular passions, invited pious affections, and resigned himself to sleep with the temper, with which he wished to awake. Thus his days were useful, his evenings cheerful, his sleep secure, and his mornings bright.

It is by the daily exercise of religion, that we hold ourselves in constant readiness for death. David lay down in peace and slept in safety, because, in the light of God’s countenance, and in the consciousness of his own integrity, he could view all events as happy. He composed himself to rest, per-

suaded, that whether he should rise or expire—
awake or die, all would be well. “The Lord is
my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? He
is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
He is my shepherd; I shall not want. He leadeth
me in the paths of righteousness. Yea, though I
walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I
will fear no evil, for he is with me. I will bless the
Lord who giveth me counsel; my reins instruct me
in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always
before me; because he is at my right hand I shall
not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and
my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope.
Thou wilt shew me the path of life. In thy pres-
ence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are
pleasures forever more.”



S E R M O N XVIII.



The Saint employed in his Morning Devotions.



PSALM v. 3.

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord ; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee and will look up.

DAVID, the author of this Psalm, was eminent for his devout and heavenly spirit. No man was more frequent, or more fervent in praise and prayer. His various afflictions and signal deliverances greatly contributed to the improvement of his piety.

The stated seasons of his devotion were morning and evening ; these he observed with conscientious exactness. He says, “ I cry unto thee in the day time ; and in the night season I am not silent. I prevented the dawning of the morning and cried ; I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.”

The Psalm, from which our text is taken, was one of his morning exercises. In the time when he composed it, he was under persecution from the ad-

herents of Saul, or the partizans of Absalom. He speaks of his enemies who took counsel against him. He was driven out from the house of God, to which he expresses a hope of being restored. And in the place where he was, he resolved still to remember the temple of God, and to pray with his face directed toward it.

An attention to this psalm will be useful to assist our devotional exercises.

1. We will consider the *season* which David chose for his devotions. "My voice shalt thou hear in the *morning*." He had other seasons of communion with God: But *this* he esteemed an important one, and this he was careful not to lose.

The scripture, by direct precepts, and by approved examples, teaches us, that we ought *daily* to call upon God. Our Savior instructs us, in our prayers, to say, "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread." The apostle exhorts us to "pray *without ceasing*"—to "pray *always* with *all* prayer." The psalmist resolves, "*Every day* will I praise thee—I will *daily* cry unto thee—I will *daily* perform my vows."

Morning and evening are seasons, which scripture recommends, and which reason approves, for our daily stated devotions.

The prophet says, "With my soul I have desired thee in the *night*, and with my spirit within me I will seek thee *early*." The Psalmist approved it as a good thing "to shew forth God's kindness in the *morning* and his faithfulness *every night*."

In the morning when we awake, it is reasonable that we should thankfully acknowledge God's preserving care, and devote to him afresh the life which his power has protected, and the strength which his influence has restored. Our sleep has been the image of death. And what is our awaking from it but a new life given us by the Creator? It is the

faculty of reasoning, sensation and voluntary motion renewed by his favor. We have, every morning, fresh proof of our dependence on God, and of his watchfulness over us ; and we have new encouragement to trust our interests in his hands, and new motives to spend our lives in his service. “Thou, O Lord,” says David, “art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of my head. I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me, I laid me down and slept ; I awaked for the Lord sustained me.”

David *in the morning* would direct his prayer to God : His best moments—his purest frames he would employ in so sacred a work. He would not venture to look abroad on the world, before he had looked upward to heaven. To God he would give the preoccupation of his heart, lest an intruding world should enter and take possession. To heaven he would send up his affections and meditations in season, before they had mingled with the corruptions and occupations here below, and hence had contracted a disqualifying pollution.

There are certain external dangers peculiar to the hours of sleep. But the danger of contracting guilt to our souls is when we are awake. We then resume the employments, and return to the society of the world. Sensible objects again allure us, and spiritual enemies again assault us. Before we step forth on the busy stage, it is our wisdom to call up pious sentiments and resolutions, and put ourselves under God’s gracious protection and guidance.

In the evening, when we have finished the work of the day, we should recognize God’s mercies, review our thoughts and actions, confess our follies and transgressions, and commit our souls to the forgiving mercy, and our bodies and substance to the watchful Providence of God.

II. As David began the day with prayer so he entered on the solemn duty with serious recollection and meditation. "Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my meditation; hearken unto the voice of my cry, my king and my God, for unto thee will I pray."

His prayers were not the ceremonious formalities of prevailing custom; but the genuine breathings of a pious heart. "With his whole heart he sought the Lord."

Prayer is the sacred intercourse of the soul with God. We should enter upon the duty with fear and caution. So Solomon advises; "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few."

David's first petition is, that God would "give ear to his words." Sensible of his own unworthiness, he relied on God's mercy and faithfulness, as the only ground of his hope; and cried to him as "*his king and his God.*"

"He who cometh to God must believe, that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him." We are to prepare our hearts for communion with him, by meditating on his wisdom, power and goodness, the gracious promises and invitations of his word, and the glorious way of access to him through the mediation of his Son. Our encouragement in prayer is to be derived, not from ourselves; but from God—not from the value of our works, or the fervor of our petitions; but from his perfections and promises, from our experience of his goodness, and from the discoveries of his word.

III. David, in his morning devotion, looks up to God as a *Holy Being*, who can be pleased with those

only, who are of pure hearts and virtuous lives. "In the morning I will direct my prayer to thee; for thou art not a God, that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou wilt destroy them that speak falsehood; the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man."

A sensible view of God's holiness will humble our souls in prayer, and strengthen our resolutions against sin. While we look up to God as a Being who hath no pleasure in wickedness, we should implore his grace to preserve us from it, and to work in us the good pleasure of his will.

How solemn is the thought, that we are going forth to transact the business of the day under the inspection of a holy God—that wherever we are, we are surrounded with his presence, and penetrated with his eye—that our secret imaginations are open to his view, and our softest whispers reach his ear. What manner of persons ought we to be? Let us begin each day with serious meditation on God's holy character, with humble reliance on his quickening and restraining grace, and with deliberate resolutions against the sins which most easily beset us; then we shall spend the day virtuously, and finish it peacefully.

David, in his morning meditation, contemplates God as abhorring, in a peculiar manner, the men of *falsehood and slander, injustice and violence*. And doubtless he entered upon the day with a particular resolution to guard against these sins.

The duties which we owe to our neighbors, such as justice, charity, sincerity and faithfulness, are not only essential parts, but some of the weighty matters of religion. They are all included in the love of God. For the love of God is a love of his moral

character, and to his character belong all those properties which we call the social virtues. In vain therefore do we pretend to love and fear God, to approve of and delight in his perfections, while we practise deceit, injustice, slander and oppression toward our neighbors. “If a man saith, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ?”

Our morning prayers must be accompanied with benevolent and social affections—with love to all men ; especially to the brethren—with resolutions to watch over our tongues in all the conversation, and over our conduct in all the transactions of the day, to do good as we have opportunity, to relieve the distressed as there is occasion, to be quiet and do our own business, to speak evil of no man, give no offence, do no injustice, and, as much as lies in us, live peaceably with all.

This benevolent, peaceable temper is the salt, with which we are to season and qualify our morning sacrifice. “Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good ; but if the salt lose its savor, how will you season it ? Have salt in yourselves, and have *peace* one with another.”

David has observed, “They who seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” But *how* must they seek him ? He adds, “Hearken to me, and I will teach you”—“What man is he that desireth life, that he may see good ?—Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile, depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer ; but his face is against them that do evil.” When he solicited God’s gracious acceptance of his morning incense and evening sacrifice, well knowing that these, without a corres-

pendent heart and life, would be rejected, he immediately added, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth ; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing to practise wicked works with them that do iniquity. Let me not eat of their dainties." Or if I should transgress "let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness. Let him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head," but heal it when it is broken. "Mine eyes are unto thee, O Lord ; in thee is my trust. Keep me from the snare of them who work iniquity.

IV. David in his morning devotion, remembers, with ardent desire, the *sanctuary* of God. He loved his closet : He loved the *temple* more. "As for me, I will come into thine house in the multitude of thy mercies. In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

He alludes to the daily sacrifice, which, by divine institution, was to be offered in the temple, morning and evening continually. This sacrifice was accompanied with prayer. Hence the times, at which it was offered, were called "the hours of prayer." To this usage our Lord alludes in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, "who went up to the temple to pray." When Zacharias entered into the temple to burn incense, "the whole multitude of the people were without praying at the time of incense." The prophetess Anna, observed these hours : Hence it is said, "She departed not from the temple," or neglected not the daily service of the temple ; "but served God with prayers night and day," or morning and evening.

They who, by reason of distance, or other inconveniences, could not attend at the temple, were careful to pray, at the stated hour, with their faces toward the temple. Thus they not only enlivened

their faith and devotion, but preserved in their own hearts and recommended to others a regard to the temple worship. Jonah, when he was cast out of God's presence, resolved, that "he would look again toward God's holy temple." Solomon, in his dedication prayer, thus addresses the God of Israel, "If thy people be carried away captive, and in the land of their captivity return unto thee, and pray toward this house ; then hear thou and forgive." Daniel, in his captivity, prayed at the time of the evening sacrifice, and "with his face toward Jerusalem."

When David wrote this psalm, he was driven out by his enemies from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord : But he had not lost his affection for the sacred privileges which he used there to enjoy ; he had not forgotten how amiable were God's tabernacles, and with what delight he had seen the glory, and tasted the goodness of God in his sanctuary. He trusted in God's mercy, that he should return, and he resolved that, with God's permission, he would return to the appointed service of the temple—and that, in the mean time, he would, as nearly as possible, conform to the divine institution by worshipping with sincerity of heart, and with his face toward the temple.

Our pious Psalmist considered the acceptance of his *daily* worship as depending on his love for the *temple* worship. A disregard to the latter must, in the nature of it, be inconsistent with sincerity in the former. Solomon has observed, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be abomination." God appointed, that the law should be read in the temple at the grand festivals, when the nation was assembled before him. After the synagogue worship was introduced, a portion of scripture was read on every sabbath. By this usage the knowledge of the law was communicated to all

who were disposed to receive it. Now Solomon says, If any man turned away, and refused to hear the law, God would abhor his prayers. For there could be no sincerity in them. One who desires to do the will of God, desires to know it, and diligently attends on the appointed means of instruction.

They who turn away from the public devotions of the sanctuary, in vain allege, that they can profitably spend their time in secret meditations and family exercises ; for their careless neglect of, and cold indifference to the former, mar all the goodness of the latter. An upright heart is consistent with itself. It submits to the whole will of God. It chooses all those means of religion, which God has instituted. It does not set one part of religion in opposition to another, but regards all in their place, and makes each subservient to the rest.

V. The Psalmist prays for God's direction in a time of general corruption, when he was in special danger of going astray. "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness, because of mine enemies," or observers : "Make thy way strait before my face ; for there is no faithfulness in their mouth ; their inward part is very wickedness ; their throat is an open sepulchre ; they flatter with their tongue."

David made this prayer at a time, when infidelity and iniquity of almost every kind much abounded. Many were enemies to him on account of his faithful adherence to the laws and institutions of God. They watched to ensnare him and draw him aside from the purity of religion. They sought an opportunity to reproach him, and through him to wound religion. He therefore prayed, that God would lead him in the path of righteousness.

The pious man will not implicitly follow the multitude, and blindly walk according to the course of the world ; but he looks well to his goings ; he

proves what is acceptable in the sight of God. It is not his inquiry, how he shall commend himself to men, but how he may obtain the favor of God. He does not turn into this, or that course, as humor, interest, or custom may happen to dictate; but he chooses the way of truth, sets God's judgments before him and cleaves to his testimonies.

He is especially careful, in evil times, to walk in a strait path. "Walk circumspectly," says the Apostle, "not as fools, but as wise, because the days are evil."—"Be blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation."

We should walk circumspectly in corrupt times, lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, we fall from our steadfastness, and thus bring guilt on our souls, and reproach on our religion. Peter exhorts Christians to a holy conversation, that they may "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

The professors of religion should walk in wisdom, that they may invite and encourage others to walk with them. A good example does more to recommend religion than an hundred speculative arguments. This is an argument sensible and obvious to every capacity. It is an argument; which is seen and felt, and which cannot be refuted. When religion is reduced to practice, and its manners and virtues are exhibited in real life, it then appears to be excellent and good. If you would confound the enemies of religion, only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. Your religion has its adversaries, and you walk amidst observers. Let it be your daily prayer, "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness; make thy way strait before me."

VI. David concludes his morning devotions with a petition for the general interest of godliness, the extinction of wicked works, and the extermination of impious men, the support of truth and the pros-

perity of its friends. "Destroy them, O God," i. e. the wicked and deceitful before described; "let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against thee."

In several of David's psalms we meet with similar expressions, which sound to us like imprecations of evil on his enemies.

But, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, the words, which sometimes are rendered as an imprecation, may, with equal propriety, be considered as a prediction. The passage before us is of this sort, and may run thus; "Thou, O God, *wilt* destroy them. They *will* fall by their own wickedness. Thou *wilt* cast them out." In this sense the imprecatory passages in several of the psalms are understood by the writers of the New Testament. In the 109th Psalm, David, speaking of one under the character of a wicked and deceitful man, says, "Let his days be few, and let another take his office." The Apostle Peter, reciting this passage, says, "This is that which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas."

Or, if we take the expressions as they stand, they will admit a sense consistent with the piety and benevolence of the gospel. David does not imprecate destruction on the wicked as his enemies; but viewing them as the enemies of truth and righteousness, and the promoters of vice and misery in the world, he prays that such judgments may fall upon them, as will arrest the progress of their corruptions, and defeat their dangerous designs.

Though we have no right to indulge malice, and study revenge against our enemies, yet we may wish and pray for the restraint of their wrath, and the disappointment of their counsels. Though we may

not rejoice in the misery of an enemy when he falls ; yet we may rejoice, when his wicked devices come to nought.

David's prayer, in the passage under consideration, amounts to no more than this, that God would banish wickedness from the land—that he would confound the implacable enemies of truth—that he would display before all men his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness—and would cause the former to triumph over the latter. Thus he prays in the seventh psalm, " Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just ; for the righteous God trieth the reins and the heart." David, finally, prays, that God would make such distinctions in favor of the godly, as may encourage all to engage in his service, and trust in his protection. " Let the wicked fall—but let all those who put their trust in thee, rejoice ; let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them : Let them also that love thy name, be joyful in thee." For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous : With favor wilt thou compass him as with a shield."

In this probationary state, good and evil are dealt out promiscuously to the godly and ungodly, and neither love nor hatred can be known by the things which are before them : A full distinction between them is reserved to another world. We may, however, believe that God will, and we may pray that he would, so far favor the righteous and frown on the wicked, as to make it manifest, who are the happier men, and have chosen the better part. Yea, we may from his word be assured, that the time is coming, when he will put away the wicked from the earth, and make the righteous rejoice in his favor.

It becomes us then daily to pray, and with faith in his word we may pray, that he would cause truth and holiness to spread in the earth ; that he would

extend the limits of his church ; that he would increase the influence of his gospel ; and that he would make known his salvation and shew forth his righteousness in the sight of all the nations.

In our prayers we are to remember, and in our benevolence to embrace all men ; but we are more especially to think of, and intercede for the land in which we dwell, and the church of God which is there. Benevolence must be diffusive ; but it may operate with greater strength near the centre, than at the extremity of the circle. Our own country is more within our view, than other countries : In her are our friends and connexions ; in her prosperity we are peculiarly interested ; and for her happiness we are daily to pray. “ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.”

We are still more particularly to remember in our prayers the religious society to which we belong, and to accommodate our petitions to the cases of particular members, so far as the peculiarity of their circumstances is known to merit a distinct consideration.

We are to pray for the edification of the church, the increase of faith and holiness, the success of the divine word, the conversion of sinners, and the establishment of saints.

One reason why we are required to covenant and associate with one another is, that by mutual counsel, social prayer, reciprocal example, and a joint attendance on divine ordinances, we all may be comforted and edified, and may all be builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit.

We see, in the example of David, in what manner we ought to begin every day that we live. We should direct our morning thoughts to God—lift up our hearts alive to him before they are sunk and buried in the world—contemplate the holiness of his character and his displeasure against the workers of iniquity—incline our hearts to his testimonies, and fix our resolution against every evil way—devote every day so entirely to God, that we may easily pass from the business of the world to the devotions of the sanctuary—implore the guidance of the divine spirit amidst the errors of a corrupt age—take heed to our ways, that we may not dishonor, but recommend religion by our daily example—and by our daily prayers solicit God's blessing on those, to whom our immediate influence cannot extend.

Thus beginning the day piously, we may spend it profitably, and close it pleasantly. Let every day be thus begun and thus employed, and our last day will be peaceful, our death bed easy, our change safe, and our eternity joyous. Thus our age will be clearer than the noon, our evening brighter than the morning, and the end of our life better than its beginning.



S E R M O N XIX.



The Shortness of Time illustrated.



I CORINTHIANS vii. 29.

— *The time is short.*

A CONCISE, but solemn sentence, and pertinent to the season of the year.

It is winter—How short are the days!—The sun rises far toward the south; and, just peeping over the hills, casts upon us a pale and oblique glance—then withdraws his face and drops below the horizon. We are naturally reminded, how short and transient is our time on earth, and how soon the day of life will be closed. When we rise to catch the first scattering rays of the morning sun, and assiduously employ the few hours, which he lends us, to dispatch the business in hand, we may reasonably contemplate the more important business, which relates to eternity, and the uncertain period allowed us for its execution. Hence we should be excited early to begin, diligently to ply, and unremittingly to pursue our great work.

The Apostle introduces our text with much solemnity. "But this I say, brethren."—What does he say?—"THE TIME IS SHORT."—What more interesting could he say? There is a similar admonition in the 40th chapter of Isaiah "The voice said, CRY. And he said, What shall I cry? ALL FLESH IS GRASS."

We will, first, illustrate, and, then, improve this serious thought.

1. The expression in the text is general, "Time," all time "is short," compared with that incomprehensible duration, which is never to end.

Time is duration measured by the motions of the heavenly bodies, especially of the sun and moon, which are appointed for signs and seasons, for days and years. When these began their motion, time, in relation to this earth, began its existence. When they shall be plucked from their spheres, then time shall be no longer. Duration will continue; but it will be duration to which no measure can be applied. The little portion of time, which our system shall have occupied, will be lost in eternity.

This world has existed nearly six thousands of years; and it may continue to exist as many thousands more. The great scheme of the Creator in forming this globe, and placing man upon it, is far from being finished. The scripture foretells many interesting events and mighty changes, which are yet to be accomplished. When we consider the duration of this globe by itself, or in comparison with shorter periods, it seems long. Ten or twelve thousands of years is a duration which our minds cannot grasp: They take it peacemeal. But still it is a duration, which will come to an end. One half of it is gone already: The rest will follow. Long as it may seem, it shrinks to a point, when eternity is placed by its side.

The revolutions of the sun, after awhile, will have completely measured off such a period. But all the rays, which, in that period, shall have been poured from the sun, in floods so constant and copious, as to fill millions and millions of leagues of space, will not be sufficient to count off the ages of eternity. Are we to exist in such a duration as this? Is its commencement just before us? Will a few more revolutions of the sun—ah, perhaps a few more changes of day and night, bring us into it?—How solemn the thought! How serious should we be in the contemplation of the grand and untried scene before us! How diligent in the execution of the business here assigned us!

2. Short is the time allotted to *man* in the present state of his existence.

The duration of the world is short compared with eternity. Inconsiderable is the life of man compared with the duration of the world. Solomon observes, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever,” or continueth for ages; we know not how many. There is a similar expression in the 104th Psalm. “God hath laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever.” This is intended to signify, not its absolute perpetuity in the present form; but its permanence and stability compared with its mortal inhabitants. For in a preceding Psalm it is said, “Of old God hath laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands. They shall perish; but he shall endure—Yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shall they be changed; but he is the same, and of his years there is no end.”

In the early ages of the world, the life of man was extended to nearly a thousand years. But this term seemed short to those, who reflected, that man was made to be immortal; to dwell on earth till he was

satisfied with life, and then, by an easy transition, to enter into a happier paradise. Alluding to the introduction of death by the apostacy, and to the longevity of the first generations Moses says, "Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years are, in thy sight, but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night." Moses here expresses the sentiments, which in that early period, mankind would naturally entertain of human frailty. A life of a thousand years seems long to us, who seldom hear of one that lives a tenth part of that time. But to those among whom death had but recently obtained dominion, and who, after six or seven generations had come on the stage, began to see their aged people dropping into the dust, a thousand years were but as yesterday, when it is past.

In the time of Job, the age of man was much reduced : But probably, then, it was three times its present length. Yet in what diminutive terms he speaks of it. "Man that is born of a woman, is of few days and full of trouble ; he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down ; he fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not." What similitudes shall we find to represent its shortness now ? David has chosen the best, "Thou hast made my days an handbreadth ; mine age is nothing before thee. Verily every man at his best state, is altogether vanity."

Moses says, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten ; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow ; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." But there are few who reach to this term. It is computed, that one half of the human race die under the age of twenty years. The youth of twenty is then to consider himself as middle aged ; and the man of forty to view himself as aged. How short is human life

compared with the duration of the world ! How many generations of mortals have risen and disappeared, since our race began ! From the creation to the flood, there were ten. From the flood to Abraham about as many more. From him to the birth of Christ four times that number. Since Christ's time there have probably been nearly as many, as there were before. How rapid is the human succession ! If revelation had not opened to our view a future existence, what answer could be found to the Psalmist's complaint ? "Remember, O Lord, how short my time is. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ?"

3. Short as our time now appears, there is another light, in which it will appear shorter still.

There are some who are dead, while they live. If we measure our life, not by the suns which roll over us, the nights which we sleep, and the meals which we eat, but by our moral, rational, useful existence, it will be reduced to a much shorter term, than what we usually compute. If we deduct from the time of life the infant years of incapacity, the youthful years of vanity, the aged years of inactivity, the hours which daily pass in indolence and slumber, the seasons of folly and trifling which are utterly lost, and the time which is worse than lost, and must be redeemed by repentance, how little is there left ?

4. Time is short in comparison with the estimate which we make of it in youth.

Job, in the days of his youth, when his glory was fresh in him, said, "I shall die in my nest ; I shall multiply my days as the sand." But reviewing life in the time of affliction, he said, "My life is wind ; it is consumed away as a cloud." In youth we look forward with eager expectation of many years to come, and with impatient desires of many pleasures to be enjoyed. When we have reached old age

which once appeared remote, we are surprised that we have reached it so soon. The intervening years seem scarcely to have existed. They are gone, we know not how. The youth raises to himself flattering prospects, and longs to push forward that he may sooner realize them. He thinks little of disappointment, disease and death. The aged man has made a trial of life, and by experience has learned what it is. He has been deceived in his earthly expectations ; and it is now too late to hope for pleasures below.

When a youth hears the aged talk of the shortness and vanity of life, he considers them as speaking the language of gloominess and impatience. In contempt of such sober lectures, he expects to live many years, and rejoice in them all. If he sees a gay companion cut down in the bloom of life, he reflects that such instances are unfrequent, and flatters himself, that a better lot is reserved for him. To convince him that his time is short, let him look back on the years already past. From the speed with which these have flown, he may form some imperfect conception, how short his future years will seem, when they are past.

Our apprehensions of time past, and time future, are, in all stages of life, very different.

One cause of this difference is the different employment of our thoughts with respect to the past and the future.

We have always something in prospect. We form designs for months and years to come. We meditate on the supposed success and happy issue of these designs ; on the means to effect them ; on the accidents which may defeat them ; on the measures to prevent or counterwork these accidents.—While our minds are full of these projections and

cares, time seems important. Time past ceases to exist; and we are little disposed to reflect, how it went away. And perhaps we have spent it in such a manner, that we find no pleasure in the review; but feel best, when we think least.

Our memory is frail and deceitful. It can gather up but little of what we have done, or have received; and of this little it gathers up less than it might.— But while memory is indolent, imagination is always busy. It runs forward and raises to our view a thousand objects, which never will exist. It creates evils which never will happen; promises enjoyments, which never will be realized; forms good purposes, which never will be executed; and exhibits pleasing images, which never can be embraced. While we lose so much of what is past, and add so much to what is future, we make the one appear longer, and the other shorter, than it is. Let us give more employment to serious reflection, and less to a foolish imagination, and we shall view time more justly, and improve it more usefully.

Discontent with our present condition, and hope of something better increase these different apprehensions. We lose the sensation of past troubles; but we feel those which are present; and while they last, the time seems long. Impatience magnifies the troubles, and prolongs the time; and anxiety comes in, and anticipates future evils. We are more solicitous to remove the pains which we feel, and to prevent those which we fear, than to bear them with submission, and improve them to advantage. We wish time to pass away, not because we would shorten life, but because we would get rid of our uneasiness. While we are restless in our condition, time seems long. But when that which is future, is gone by, it will, like the time already past,

be scarcely perceptible. If we measure our future time by the estimate which we make of the past, it will be but as a dream, and as a watch in the night.

5. Our time will appear short, if we measure it by the magnitude and importance of the work which we have to do.

When business presses hard, the husbandman reckons even a summer's day too short. He chides the sun's hasty progress, and wishes to check its downward career, that he may have time to despatch his work and adjust his affairs.

The Christian, working out his salvation with fear and trembling, views life as short, because his business is urgent, and there is much to be done.

Vast is the object proposed to us : It is the happiness of immortality. To secure this is the work assigned us in the present life. And great is the work. We are to gain the knowledge of God, of religion, and of ourselves : We are to repent of our sins ; acquire habits of holiness ; obtain a temper of piety and benevolence ; learn the mind which was in Jesus ; correct our errors ; subdue our passions and mortify our lusts : We are to watch against temptations, and repel their attacks ; to grow in grace, prove our works, and make our calling and election sure. When we contemplate the greatness, the moment, the difficulty, and the variety of our business, and the hindrances and interruptions to which it is exposed, does not our time seem short ? " What our hands find to do, let us do it with our might. There is no work in the grave, to which we are going."

6. Many may say, The time is short compared with what it was once ; and the time which remains is short, compared with what is past.

That which is gone by, is gone forever : It cannot be recalled. It has been ours : It will be ours

no more. We can appropriate only what remains ; and this, with respect to many, is very little, and this little very uncertain.

The aged man may review with thankfulness God's sparing mercy and daily benefits ; but he may well look forward with seriousness and solicitude. He is soon—very soon to enter upon a new state of being, in which his eternal destiny will be fixed. There is little more that he can do for mankind, or for himself. He may say with Job, “ My days are past—the graves are ready for me.”

As the greater, so the better part of his time is gone. The little which remains will probably be filled up with pain and infirmity, which will embitter his worldly pleasures, interrupt his intended services, clog his mental powers, and chill the ardor of his devotions. The past time has been better, than the future can be, for the enjoyments of life, the labors of benevolence, and the work of his salvation.

The youth sees, that to an aged man the time is short. But who can say, the same is not true of himself? Where is the youth, who can be sure, that the better and longer part of his life is not spent? What is wisdom in an aged man, is wisdom in all men, to fill up with virtuous diligence the time which remains, and to walk circumspectly redeeming the time, because the days are evil.



S E R M O N X X .



The Shortness of Time improved.



I CORINTHIANS vii. 29.

—*The time is short.*

THE shortness of time has been a subject of our meditations. We will now attend to the reflections which it suggests. We will follow the apostle who has led the way.

1. If the time is short, little dependence can be placed on wordly friendships and connexions ; but “they who have wives should be as though they had none.” The same observation will apply to all other mortal relations.

In the present state these connexions are necessary. Without them we could not subsist, much less be happy. We were made for society. As our wants and weaknesses urge us, so our affections and feelings invite us to associate. The pains of life are softened, and its burdens alleviated by mutual sympathy and support ; its joys and pleasures are heightened by reciprocal participation ; the needful supplies of the body are procured by joint labors and friendly cooperations ; mental attainments are assist-

ed by familiar communications ; piety and devotion are enlivened by social and united addresses to the common parent. The nurture of infancy, and the education of youth depend on those of mature age. Without attention to the former, the infant must perish ; without regard to the latter, the child will grow up in ignorance and vice.

As our natural relations are necessary to our subsistence, so our natural affections are useful to sweeten these relations, and facilitate the duties which belong to them. We see the benevolence of the Creator in assigning us our various relations, and in so framing us, that reciprocal regards and affections spontaneously spring out of them. How unhappy would be our condition, if these relations were abolished, and each one was placed in solitary disconnexion ? Or if these affections were extinguished, and invincible disgust, or cold apathy and indifference succeeded in their place ?

We are to remember, however, that these relations are only for the present life. In the resurrection, when the children of God shall be like the angels, " they will neither marry, nor be given in marriage." Hence we may conclude, that the special affection, which unites near relatives here below, will cease in the world above. Charity, indeed, exists there, for this never fails. But the charity of heaven is universal love—love to God and all holy beings—delight in his infinite glory and perfection, and in their purity and happiness. It is not that partial affection, which here unites a particular family in distinction from others ; but that expansive benevolence, which embraces the whole family of God.

I cannot say, but that holy and virtuous friendships, formed on earth, may, after they have been dissolved by death, be again renewed in heaven. I cannot say, but that they, who have assisted one an-

other in the religious life, and have mutually contributed to improvement in holiness, and preparation for happiness, may meet in heaven with sentiments of peculiar congratulation, and feel, in each other's company, the warm return of former holy endearment. There is something in scripture, which favors this idea. To those who had been converted to, and edified in the faith by Paul's ministry, the Apostle, says, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy."—"We look for the Savior from heaven; therefore my brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy, my crown, stand fast in the Lord."—"Work out your salvation—hold fast the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ with you all, and that you also may rejoice with me."

Paul seems to have expected, that his happiness and joy would be exalted by meeting those in heaven, among whom his ministry on earth had been employed with success; and that their felicity would also be enlivened by meeting him, whose faithful and friendly labors had brought them thither. For the same reason, religious friendship among christian brethren, begun on earth, may be renewed and continued in Heaven. As they are to live together with Christ, so they should comfort themselves together now, and edify one another. Pure, christian love—holy, spiritual friendship will pass from earth to heaven, and be refined and exalted there.

But our *natural* affections, with our natural relations, will cease. These are only for the present time; and the time is short.

We should view our relatives and friends as itinerant, transient beings, like ourselves, soon to emigrate to another country, and to have no more an in-

terest in the possessions, and no more a connexion with the mortals, whom they have left behind. When we rejoice in their prosperity, or grieve in their adversity, let us consider that both the one and the other is but for a moment ; and thus repress our intemperate joy, and soothe our immoderate grief. We may take comfort in our friends while they are with us ; but we should remember, they cannot be with us long—Hence we should be excited to prepare for the parting hour, and to place our reliance on the immutable, allsufficient God. We should faithfully discharge the duties resulting from these mortal relations ; but in our attention to social and relative duties, we must not forget our superior obligations to the allperfect Creator. We are diligently to provide for them of our own household ; but we must never suffer earthly cares to divert us from, or distract us in our attendance upon God. We should study to render every relation of life mutually pleasant and useful, while it lasts ; but chiefly labor to provide for that time when all these mortal connexions will be dissolved.

2. Since the time is short, “ it remaineth, that they who weep be as if they wept not.”

The Apostle exemplified his own precept ; for “ he was troubled, yet not distressed ; perplexed, yet not in despair ; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; poor, yet making many rich.” Affliction, which is incident to all, for the present must be grievous ; but soon it may yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Whatever our trouble may, we have this consolation, that it will not last long : It is but for a season—for a moment. It will cease when our time shall end. It *may* cease before.

It is not usual, that any particular sorrow abides through life. “ Weeping may continue for a night, but joy comes in the morning. If God cause grief,

yet will he have compassion ; for he does not afflict willingly.” Most men can number more days of health and ease, than of pain and sickness—more successes than disappointments in the prudent prosecution of lawful designs—more friends than enemies, while they shew themselves friendly—more favors than injuries, while they walk inoffensively.

Life, indeed, is a checkered scene ; but the light occupies more ground, than the shade. We may walk a few steps in darkness ; but soon we meet a brighter sky. The sun is often obscured with intervening clouds ; but he presently breaks through them, and transmits his smiling rays. None pass through life in the constant gloom of adversity. There are many lucid intervals ; and in the deepest shade, there are some scattering rays.

In the severest afflictions, there are comforts intermingled, which sensibly qualify and soften them ; and the composition, like acids mixed with honey, gives a flavor to both the ingredients, which neither simply possessed.

The end of adversity is kind and friendly. God chastens us, not for his own pleasure, but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness in this life, and admitted to his presence in the next. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The reward of our patience is sure as the divine truth, and near as our own death. Let us be patient, and stablish our hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh—He is even at the door. We have need of patience, that when we have done the will of God, we may inherit the promise. But we need not wait long. We are begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ, to an inheritance incorruptible, reserved for us in heaven, and ready to be revealed. In this hope let us great-

ly rejoice, though now for a season, we are in heaviness through many temptations. Such is our hopeful state—such is our glorious prospect. In our sorrows, let us weep as if we wept not. Weep we may for there is a time to weep; but complain we may not, for we suffer no wrong. Let us maintain a fortitude, contentment and cheerfulness, befitting our christian character and our glorious prospects. If we weep, yet let us not forget God's ruling and sovereign providence, overlook his daily benefits, nor sink into dejection of spirit. We may not so weep, as to impute folly or unrighteousness to God, or hastily seek relief by sinful means. We may not so weep, as to cast away the blessings which are left us, or to despair of those which are needful for us. On the contrary, we must maintain our hope and confidence in God, our fidelity and love to him, calmly resign the blessings which are taken from us, cheerfully enjoy those which remain to us, and thankfully receive those which are sent us, patiently bear the evils which we suffer, and stedfastly look for the reward of our patience. And "though the figtree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vine; though the labor of the olive should fail, and the field should yield no meat; though the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stall; yet we must rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation."

3. The Apostle farther teaches us, that as the time is short, "they who rejoice should be as if they rejoiced not."

We are required, "in the day of prosperity to rejoice." The divine goodness, which we continually experience, we are to observe with the feelings of gratitude, to acknowledge with the voice of praise, and to imitate in works of beneficence. A restless, discontented spirit, always complaining, and

never satisfied, despising the mercies and wrangling under the corrections of God, is as contrary to reason, as it is to religion; as incapable of enjoying itself and the world, as it is of enjoying God and heaven; as miserable, as it is abominable. We are always in the hands of a wise and gracious parent; we are continually receiving fresh benefits from his benevolence; we are to rejoice evermore. But our joy in worldly good should be sober and temperate, for our time is short. As the object is transient, the joy should be moderate. Thus our religion instructs us, "Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand." "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober."

How many, like David, say, in their prosperity, "We shall never be moved?" Let us remember, that by God's favor our mountain stands, and our lives are safe. When he withdraws his hand and hides his face, our mountain will shake, and our hearts be troubled. Let us view the world in its proper light, as a place of change—ourselves as we are, mortal and transient—our time as it is, short and uncertain; and thus, in days of prosperity, repress the excess of our confidence, and check the intemperance of our joy. We may rejoice in the good which God bestows; but rejoice with trembling, for changes are before us. Health must soon give place to disease; strength to infirmity; success to disappointment; mirth to mourning; life to the king of terrors. But admitting, that present prosperity continues the same, what find we in it that can give permanent joy? The successes of to-day soon lose their power to please; we are looking for something new. Without some disappointments success becomes dull and insipid. In health we

grow indolent, if there is no variety. Occasional interruptions teach us its value and sharpen our relish. We love life : But what is a life in this world, if none is expected in another ? Do we wish forever to tread the same dull round of occupations, amusements and pleasures—of laboring in summer to provide for the consumption of winter, and of consuming in winter the fruits for which we labored in summer—of business by day to sweeten our sleep at night, and of sleeping by night to prepare us for the business of day ?—It is the prospect of a future life, which dispels the gloom, enlivens the labor, and improves the pleasure of the present. It is death which introduces us to that better life. And the time which detains us from it, is short. Let us, then, no more rejoice in the world, as if it were our home ; or in the goods of the world, as if they were our portion : But remember, this is not our rest ; we must arise and depart ; and when we go, we shall take nothing in our hand. So short is the present life, compared with the duration before us, that prosperity and adversity here are inconsiderable circumstances. They will but little affect our condition on the whole. All the good which we receive from God strengthens our obligations, and increases our accountableness to him. The good in which we now rejoice is a trifle compared with that which we have in prospect ; and however it may cause present joy, too fond an attachment to it will be bitterness in the end. Let these sentiments possess our minds, and we shall rejoice, as if we rejoiced not—shall rejoice, not with a presumptuous confidence, but with serious gratitude, and sober contentment.

4. If the time is short, “it remaineth, that they who buy, be as though they possessed not,” or *retained* not ; so the word signifies.

What we acquire, we cannot retain longer than the short time allotted us on earth : We may not retain it so long, for it may take wing and fly away ; some part of it we ought not to retain, for the poor have their claim.

It is lawful for men to *buy*—to increase their property and improve their circumstances by labor and commerce. But what they gain, they should freely disperse, when the cause of piety, or the necessity of the poor demands. “ They who are rich in this world, must be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. Yea, even the poor, having ability to labor, are to “ work with their hands the thing that is good, that they may have to give to him who needeth ;” to him who hath not ability to labor.

There are many who buy, as if they were always to possess, and lay up for themselves, as if they were always to retain ; trust in their wealth, as if it were never to perish ; and withhold from the poor, as if they themselves were never to want. But this their way is their folly. With all their riches they cannot secure themselves, or redeem a brother from the grave. They must die and leave their wealth to others. They can carry nothing away ;—their glory will not descend after them. Some surviving mortal will have dominion over all that they have left, and scarcely remember from whom he received it.

What is the world to those whose death is so certain, and whose time so short ? It is our Savior’s advice ; “ Give alms of such things as ye have : Thus provide for yourselves a treasure in heaven, which faileth not,” “ Make to yourselves friends,

of the mammon of unrighteousness," or of the false and delusive riches of this world, "that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Does the man of charity and benevolence so bestow his earthly, perishing property as to provide a mansion eternal, and an inheritance incorruptible in heaven? In what a gainful commerce is he employed! What enriching bargains he makes! Surely property was never laid out better.

5. As the time is short, "they who have the world, must use it as not abusing it, for the fashion thereof passeth away."

The world is given us to be used—not abused. When we apply it to our support and comfort, and bestow it in works of piety and beneficence, we use it as God requires. When we consume it in the gratification of vanity and pride, appetite and lust, or throw it into a useless heap to behold it with the eye, spurning in the mean time, the cries of poverty, and the demands of piety, then we abuse it; we pervert it from its proper use—from its real design.

The world is given us in trust; we are stewards of God's manifold gifts; and we must be faithful. Our stewardship will end; the day of reckoning will come. The fashion of the world is changing; its property is shifting; we are passing away; and the time is short. Let us be diligent in the calling assigned us, wise in the application of the property given us, and fervent in the service of our Lord, that we may meet his approbation when he comes; for the day is at hand. "The faithful and wise steward he will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season. Blessed is the servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily he will make him ruler over all

that he hath. But if the servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken; his Lord will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and will cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with unbelievers."

The time is short: An argument this, of which our blessed Lord felt the weight. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." "I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected;" or shall have finished my ministry on earth. What was the work in which he was so deeply engaged? It was the work of our salvation. If he would not lose a day, which he could employ in the salvation of others, let us not lose a day which can be applied to our own. Dare we waste a day? We have a vast work in hand, a mighty interest depending; we are on trial for eternal glory, and the least delay may be fatal; life is short, time is swift, every hour uncertain. If this argument is unfelt, what other shall be found to awaken our diligence?

How important is early religion? Time is short: Begin your work in season, lest, while you loiter, the day slip away, and the time for labor be ended.

Short is the winter's day: Unless you rise early, little can be effected. Short is this mortal life: Unless you begin the work of religion betimes, you will make little improvement. Your dilatory intentions may be wholly defeated; for you know not what accidents, or obstructions are before you. If you would lengthen the transient day, seize the morning hours. A diligent morning will forward the business, and facilitate the labors of the whole day, and give you a pleasant and cheerful evening.

Though the sky may be dark and cloudy, storms may rave without, and winds may buffet your dwelling, yet you will have a secure retreat, review your work as finished, and find comfortable accommodations around you ; and you may cheerfully resign yourselves to the long night's sleep, in hope of awakening to a calmer and brighter morning.



S E R M O N XXI.



The pernicious Effects of an inflamed Tongue.



JAMES iii. 6.

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell.

SAINT James, in this chapter, gives us an animated description of the mischiefs produced in the world by a petulant and untameable tongue.

The tongue has so much to do in all the business of life ; it is so nimble and voluble an organ ; it is so easily put in motion by the lightest breath of passion—and it so instantly feels the impulse of other tongues, that the regular government of it is considered, in scripture, as an evidence of high attainments in virtue. Hence our Apostle says, “ If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

The tongue has an influence upon all the human movements ; and he who regulates this with wisdom and sobriety, will seldom grossly err in the conduct of life. While *this* moves aright *he* will not go wrong. This observation the Apostle illustrates by two similitudes ; the bit which guides a horse, and the helm which directs a ship. “ We put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. And the ships, which though they be so great, and be driven with fierce winds, yet are turned about by a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. So the tongue is a little member, and boasteth,” or performeth, “ great things.” It moves and turns the whole body, as the bit does a horse, or the helm a ship. Nor is its power confined to the man who possesses it ; but extends to many others. One tongue, like the main wheel in a complicated machine, being set a going, will put a hundred more in motion. It may in this respect, be also compared to fire, which is the Apostle’s metaphor. A small spark, falling into dry matter, soon mounts into a blaze ; and spreading with ungovernable fury, consumes cities, or levels forests in its progress ; and it is not extinguished, as long as there are, in its way, any combustibles to feed it. “ Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindieth.” “ The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity ; it defileth the whole body ; it setteth on fire the course of nature ; and it is set on fire of hell.”

We will make some remarks on the Apostle’s description of this pernicious evil, *the inflammation of the tongue*. And we may observe,

I. The inflamed tongue “ is set on fire of hell.” It is, indeed, immediately set on fire by the *passions* ; but these are inflamed by hell ; and, operating as conductors, the flame which they catch from be-

neath, they transmit to the tongue. They are the tongs by which the live coal is taken, not from the sacred altar, but from the sooty furnace, to touch the unhallowed lips. Hence our Apostle, speaking of the haughty and malignant passions, envy, strife, deceit and vain glorying, says, "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, *devilish*." Saint Paul speaks to the same purpose; "Put away lying, let not the sun go down on your wrath, neither give place to the *devil*." When these passions, by the operation of an infernal spirit, are excited into action, the tongue obeys their impulse as naturally, as puppets dance to the motion of the wire, or a stringed instrument sounds to the stroke of the bow. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. From within, out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, false witness and blasphemies."

The boasters, false accusers and covenant breakers, who shall come in the last days, are described by the Apostle, as "proud, fierce, high minded, unthankful, and despisers of good men." When the tongue is inflamed by the diabolical passions, it may properly be said to "be set on fire of hell."

II. The tongue thus inflamed, "sets on fire the course of nature;" or "defiles the whole body." It spreads disorder through all the members and powers of the man.

As the passions by their action give motion to the tongue, so this by its reaction gives new violence to the passions. If men under high provocation, instead of hastily uttering their resentments, would apply themselves to sober, silent, prayerful meditation, their passions might soon subside into a calm. But how often, without deliberating what they ought to say, or whether they ought to speak at all, do they pour out their first feelings in a tornado of blus-

tering language, and thus urge their rising passions into a sudden tempest? How often do men, who have met with a supposed injury, force themselves into a rage by relating the injury with all the fictitious aggravations, which jealousy can invent? Men of opposite parties, or of different sects may, at first, dissent from each other in their sober judgment; and their dissent may arise from their different connexions or from different degrees of information. But they enter into a dispute, talk confidently, grow warm, perhaps angry, each asserts more than he knows, each takes advantage of the other's mistakes, and each, instead of confessing, labors to defend his errors. They soon begin to reproach each other as ignorant, and to criminate each other as dishonest, and, by degrees, work themselves into a belief of all the illiberal things, which they have said; and thus contract a mutual hatred, which never would have existed, if they had curbed the licentiousness of the tongue.

The man addicted to sensuality, by often pleading in defence of his conduct, and affecting to glory in his shame, stupifies his conscience, extinguishes modesty, loses a sense of decency, and gives dominion to lust.

Whatever corruption exists in the heart, it will acquire strength by the concurrence of the tongue in aiding and defending it. The fire within, ventilated by the mouth, soon rises and spreads through the man. Thus "the tongue defiles the body, and sets on fire the course of nature."

But it does not stop here; for the Apostle says, III. "The tongue is a *world* of iniquity." It has a concern in all the mischief that is done upon earth.

As it is a principal agent in all the transactions of mankind, it of course has a share in all their unjust-

ice, fraud, cruelty and oppression. If we look through the world, we see no good work carried on, and no laudable design accomplished without the help of this little organ. It is by this, that companions amuse, friends entertain, and Christians edify one another. It is by this, that neighbors negotiate bargains, and merchants manage their trade. It is by this, that families are educated in piety, and schools instructed in science. It is by this, that legislators frame laws, advocates plead causes, judges decide controversies, generals command armies, kings rule empires, and preachers proclaim the gospel.

The tongue has an equal concern in works of a different kind. If this were no more to be used, all *social* business must cease. The work of Babel was soon stopped, when the language of the builders was confounded. If language should be generally *perverted*, the world would be in a worse state still; it would be filled with violence, and society must be disbanded. When the nation of the Jews became an assembly of treacherous men; when every brother would utterly supplant, and every neighbor would walk in slanders; when all bent their tongues, like their bows, for lies, and none were valiant for the truth, the prophet wished to find in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that he might leave his people and go from them. It was the perversion of speech, which made the state of society so intolerable then; and to the same cause are owing the principal infelicities of society at any time. If there be brawls in a family, they are begun and kept up by the petulance of the tongue. If there be between man and man a fiery contention, which cannot be extinguished, it is because their two tongues, like the burning ends of two firebrands, come in contact, and thus raise and continue the flame. If there be

dissentions and animosities in a town, there are some secret whisperers who separate near friends, and some talebearers going up and down to scatter the sparks of discord. If there be mutual slanders and criminations in a neighborhood, some tongue set on fire of hell has imparted its fire to other tongues, and the flame fanned by every breath, as it passes, runs swiftly and spreads widely, until it involves all in a general combustion. If there be divisions in churches, and brethren hereticate and censure one another for trivial faults, or imaginary errors, some tongue full of deadly poison has infused into them the venom of its own pride, bigotry and malice. If principles subversive of the doctrines and virtues of the gospel, are diffused and received, some mischievous tongues are busily at work, that by evil communications they may corrupt good manners. If there be a perversion of justice in a state—if iniquity be framed by law—if truth stand afar off, and equity cannot enter, the evil tongues of unprincipled and imperious men have wrought the mischiefs. If nations send forth armies for mutual carnage—if they spread desolation in each other's territories—if peaceable inhabitants are driven from their possessions and robbed of the means of subsistence, in all this horrible work the tongues of men act a distinguished part. Justly therefore might the Apostle say, "The tongue is a world of iniquity."

IV. The Apostle calls the tongue a *fire*.

In the virtuous tongue there is a cheerful and refreshing warmth; but in the evil tongue there is a scorching and destructive heat. As fire, so the tongue is a good servant, but a bad master. Under just direction and restraint, it is highly beneficial; but let loose, and left to its own impetuosity, it works every kind of mischief.

The lawless tongue, like fire, makes no discrimination of objects, but devours promiscuously whatever comes in its way. Fire, when it breaks out, consumes not only the worthless shrubs, but the stately oaks—not only the vile rubbish, but the precious treasure—not only the nauseous filth, but the necessary food: So the wanton tongue assails the virtuous character as freely as the vicious, and prostrates the well deserved reputation of public benefactors, as readily as the assumed and unmerited honor of self seeking boasters.

Fire, when it breaks forth in combustible materials, will naturally spread; and the means used to repress or extinguish it, will often scatter its sparks and augment its fury. So it is with the fiery tongue. The man who has maliciously uttered a slander, or impudently asserted a falsehood, will repeat it, that he may be believed; and will grow more bold in his assertions, that his wickedness may be less suspected. Opposition makes him more violent, and contradiction awakens new confidence, until he works himself into a partial belief of that, which at first he knew to be totally false, and into a real hatred of the innocent man, whom at first he slandered in a pet. Solomon observes, that “a wise man feareth and departeth from evil; but a fool rageth and is confident.” He has another observation full to our purpose: “A lying tongue hateth him, that is afflicted by it.” His meaning is this: If a man, in order to afflict his neighbor, tells a malicious lie about him, he will endeavor to persuade himself, that this neighbor deserved the slander; and, by conjuring up in his imagination evil surmisings and groundless suspicions, he will bring himself to believe, that this neighbor is as bad a man, as he ever represented him to be. Thus his own lie becomes the occasion of his hating the man, whom his lie has afflicted.

Destruction by fire is not easily repaired ; nor is the mischief done by a malicious and backbiting tongue. When once you have uttered a slander, it is gone from you forever. It is no longer under your command ; you cannot recal it, if you would. You have set an hundred tongues in motion, and you cannot stop them. If you can stop your own, it is well. You may contradict the report, which originated in your passion ; but you cannot oblige all to contradict it, who have taken it from your mouth, and circulated it on your credit. You may as well stop the progress of a fire, which you have kindled in a dry thicket, as stop the progress of a slander, which you have uttered in bad company. You may as well restrain the wind from spreading your fire, as restrain mens' tongues from propagating your falsehood. You may as well restore the verdure, which the flames have consumed, as restore the reputation, which your calumny has blasted. The mischief is done speedily ; the reparation, if made at all, must be a work of time.

With little pains you may propagate licentious opinions ; but with all your pains you cannot extirpate them. They have gotten possession of many corrupt hearts, and have taken deep root in them ; and how much sœever you may detest them now, you cannot pluck them out of the soil. They have been received, at second hand, by many, whom you never saw, and never will see. And those whom you see, though they have been corrupted by your evil communication, yet perhaps will never be reclaimed by your sound reason and good advice. Your evil words, like poisoned arrows, have struck the venom deep into their hearts, and it will eat as doth a canker. The untameable violence and irrevocable mischief of the evil tongue James describes in the words following our text. “ Every kind of

beasts and of birds is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind ; but the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God even the Father, and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”

V. There is one observation more, which, though not mentioned by our Apostle, yet naturally arises from our subject ; namely, that this infernal heat, which usually sets the tongue on fire, and renders it very voluble and loquacious, sometimes causes a swell and stiffness, which is accompanied with a sullen taciturnity. This symptom, though not so extensively mischievous, as the inflammation, which we have described, may be as painful to the patient, and as vexatious to the bystanders. We read of some, who were brought, by their friends, to our Savior to be cured of their dumbness.— Whether their dumbness was caused by the impotence of the organ, or by the wilfulness of the mind, it is not said : But whatever might be the immediate cause, there was a satanical operation at the bottom. The patients are expressly said to be “ possessed of the devil”—to have “ a dumb spirit”—And “ when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake.” If there was real disability in *their* case, as probably there was, yet in some other cases there is mere crossness and obstinacy. If the patient like old Ahab, vexed at an unexpected contradiction, or mortified at a worldly disappointment, carries a thick gloom in his brow, affects sickness, takes to his bed, turns away his face from his friends, and refuses to eat bread, we may conclude, that the malady lies deeper than the tongue.

There are some who have no rule over their spirits, and no command over their tongues. They are often angry without cause, and they often speak without consideration, and bluster without restraint. These, while the storm lasts, greatly disturb the peace, and disquiet the feelings of those, who stand near them. The violent gust, however, soon blows itself out, and leaves a more pleasant sky. But they who indulge a sullen gloom—a silent discontent—who brood over their selfcreated afflictions, and will never say, what has offended them, or what will please them ; who take a perverse satisfaction in ruminating on their grievances, and in thinking that they vex others by keeping their grievances to themselves are more troublesome to their friends and more unhappy to themselves than the former. They are like a close, muggid atmosphere, which obscures the sun for days together, and in which one feels a continual depression of spirit, and enjoys not an hour of cheerfulness. A fire which puts the tongue in *motion*, though it may do much mischief, yet is the less dangerous, because it is visible, and means may be used to check or divert it. But if the fire burns secretly and silently within, the flame may burst forth, when it is too late to apply a remedy. It is like hidden fire in a building. It works unperceived, consumes the solid substance, and before it breaks out, it has made too great progress to be extinguished.

To these observations we will subjoin two or three reflections.

1. It appears that the government of the tongue is an essential part of religion.

The tongue has so much to do in all the duties of life, and actually does so much in all the wickedness of the world, that without a sober government of it, no man can pretend to possess the temper, and ex-

hibit the manners of a virtuous character. "If man any seem to be religious, and bridle not his tongue, that man's religion is vain." The current of men's language is so exact a criterion of their character, that our Savior says, "For every idle word, which they speak, they shall give an account in the day of judgment; for by their words they shall be justified, and by their words they shall be condemned."

In whatever point of light we view religion, we shall find, that the regulation of speech essentially belongs to it. "Pure religion before God is to visit the widows and fatherless, in their affliction." But to no purpose is the visit, if nothing is spoken; and if evil only is spoken, the visit aggravates their affliction. "Religion is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world." But for this we must keep our tongue unpolluted; for the foul tongue defiles the whole body. Religion implies an abstinence from evil, from injustice, deceit and slander. But these are the vices of the tongue. Religion consists in doing good; and "the lips of the righteous feed many, and the tongue of the just is as choice silver." We may do good to others by relieving them in their outward wants; but we may do more good by prudent counsel, friendly exhortation, timely reproof, edifying instruction, and affectionate consolation.—For the former kind of charity, the occasions are rare, and our abilities small: For the latter kind, the occasions are frequent, and most men's abilities are competent. No day passes without an interview with some. In every interview we may suggest something that will be useful; at least we may avoid every thing, that would be hurtful. Almost every man may suggest some good sentiments, and certainly every one may restrain his tongue from uttering evil ones. And this is doing much good,

as it is an example, which may prevent much evil in others. If in doing positive good, we need some ability, yet in forbearing to do evil we need none. If we have not knowledge sufficient to instruct others, yet we have, at least, knowledge sufficient to leave them uncorrupted. If we cannot speak so wisely as some of our neighbors, yet we can be silent as well as they; and silence in some is accounted wisdom. Whatever weakness or ignorance we may plead as an excuse for not being more useful, we cannot plead either as an excuse for being mischievous; and least of all can we plead them as a reason for injuring others by our words; for however unqualified we may be to speak, we are neither too ignorant, nor too impotent to hold our tongues.

2. We see that the due government of the tongue chiefly depends on the government of the thoughts and passions.

There is so near a connexion between sentiment and language, that without attending to the former, we never can wisely regulate the latter. The man who allows his thoughts to run at random—who indulges in his heart evil imaginations—who harbors in his breast impure or malignant passions, will, like raging waves of the sea, foam out his own shame. In spite of his studied reserve, his inward feelings will often burst forth. Hence the Psalmist prays, “Set a watch, O Lord, before the door of my mouth; keep the door of my lips; incline not my heart to any evil thing.” If evil inclinations are indulged in the heart, no external watch can effectually guard the door of the lips. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.” Solomon advises, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” If the heart be filled with evil thoughts and vile affections, the government of the tongue, if in any degree practicable, will, at best,

be forced and irregular. But let the heart be cleansed from evil dispositions, and replenished with virtuous principles, and the tongue will readily speak what it ought ; and that which ought not to be spoken, it will easily repress ; not corrupt communication will proceed out of the mouth, but that which is good for the use of edifying. The government of the tongue is like that of a state. Where the people are virtuous and peaceable, government is easy ; where they are vicious and turbulent, government is coercive, and no coercion will prevent rebellion.

3. We see the great evil of the sins of the tongue. “ The” inflamed “ tongue sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell.”

Many of these sins, as lying, slander, reviling, and seduction, are diabolical in their nature. They are the very works of the devil. The springs, which give motion to the evil tongue, as pride, envy, malice, hatred and wrath, are satanical passions—the very passions which dwell in the prince of darkness. And often it is by the influence of this malignant spirit, that similar passions in the human breast are excited into action ; for he works in the children of disobedience.

By the abuse of the tongue, then, we submit to the power, imitate the example, and cooperate in the design of the devil, and thus participate in his guilt. The place of punishment to which the devil and his angels are detrued, is called *hell*, and described as a lake of *fire* burning with *brimstone*. The tongue inflamed by diabolical passions, is said to be set on fire of hell ; and from it, as from the mouths of the horses in John’s vision, issue fire, and brimstone and smoke. Wicked men, who yield themselves up to the influence of infernal spirits, stand exposed to a share in their punishment. The sentence which awaits them, our Savior has announced, “ Depart, ye curs-

ed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Their horrible condition in this lake of fire, our Savior represents in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. When the rich man died, he lifted up his eyes in hell being in torments; and seeing Abraham afar off, he prayed, saying, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool *my tongue*, for I am tormented in *this flame*." The tongue set on fire of hell here, will be tormented by the fire of hell, hereafter. Our Savior's advice with respect to the other members of the body, may be also applied to the tongue: "If it cause thee to offend, cut it off, or pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than with all thy members to be cast into hell, into the fire, which shall never be quenched." He in these words solemnly warns us, that the perversion of our members to the service of hell in this world will be punished with the pains of hell in another; and those pains will be so tormenting, that no anguish, which we can conceive in the present life, not even the amputation of a limb, or the extirpation of an eye, can be compared to them; or can be too great to be endured, if thus we may escape them. The amputation of offensive limbs is a metaphor to express the mortification of all sinful lusts and passions, and the cultivation of all heavenly graces and virtues. Our Apostle closes his discourse on the evil tongue, by a representation of the difference between the wisdom from beneath, which brings down to hell, and the wisdom from above, which leads up to heaven. And as he concludes his discourse on this subject, so I shall conclude mine. "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversa-

tion his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not and lie not against the truth. This wisdom defendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish, for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom, which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.— And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”



SERMON XXII.

Noah's thankful Egress from the Ark.

A THANKSGIVING SERMON, preached November, 1794.

GENESIS viii. 20, 21, 22.

And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.

THE transaction here recorded is the first which took place, on earth, after Noah had escaped, with his family, from that dreadful deluge which destroyed the rest of the human race.

What mingling emotions of sadness and joy—of grief and gratitude must the patriarch have felt, when, after a long, wandering voyage on the shoreless deep, he and his household were allowed to set their feet once more on the solid earth?

He embarked on board his new constructed vessel, leaving the old world in its usual prosperity.

There were flourishing towns and populous cities, verdant meadows and cultivated fields, pastures alive with grazing herds, and groves vocal with the songs of birds, men occupied in their several employments, and youths pursuing their various sports: They were building and planting, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, full of worldly prospects, and thoughtless of impending danger, until the day that Noah entered into the ark. But on the day when he comes out of it, how mightily is the scene changed!—In what a strange situation he finds himself!—His eyes look around for former objects, and his ears listen for wonted sounds—but all is desolation and silence. Towns with their inhabitants are swept away; groves are stript of their beauty; and fields despoiled of their fruitage. No face of man, or footstep of beast is seen—no human or brutal voice is heard, except from his own few attendants—no sound salutes his ears, but that of hollow winds howling through the naked trees.

But amidst this gloomy scene, still there was room for grateful reflections. When the old world was doomed to destruction, Noah and his family had a promise of security. In the general deluge they had all been preserved through a long voyage, the most perilous that mortal had ever known. And after rolling, for a full year, on the tumultuous element, they again beheld the face of nature, and walked on the dry ground.

Now the patriarch's first work was to return thanks to his great Preserver. "He builded an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean beast and fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar."

Noah was one, who had walked with God, and had been found righteous in his generation. His piety distinguished him in a degenerate age, and procured for himself and his family an exemption from

the general destruction. As in the days of prosperity he maintained the practice of religion, surely he would not neglect it in the solemn period of danger and confinement. The first thing said of him, when he came out of the ark, is, that he presented burnt-offerings to God.

This was an act of *social* devotion. He had preached righteousness to a degenerate world ; but with little success, except in his own household.—Happy he was to see *them* submitting to the influence of his instructions and example.

A more melancholy scene can scarcely be imagined, than this which meets the patriarch, on his entrance into the new world. But here he recognizes the mercies of God. There is no season or condition of life so adverse, but that blessings attend it. The godly man can find matter for praise in the greatest afflictions. Paul and Silas, confined in a prison, and fastened in the stocks, sang praises to God at midnight. The prophet says, “ Though the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.” The Apostle says, “ We are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; we have nothing, yet possess all things. We are filled with comfort, we are exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.”

Noah, whatever grief and dejection he might feel in viewing the state of the new world, could not but mark with gratitude God's peculiar mercy to him and his family. They, in a time of general destruction, were all preserved alive. God's judgments on others should awaken in our souls admiring thoughts of his distinguishing goodness to us.

We think, perhaps, that God's ways are unequal. But let us view our condition in a just and impartial light. What blessing is withheld, which, we can say, we deserved? What affliction has befallen us, which, we can say, is unrighteous, or unnecessary? Is there not more good than evil attending our lot? Have we not more days of health and security, than of danger and distress? More days of plenty and fulness, than of hunger and want? In the prosecution of our lawful calling do we not find more success than disappointment? While we act well our part in society, are not mankind our friends? In times of calamity, are there any who insult us?—Do not most pity us, and many contribute to our relief? Do not our troubles often rise from ourselves, our irregular passions, unreasonable expectations, and vain pursuits? Do we not fear more evils than we feel? And do not mercies sometimes surprize us, which we never had thought of?

We see some men, whom we think to be under better circumstances than ourselves. In this comparison we often judge wrong. But admit this to be really the case: It is not certain, that their circumstances would be better for us. We are probably safer under our own. But let us look round a little farther. Can we see none, whose condition is less desirable than ours? Can we see none in poverty, sickness, and real distress? From their calamities let us learn gratitude to God, and compassion to them. Can we find many, with whom we would wish to exchange conditions in full? If not, let us be content with such things as we have.

The little stock, preserved with Noah in the ark, was all that the world now contained. From this the earth was to be replenished. But still the patriarch devoted a part of it to God. "He took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt

offerings on the altar." Present poverty was not alleged in excuse for the neglect of divine service. All that he had was God's gift, and all his future prosperity depended on God's blessing; and he consecrated a portion of the family substance to him, who had been the family Preserver.

Piety to God is the foundation of virtue. Without the former, the latter cannot exist. Our neglect of the instituted means of piety can be justified by no worldly circumstances, but those which put an attendance on these means out of our power. Whatever may be the calls of secular business, a part of every day must be employed in devotional exercises. Whatever may be the calamities of the times, God's worship must be maintained. Whatever may be our particular condition, we must shew a forwardness in his service. As all our worldly success depends on his blessing, so in all our ways we must acknowledge him. We are then most sure of his smiles upon our labors, when the fruits of them are used to his glory. "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."—"Bring ye all the tythes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in God's house, and prove him herewith, if he will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it."

In Noah's offering, "the Lord smelled a sweet savour." It was acceptable and well pleasing to him, as the fruit of Noah's faith and thankfulness. "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain."—"By faith Noah, being warned of God, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." And that faith, by which he at first obeyed the divine warning, moved him afterward to offer a

sacrifice of praise for the divine deliverance. His faith in preparing the ark was accompanied with fear: His faith in leaving the ark was attended with thanksgiving. The essence of thanksgiving consists in that faith, by which we realize our dependence on God, recognize his mercies, feel our obligations to him, and are excited to obey his will and imitate his goodness. "He that offereth praise glorifieth God, and to him, who ordereth his conversation aright, God will shew his salvation." The external form of thanksgiving is no farther valuable, than it is a mean to promote, and a token to express our inward faith and gratitude. It was not in the smoke of the burning sacrifice, but in the piety and gratitude of Noah's heart rising with the sacrifice, that God smelled a sweet savour.

God's acceptance of Noah's thankoffering was expressed in the promises immediately subjoined, "that the ground should not any more be cursed for man's sake, and that the regular succession of the seasons should not in future be interrupted."

Though it was only a single family, which united in this thanksgiving, yet it was as general as it could be made; for this single family contained all who were left of the human race. The blessings here promised were intended not merely for the family then existing, but for all the families of the earth in succeeding ages. Our public and social devotions may often be rewarded with extensive and lasting favors to mankind. It is agreeable to the constitution of God's government to bestow benefits on many in the present state, for the faith, piety and virtue of a few. Thus he encourages our devotion to him, and our benevolence to our own species.

One promise, which God here makes, is the future exemption of the earth from the ancient curse. "I will not again curse the ground any more for

man's sake, though the imagination of his heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite every living thing, as I have done."

Here is a security against a future deluge. "God hath sworn, that the waters of Noah shall not again go over the earth." National corruptions will be punished with national judgments; but a general extinction of the human race and the brutal tribes will no more be executed, until that time shall come, when the frame of nature is to be dissolved.

The promise also imports, that the curse denounced on the ground, at the time of the apostacy, should in future be removed, or at least greatly mitigated.

One part of the sentence on Adam was in these words: "Cursed be the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life—thorns and thistles shall it bring forth, and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground." To comfort Adam under this melancholy curse, assurance was given him, that, in some future time, "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpents head;" or should relieve mankind from the curse brought on them by the influence of the serpent. This promise ultimately respected the great salvation to be procured by the death of Jesus Christ. But to keep alive men's hopes concerning an event then remote, God was pleased to grant some partial fulfilments and anticipations of his promise in the earlier ages of the world.

The removal of the curse from the ground seems to have been the expectation of mankind in the time of Lamech. He, when his son Noah was born, foretold, "This same shall comfort us concerning the labor and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Of this prediction the promise in the text seems to be a verifi-

cation. God now declares, "I will no more curse the ground for man's sake." From this promise we have reason to believe, that, after the flood, the earth was more fertile, the seasons more favorable, and human industry more successful, and subject to fewer disappointments, than they had been before. Accordingly we find, that the blessing granted to Adam before the fall, was, after the flood, renewed to Noah completely and in every circumstance, with the additional grant of liberty to eat flesh. "God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth; and the fear of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon all that moveth on the earth. Into your hands are they delivered. Every living thing shall be meat for you. Even as the green herb have I given you all things."

Whatever might be the state of the antediluvian world, we now find the earth sufficiently fertile, under the hands of industry, to supply the wants of man. Labor is indeed necessary to the support of life; and necessary it would have been, even if Adam had never revolted. He was put into the garden not to riot in sloth and indolence on the luxury of spontaneous fruits; but to dress the garden and to keep it. Whether greater industry may not be necessary now, than in the time of innocence, it is not material to inquire. Certainly no more is necessary, than what conduces to human virtue, health and comfort. If the earth was more productive, men might live with less labor; but they would not enjoy more happiness. The earth will not spontaneously gratify all our foolish and fantastic desires; but, under proper cultivation, it bountifully supplies our real and natural wants. This is as much as would ultimately prove a blessing.

It is farther added, "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease."

These words are by some understood to signify, that there should never be another year, like the past, in which there was neither sowing nor reaping, nor a regular distinction of seasons, and in which the heavens, covered with thick clouds, confounded day and night.

But, I think, here is an intimation also, that the seasons, in future should be more favorable to the husbandry, than they had formerly been. The curse on the earth, in the antediluvian age, seems to have been the effect of unkind and irregular seasons. Excessive rains and severe droughts, untimely frosts and intense heats, often frustrated the labor of man, and sometimes introduced famine and distress. This seems to be implied in the promise, that seed time and harvest, cold and heat, in time to come, should not cease. The foregoing part of the promise, "that the ground should no more be cursed for man's sake," certainly alludes to the curse pronounced on the earth at the fall: By analogy then we must suppose, that the promise of future regularity in the seasons alludes to a different state of things in preceding ages.

This promise we see, from year to year, made good. Nature proceeds in a steady course, and brings us seed time and harvest in their appointed weeks. If the seasons were deranged, and their succession often interrupted, human prudence would be nonplussed, and industry disconcerted; for who could judge what line of business to mark out, or in what manner to pursue the line which he had marked? Who could tell, when his seed must be sown, or when a harvest might be expected—how long he should enjoy the smiles of summer, and what provi-

sion he ought to make for the demands of winter? In such a state of uncertainty, the wisdom and the labor of man must be suspended. But as the system of God's government is uniform, or subject only to small and occasional variations, we can order our business with discretion, and prosecute it with success.

Though seed time and harvest fail not, yet they are not always equally favorable. There is then such a variety, as teaches us the supremacy of the divine government, and our continual dependence. If the course of nature was invariable, unthankful man would forget, that there is a God. Changes are designed to awaken us from our indolence and ingratitude, and direct our thoughts to him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Particular countries have, at times, felt the distresses of famine. But these have oftener been caused by the ravages of war, or the monopoly of greedy oppressors, than by the unkind disposition of the seasons. There may, in one year, be a real scarcity, compared with the plenty of common years, and still there may remain a competency for human want; or the deficiency in one place may be supplied by the abundance in another; so that distress will be prevented. Industry in the culture of the earth, charity in the distribution of its fruits, and frugality in the use of divine bounties, will ever be sufficient to secure us from the dangers of famine. There has never been known such a general failure of seed time and harvest, as can justly weaken our confidence in God's ancient promise.

The remarks which we have made on the words of our text will naturally suggest to us a useful improvement.

1. Our subject leads us to view the world as mutable and uncertain.

So great and sudden a change, as Noah beheld, has never since taken place in our earth. But still we see the world in continual mutation; and nothing in it can we find, that is fixed and permanent. Every man experiences, from year to year, some alteration in his own state, and in the circumstances of his family. He sees also similar alterations in the families and fortunes of others. And, within the compass of a few years, there is as great a change in the *inhabitants* of this globe, as that which the patriarch saw. This comes not so suddenly; but, in time, it is as great, as the change produced by the flood. Noah, when he came abroad from the ark, could find none of the people, whom he had seen a year before. Take a little longer time, and you will perceive a change almost as great.

The aged man looks back to youth, recollects his early companions, and the pleasures and amusements which he once enjoyed in their company. Where are they now? In vain he casts his eyes around to see them. They are gone—gone to the grave. Were it not that a new race is come forward in the place of that which has retired, the aged man would be as solitary, as Noah when he came out of the ark.

The changing nature of earthly things, and the transient condition of mortal man, should raise our thoughts to the future world, and hasten our preparation for it. Great was the change which Noah saw, when he passed from the old world to the new. Greater is the change which we all shall see, when we pass from this world to the other. Warned of the approaching deluge, the patriarch employed his time in preparing for so important a scene. Wisdom will direct us to fill up our short life in those holy exercises and humble duties, in which consists our preparation for heaven.

What folly would it have been in Noah, after the divine warning had reached him, to have spent all his time in building houses, erecting monuments, forming new plantations, and accumulating property, which, in only the short space of six score years, would be all swept away and destroyed ! If the patriarch, instead of providing for his security, had directed his whole attention to the designs of avarice and ambition, we should have said, He did not believe the warning, which he had heard. He did not realize that the end of all things was at hand. Do we believe, that in less than half—in less than a quarter of that time, all the property, which by incessant labor we acquire, will be to us as useless and vain, as the treasures, which were swept away with the flood ?—Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endures to everlasting life.

2. We see reason to rejoice in the divine government.

Terrible was the scene which Noah beheld ; but to him and his family joyful was the issue. The destruction of the men of the old world was the demerit of their crimes. The preservation of the patriarch and his family was the result of their piety. God's government is not only just, but kind and benevolent, and, on the whole, favorable to virtue. If under it any are unhappy, they must impute their sufferings, not to its primary design and real tendency, but to their own perverseness and rebellion.—Good men, in their connexion with the wicked, will in the present state, have a share in public calamities. Noah and his household were, by the corruptions of the age, involved in danger and trouble. But they were wonderfully preserved and finally rewarded.—And, as the Apostle reasons in the case, “ If God spared not the old, but saved Noah a preacher of righteousness, when he brought in the flood on the

world of the ungodly ; then the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

Many remarkable interpositions for the preservation of the just, in times of general calamity, are recorded in sacred history, as instances of God's justice in the government of the world, and as premonitions of that solemn day of retribution, when he will separate between the righteous and the wicked. Saint Peter considers the deliverance of pious Noah from the flood, which destroyed the ungodly, as a proof that there is a judgment to come.

The Lord reigns : Let the earth rejoice, for his way is perfect. All events will be made subservient to the interest of holy and upright men. Much we have to fear from our own iniquities. Here is our only danger. Let us do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God ; then from his government we have nothing to dread. No evil shall happen to the just.

3. From the calamities of others, let us learn gratitude for God's distinguishing favors to us.

Noah and his family, preserved in a time of general desolation, builded an altar to God, and offered upon it sacrifices of praise for his wonderful goodness to them, when all around them were destroyed.

Our blessings, contrasted with the afflictions of many, whom we see, rise in their value and importance. If there had been no signal judgment on the world, Noah's preservation would have been a common favor, and no altar would have been erected to commemorate it. What struck his mind with admiration and gratitude was the distinction made between his household and the rest of mankind.—

From the same cause may our thanksgivings be enlivened.

If we view the state of mankind in general, we see them blinded with ignorance, deluded with superstition and oppressed with tyranny. If we look into Europe, we behold the horrors and desolations of war; armies collected to butcher their fellow mortals; ancient governments subverted; towns depopulated; defenseless citizens fleeing from their habitations and seeking refuge among strangers. If we consider France, boasting her emancipation from royal despotism, we find her still under an absolute government, engaged in arduous wars, calling forth her sons for defence or invasion, and still remote from that freedom and tranquillity, which render a nation happy.

How different is our state? We enjoy a free and settled government, the deliberate and unawed choice of the people. We taste the sweets of liberty. We dwell securely in our houses. We walk forth without fear of a lurking enemy. We travel abroad without apprehension of a bloody assassin. We converse in the social circle without suspicion of a hired informant. We possess the means of civil and religious knowledge in common, without invidious discriminations. We sit under the light of divine revelation and rejoice in its cheering beams.

If we bring our thoughts nearer home, we meet distinctions, which deserve our grateful notice.—While some of our principal towns have been distressed with epidemical and mortal sickness, we of this society have, within the year past, enjoyed general and unusual health. But though the deaths have been few, still we see mourning families. Let us who have no rod of God in our houses, gratefully acknowledge his sparing mercy; and remember also, that sorrow awaits our dwellings, and that death is

appointed for us all. While we sympathize with the afflicted, and rejoice in God's goodness, let us realize the mutability of the world, and prepare for days of darkness.

4. In times of public calamity and private affliction, let us recognize attending benefits.

Nations and families see prosperity and adversity placed the one over against the other. When we speak of judgment, we may sing of mercy. When we are loaded with benefits, it becomes us to rejoice—but to rejoice with trembling, lest by ingratitude and wantonness we bring down national judgments. While we are willing and obedient, we shall eat the good of the land: If we refuse and rebel, God has a sword to punish us.

Though the past year has been less fruitful than some preceding seasons, seedtime and harvest have not failed. Disappointment teaches us our dependence, and should awaken our gratitude for the blessings which are reserved to us.

The usual regularity of the seasons, and fruitfulness of the earth are evidences, that the curse anciently pronounced on the ground is, if not wholly removed, yet greatly mitigated, and that a blessing has succeeded it. The alleviation of this part of the curse was to the patriarchs a pledge of the coming of that seed of the woman, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. This Savior has come. He is made known to us. Through him let us seek deliverance from every part of the curse, which sin has brought on our fallen race. If the ancient curse is removed from the *earth*, yet on the *inhabitants* of the earth it still remains; and from it there is no deliverance, but by faith in the great Redeemer. He has purchased the pardon of sin, the resurrection of the body, and a life to come. By faith in him these blessings become ours. By faith in him we are de-

livered from the dominion of sin, the condemnation of the law, and the evil of death, and are made heirs of a heavenly paradise. The paradise above far exceeds, in felicity and glory, the earthly paradise from which Adam was ejected. There flows the river of life in a perpetual stream—there grows the tree of life yielding its fruits every month—there is no more curse ; but the throne of God is there, and there his servants shall serve him, beholding his face and rejoicing in his favor forever.

Blessed are they, who do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, may enter in through the gates into the city, and may eat of the fruit of the tree, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.



S E R M O N XXIII.



The impiety of offering to God that which costs us nothing.



II SAMUEL xxiv. 24.

And the king said unto Araunah, Nay ; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price : Neither will I offer burntofferings unto the Lord my God of that, which doth cost me nothing.

FOR David's distrust of God's promised protection, and for his confidence in his own power, which appeared in his numbering his people, there was sent on the land an awful pestilence, by which, in the space of three days, there perished seventy thousand men.

The king, humbling himself before God for this sin, and supplicating the removal of the plague is directed by a prophet to go and erect an altar in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and to offer upon it burntofferings to God for the expiation of his guilt and the preservation of his subjects. When David made the proposal to Araunah, the latter with

great liberality answered, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth him good. Behold, here are the oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments, and other instruments of the oxen for wood." All these things did Araunah with a royal generosity, give to David: And he said, "The Lord thy God accept thee." And David said, "Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burntofferings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." Or as it is expressed in the first book of Chronicles, "I will verily buy it of thee at the full price; for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burntofferings without cost." "So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen, and there built an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and the Lord was intreated for the land." "He called upon the Lord, and the Lord answered him."

We easily see the propriety of David's caution, not to make atonement for his own guilt at the expense of another man's property. The acceptableness of his offering depended, not on its intrinsic value, but on the temper with which he represented it. If through avarice and penuriousness he had withheld his own property, and taken, without compensation, the Jebusites' oxen for sacrifice, his offering would have been vain, because the covetousness of his heart would have been inconsistent with sincere repentance and true devotion. It would have been that sacrifice which is abomination, being brought with a wicked mind. "The Lord hateth robbery for a burnt offering." And covetousness, which withholds from God our own, and offers him another's property, is a species of robbery. We are to honor the Lord with our own substance, not with the substance of other men. Whatever ostentation we make

of piety to God, or liberality to the poor, if we contrive to make other people bear the expense, that we may save our own substance ; it is all hypocrisy and abomination.

We are to give unto God the heart : And a heart given to God, is a heart cleaving to him with faith and love, and assimilated to him by goodness and benevolence. Such a heart prefers God's favor to every worldly interest ; and, to secure the former, will cheerfully give up the latter. There can be no sincerity, no piety in those sacrifices, which are made under the governing influence of love to the world.

The prophet Malachi condemns the Jews, because they offered to God for sacrifice the blind, lame, sick and torn, when they had in their flocks sound and unblemished beasts—such as God required them to offer. “ But why might not these defective beasts answer for sacrifice, as well as perfect ones ? The latter were better for the owners—the former were as good for God, for neither could be gain to him. There seems to have been economy in this management.” Yes ; but it was such economy as hypocrites only use in religion. It blasted the whole. Sacrifice is not gain to God ; but he would have us offer it with such a temper, that it may be gain to us. And this is a temper of love and devotion to him and of justice and benevolence to men. If we offer the blind and lame for sacrifice, it is because we wish to serve him without cost, and aim to give him that only which is worth nothing to us. Such a spirit is directly opposite to that piety to God, and charity to men, which ought to accompany all our external worship.

We will farther illustrate our subject, by shewing in particular instances, when men may be said to offer to God that which costs them nothing ; and by

demonstrating the impiety and unreasonableness of such offerings.

First. We will mention some cases, in which men offer to God that which costs them nothing.

1. If a man, under pretence of zeal for religion, but really for the sake of an easy livelihood, should devote himself to the ministry without seeking previous qualifications ; or if under pretence of immediate assistance, but really through indolence and laziness, he should perform the work of the sanctuary without previous labor and meditation, he would offer to God, that which costs nothing, and that which probably is worth nothing.

Christ has instituted a ministry of the word for the increase and edification of his church. He requires, that they who enter on this office, should not only possess inward grace, but be furnished with competent endowments. These are to be obtained, not by immediate communication from God but by the faithful application of those means which God has provided and which he usually blesses for this purpose.

Our Lord, when he began his public ministry, chose a number of disciples to be the preachers of his gospel. But before he sent them forth in this character, he took them, for several years, under his own tuition, and trained them up for their work.— Timothy had a good education in his childhood ; but, before he was ordained to the ministry, he was, for some time under the instruction of the Apostle Paul. And when Paul gave him the ministerial charge, he cautioned him not to lay hands suddenly on any, and not at all on those, who were novices in religion, or had not a faculty and aptitude to teach. When Christ ascended on high, “ he gave pastors and teachers for the perfecting of saints to the work of the ministry, in order to the edifying of his body.” It was one part of the duty of the first ministers, to

train up saints or holy men to the ministry, that so the church might be edified by succeeding preachers, as well as by those who were first appointed. The Apostle instructs Timothy, that in order to his rightly dividing the word of truth, and shewing himself a workman, who needs not to be ashamed, he must give attendance to reading, study and meditation.

If, in those days of supernatural gifts, a previous education was necessary to qualify one for the ministerial office; and previous study was requisite to the edifying performance of the ministerial duties; how presumptuous are they, who, in these days, rush into the office without an education, and attempt the duties of it without diligent preparation? Whatever pretensions they make of reliance on supernatural assistance, either pride and selfconceit, or indolence and avarice are at the bottom.

You would all condemn the minister, who should thus prostitute a sacred office to his worldly ends. You easily see, that a man who undertakes a work so important—a work which relates to the common salvation—a work in which he is supported at the expense of his fellow mortals, ought to be previously qualified for, and continually diligent in this work. But,

2. Let us, if you please, turn the tables: They who expect the benefits of the gospel ministry, either without supporting it, or without attending upon it, incur equal guilt with a selfish, indolent, earthly-minded minister.

There are few, but who, for some reason or other, choose there should be a decent house of worship near them, and a reputable minister to officiate in it. But some seem to imagine, that the maintenance of these objects is optional with them. If there is a minister, he must perform his duty faithfully, and trust himself in the care of providence. But for them-

selves they feel at liberty whether they shall sustain him or not. He is under obligations to them ; but they think themselves under none to him. He must always be at their call ; but he should have no claim for, and hardly a desire of a compensation. They would have him rely on providence for supplies ; but they will not rely on providence to remunerate the smallest act of liberality, or even of justice to him.

Now such ought to consider, that they have no more right, than a minister, to offer to the Lord that which costs them nothing. When Christ sent forth his disciples to preach, he told them to take with them neither purse nor scrip, none of their own property ; for the workman was worthy of his hire. And into whatsoever city they entered, if they were not provided for, and attended to, in their sacred character, they were to retire, and go to some other place, where they might be better received. They were empowered to work miracles in proof of their mission, but not for their own support : This they were to expect from the justice of those whom they served. Christ would not make his gospel so cheap as to bring it into contempt. That worldly spirit, which withholds from the ministry a competent support, defeats its design. For this reason Christ commanded his disciples to leave the people, among whom this spirit prevailed. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness, of riches and the lusts of other things choak the word, and render it unfruitful.— One may as well sow his seed among thorns, as sow the word among those, whose hearts are overgrown with worldly lusts. If the brambles cannot be cleared away, the seed will never come to maturity.

There are some, who, while they contribute to the maintenance of the gospel ministry, rarely bestow an attendance upon it. They think such an institution answers some good purposes. If a minister

often absents himself from the service of the sanctuary, or performs it in a careless and unedifying manner, they judge him unworthy of his place. But they are seldom seen in the sanctuary to take a part in the service there performed. If ever they appear there, it is when they shall experience no trouble or selfdenial. But what is the ministry to them, if they will not attend upon it? What benefit can they receive from the word preached, if they will not hear it? Why may not a minister neglect to preach, as well as they refuse to hear? As far as they are concerned, it matters little, whether he preaches well or ill; whether he explains the doctrines and duties of the gospel, or gives lectures on husbandry and astronomy; or whether he preaches at all.

Some will say, "We choose he should preach for the common benefit." But if you may refuse your attendance, why may not others? The reasons which oblige them, oblige you to attend. The precepts of the gospel make no discrimination in this matter. And if all men should take the same liberty as you take, the preaching of the gospel would cease; for there would be none to hear it. Can you expect the word preached will profit *you*? If it does, it must be in a way, which costs you nothing—no labor—no attention—no thought. The word will never work a saving effect in this manner. Christians are required to assemble themselves together—to take heed how they hear—and to give earnest attention to what they do hear. Thus they may hope, that by the divine operation the ingrafted word will save their souls. It is in the hearing of faith, that men receive the Spirit. They who neglect the word preached, neglect the salvation, which it brings.

3. Such as content themselves with a *careless* kind of religion, offer to God that which costs them nothing.

You think it your duty to attend on the worship of God. You wonder at some of your neighbors, who seem to be perfectly easy in the neglect of it. For your parts, you highly value the religious privilege which you enjoy ; and you hope to be accepted, because your attendance upon it is very constant and regular. But is this all the religion, which you offer to God ? If it is, you serve him with little cost, and receive as little profit.

We read of a very wicked people, who daily sought to know God's ways, and inquired of him the ordinances of justice, as if they intended to observe them. But in reality nothing was farther from their hearts.

What is the end of divine worship ?—Is it to be a substitute for virtue and holiness—for charity and good works ? No : It is to be a mean of promoting these. You must, then, come to God's house with serious preparation of mind, with a purpose to hear what is spoken, and to apply what you hear. You must guard against all guile, envy and hypocrisy, and desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. “ You must be doers of the word, and not hearers only ; for if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man who beholdeth his natural face in a glass, and then goeth his way, and forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth in it, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed ?

A profitable hearing of the word is a matter, which will cost you something. It must cost you attention, examination, application, prayer, repentance, selfdenial, correction of heart, and amendment of life. Without such exercises as these, it is a service, which costs you little, and will do you little

good. Barely to come and sit an hour in God's house is the smallest and cheapest part of the offering.

Besides the ordinary attendance on the stated worship of the sabbath, you have, perhaps, made a profession of Christ's religion; and you come, at the usual time, to the ordinance of his supper. And because you have called Christ your Lord, and have eaten and drunk in his presence, you flatter yourselves, that you shall be admitted into his kingdom. But remember; some who could make the same plea, were shut out of it. If you have only adopted the words of a Christian profession, and eaten and drunk at Christ's table with his disciples, what have you offered him? You have offered that which costs you nothing. Calling him your Lord, and sitting at his table, if you do no more, are things of little difficulty, and little value. Have you professed his religion with a real belief of it and love to it? Have you taken pains to understand and obey it? When you come to his table, do you bring the temper which he requires? Have you repaired all known injuries, repented of your past sins, banished unfriendly passions, and called up the exercise of faith and charity? When you sit at the table, do you direct your attention to the great things there represented—the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, the grace of the Savior, and the nature of the gospel covenant? Do you feel or even desire to feel correspondent tempers and affections? Do you here offer to your Lord the love and gratitude of your hearts and fresh resolutions of future obedience? Do you here renew your covenant, intending to abide in it? Do you forgive, if you have ought against any man, as you hope God for Christ's sake will forgive you? And is it your care to live agreeably to the purposes, which you here renew, and the vows which you

here repeat ? Then you offer that which costs you something, and which your Lord will accept.

4. There are some who offer to God only the *purpose* of a *future* religion. This, at present besure, costs them nothing.

You who are young will acknowledge, that you are bound to devote yourselves to God, and you intend to do so, at a convenient time. But you wish to enjoy the pleasures of the world first. When you come forward into the active and busy scenes of life, you will have the same intention ; but still be reluctant to a present execution. The cares of the world, and the prospect, or the desire of riches will occupy your thoughts ; and you will then reserve for God only the service of your old age after it shall have become incapable of the labors and pleasures of life. And perhaps at last you will deny him even this. New difficulties will now arise, and the long habit of procrastination will hardly yield to reason's pressing demands for an immediate decision.

In this dilatory state of mind, what is it that you offer to God ?—No present service, or direct obedience—no repentance of sin, or performance of duty—no denial of your ruling passions, or mortification of worldly lusts—nothing more than a cold, wavering, ineffectual resolution, that you will make him such an offering, some time or other. And what is this, but to offer him that which costs you nothing ? It costs you nothing at present ; and you intend, that it shall cost you nothing hereafter ; for you reserve the execution to that period of life, when, you imagine, the world will have no charms, and religion will obtrude itself upon you from necessity. If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil ? If ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil ? And if you offer to God your own service only when you are blind, lame and sick, and when you are incapable of

any worldly enjoyment is not this also evil? Will God accept such an offering at your hands? He is a great king, and his name is dreadful. If you hope for his acceptance, present yourselves a living sacrifice. This is your reasonable service; and it is reasonable *now*. Make an immediate dedication of yourselves, and of all that you have. Renounce all your iniquities, and all the evil customs of a corrupt world; attend to all the duties of a holy life, and all the instituted means of religion, and cleave to God with purpose of heart. All this, you think, will cost you something. It will, indeed, cost you vigilance, diligence and selfdenial. But unless you will submit to this cost, your sacrifice will be of little value.

5. They who content themselves with a *superficial, formal* religion, offer to God what costs them nothing.

Our Savior teaches us, that if we would be his disciples, we must take up the cross and follow him. He advises us to sit down, and count the cost—to examine whether we can forego the interest and pleasures of the world for his service. It is only the deliberate—not the hasty, inconsiderate resolution, which will be permanent.

There are some who resolve on a religious life, without understanding what it is. They make up for themselves a religion consisting in a few personal or social virtues, which agree to their natural inclination; or in the practice of some external duties, which are easy to be done; or in the observance of certain forms, which are fashionable; or in an abstinence from some particular vices, against which their interest secures them; and they leave out every thing, which contradicts their inclinations, crosses their corruptions, or condemns their manners. With

such a kind of religion they pass quietly along and never allow their consciences to condemn them for partiality, or insincerity. When they look around, they see many, who indulge the vices, which they forbear; and neglect the duties, which they practise. Hence they are confirmed in the favorable opinion of themselves, which they have before entertained. And yet, if they were to examine their religion, they would find, that it cost nothing, and was worth nothing. It is all to make the best of it, no more than what they would do for their bodily health, their secular interest, or their social character, even though they believed not a single word of the gospel. The Pharisee trusted in himself that he was righteous, because he was not a liar, extortioner or adulterer, and because he observed certain customary forms; but he was not aware of the pride, envy and uncharitableness, which reigned in his heart.

Now if you practise no more religion, than what easily falls in with your natural propensities, or worldly views; if you can make no sacrifice of interest, reputation, humor or friendship, for the honor of God, and the salvation of your soul; if you explain away every obligation, which would subject you to the least degree of selfdenial, then you offer to God that which costs you nothing, and which he will not accept at your hands. If we think of serving God acceptably, we must give him our hearts, present our bodies living sacrifices, yield ourselves to him as those who are alive from the dead, and our members instruments of righteousness to him; we must devote ourselves to him without reserve, and choose his services without exception. Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all his commandments, and when our hearts are inclined to keep all his statutes, always even to the end.

We have seen what it is to present unto **G**od that which costs us nothing.

The folly and injustice of such a service will come under future consideration.



S E R M O N XXIV.



The Impiety of offering to God that which costs us nothing.



II SAMUEL xxiv. 24.

And the king said unto Araunah, Nay ; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price : Neither will I offer burntofferings unto the Lord my God of that, which doth cost me nothing.

THUS David answered Araunah, who proposed to give him his threshing floor for the place of an altar, his oxen for a sacrifice, and his utensils for fuel, that the king might present unto God a burnt offering for the removal of a pestilence, which raged among the people.

David, humbled for his own sin, which had brought distress upon his people, and desirous to testify the sincerity of his repentance, declined to accept Araunah's liberal proposal ; for he thought it incompatible with the religious end of sacrifice, to offer it at the expense of another.

In a former discourse we pointed out some cases, in which men pretend to serve God, but serve him without cost to themselves. We will now, in the

second place, shew the folly and injustice of offering to God such a service as this.

1. An offering which costs us nothing, will bring us nothing.

If David, governed by a spirit of avarice, had spared his own property, and made an offering at the expense of this liberal Jebusite, his sacrifice, in divine estimation, would have been of no value; the covetousness of his heart would have marred all the virtue of his religious service. The same temper, operating in *our* religious services, is equally inconsistent with their virtue and acceptance.

Our Savior has taught us, that if we do our alms, make our prayers, observe our fasts, or perform any religious duties, to be seen of men, to gain their confidence, and thus to facilitate our worldly designs, we are to expect no reward from our father, who is in heaven.

God looks on the heart; and the religion, which he approves, must have its seat there—it must consist in a love of his character, a subjection to his will, a reliance on his grace, a relish for heavenly things, benevolence to mankind, and a disposition to do good to them, as their occasions require. These tempers ruling in the heart will discover themselves in correspondent manners. The Christian, renewed in the spirit of his mind, puts off the old man with his deeds, and puts on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Whatever he does, he does it heartily as to the Lord, and not to men. The motives of the gospel come home to his feelings, and operate with power on his soul. Its threatenings awaken his fears, and its promises animate his hopes. By the contemplation of a future world he lives above this. In obedience to divine call he can give up his mortal interest. Knowing that he has in heaven an enduring sub-

stance, he can take patiently the loss of his earthly goods. Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect to the recompence of reward. The apostles, supported by faith, submitted to afflictions and death in the cause of Christ; and while their outward man perished, their inward man was renewed day by day; for they believed, that these light and temporary sufferings were working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

A religion, animated by the motives and directed by the precepts of the gospel, is pure and undefiled, uniform and constant, and will receive a heavenly reward; but that, which proceeds from the spirit of the world, is external, partial and versatile; it has no life, nor consistency; it changes its form, as occasions vary, and ceases to operate, when the world suspends its demands. St. James says, "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think, that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

There are some who take great pains in religion without any love to it, and merely from worldly motives. But, in regard to a future reward, all their religion is vain. They may, indeed, as our Savior observes, "have their reward"—the reward which they seek—their worldly advantages. If they are temperate, frugal and industrious, that they may preserve their health and increase their property; or if they pray and give alms, that they may obtain a good reputation, thus far they may accomplish their purpose—they may have health, property and reputation. But as their religion looks no farther than this

world, it will secure them no reward but in this world. There is no more religion, properly so called, in praying, giving alms, and fasting, merely to be seen of men, than there is in wearing gay apparel, and building elegant houses, to be seen of men; for the temper and intention of the mind are the same in both. If the former may be more useful, as an example to men, who can see only the external actions, yet it has no more of the nature of religion, and can no more claim a future reward, than the latter.

If then we offer any thing to God, let us offer the heart with it. The Christians in Macedonia, who contributed bountifully to their suffering brethren in Judea, are said, “to have *first given themselves* to the Lord.” Whatever we pretend to bring as an offering to God, if we yield not *ourselves* to him, but intend still to be governed by our own will, rather than his, our offering is vain. Though we give all our goods to feed the poor, and even our bodies to be burned, if we have not that charity, which is the end of the commandment and the bond of perfectness, our offerings will profit us nothing. And if such costly offerings as these, made without love to God and benevolence to men, can claim no reward; what can we expect as the reward of those offerings which cost us nothing?

2. As a pure and faithful service will entitle us to a divine reward, so the reward will be greater in proportion to our cost.

Our hearts must first be right, and our motives pure: Then may we expect a recompence answerable to our diligence and zeal. “Be ye stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know, that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” The smallest service, performed with an upright mind, will be graciously accepted. “He who gives to a disciple, in the

name of a disciple, a cup of cold water only, shall in no wise lose his reward." The greatness of the reward depends not so much on the magnitude of the service performed, as on the proportion of the work to the servant's ability, and on the goodness of his heart in performing it. "If there be a willing mind, a man is accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not." The poor widow's two mites were by our Lord more highly estimated, than all the costly offerings of the rich; for the two mites were all she had to bestow, and if she had possessed more, she would have given more. Servants are encouraged to a cheerful performance of the duties of their humble station, by an assurance "that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." The more active is our diligence in the work assigned us, the richer will be our recompence in the day of general retribution. As it is in the natural, so it is also in the spiritual husbandry; "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully."

We need not then be afraid of any cost or labor in the service of God; for whatever we do for him, will be abundantly remunerated: From his treasury all our expense will be refunded. "He who hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the Lord; and what he hath given, God will pay him again." "He hath dispersed and given to the poor, his righteousness remaineth forever, and the fruits of his righteousness God will increase."

In our intercourse with mankind we usually act with caution, because we are dealing with selfish beings, who too often seek to benefit themselves at other people's cost. But in the service of God we are to act on a different principle: Our caution here

must be, not lest we do too much, but lest we come short of what we ought to do. The service which we perform for him is not for his benefit, but our own; and all our cost, bestowed according to his acquirements, will turn to the increase of our true riches. God is not unrighteous to forget our works of piety and love. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty."

3. The cost to which true religion subjects us is too small to be made a matter of complaint: It is much less than the cost which attends the false religions invented by men.

That there is a God, whom we are bound to serve, mankind have been generally agreed. But the service which they have contrived to give him, has been very different from that which he has required, and far more troublesome and expensive. The prophet introduces a superstitious heathen, or a deluded Jew, inquiring, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The prophet answers, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: And what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

The Jewish dispensation, as God gave it, was far less burdensome, than the heathen superstition. The Christian dispensation, as we find it in the gospel, is more easy and simple still.

Religion substantially consists in righteousness and charity to men, and in supreme love to God and a humble walk with him. The institutions which

belong to it are only such as tend to promote its essential tempers and duties. Now where is the cost of justice, mercy, humility and piety? All the cost lies in the denial of the lusts and passions which oppose them. Where is the cost of prayer and praise, of attending on God's worship, and conversing with his word? The cost chiefly lies in conflicting with the reluctance of the heart to these duties. In all this there is nothing more than men will do, or seem to do, for their own worldly ends. The Pharisees could make a show of justice, charity, devotion, abstemiousness and mortification, in order to gain the world and exalt their character. And they carried the external show much beyond the mark of sincerity. It would have been cheaper and easier to be really pious, just and charitable, than to make all their hypocritical parade by praying in the streets, sounding a trumpet when they gave alms, fasting two or three times in a week, and disfiguring their faces, when they fasted.

Some people complain of the expense of maintaining public worship: But without any complaint they can incur much greater expense to gratify their inordinate appetites and ungodly lusts.

Besides: A virtuous and wise man, in regard to the peace and happiness of society, will cheerfully encourage the morality of the gospel. To this end he knows public worship to be important, because it tends to promote knowledge, piety and virtue, without which society cannot be free and happy. If mankind can be governed by a sense of right and wrong, by a love of virtue and abhorrence of vice, by a hope of the favor, and a fear of the displeasure of God, this method will certainly be much better and much cheaper, than to rule them by the force and terror of bodily pains. In reality, then, the gospel, as a religious institution, costs us nothing;

for nothing more is required for its support, than what good citizens would cheerfully contribute for the benefit of civil society.

Now since God has made his service so plain and simple, so cheap and easy, surely we may perform it without complaining of cost and difficulty. We may apply the expostulation made with Naaman by his servants. "If the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much more, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?"

4. We ought not to grudge the cost, which God's service requires of us, for it requires only his own.

We are his creatures, and all that we have is his gift. When we yield to him all our possessions, and serve him with all our powers, we render to him what we have received. "Ye are not your own;" says the apostle, "for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and spirit, which are God's." When David had richly provided for building the house of God, instead of making a merit of his liberality, he thanked God for his ability. "Now, O God, we thank and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. O Lord, all this store, which we have prepared for thy holy name, cometh of thine hand; it is all thine own. But thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness."

5. When we offer to God that which costs us nothing, we are dissatisfied with it ourselves; we distrust its goodness, and fear its rejection.

There is a pleasure of mind, which attends religion; but then it must be a pure, entire and uniform, not a hypocritical, partial and superficial religion. Where the heart is not engaged, the work, if done

at all, is done with reluctance, and consequently can yield no pleasure. "What a weariness is it?" says the hypocrite. He dares not wholly neglect religion: But he does as little as his conscience will allow, and excuses himself as far as he can. He makes much of the little which he does, substitutes the form for the power of godliness, a few ceremonies for real good works, and external performances for inward virtues. And after all that he has done, he cannot be fully satisfied; for he feels a strong suspicion, that his religion is vain, his heart corrupt and his service unacceptable. The good man has this for his rejoicing, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity he has his conversation in the world. He feels his heart consenting to the gospel; he perceives its steady influence in governing his life; he is conscious of an aim to approve himself to God; and he enjoys sweet peace in his soul. "Great peace have they who love God's law, and nothing shall offend them." Hope and comfort spring spontaneously from sincerity of heart. "If our heart condemn us not, we have confidence toward God." But the hypocrite's hopes and comforts are forced and artificial: They are accompanied with distrust: "His heart condemns him; and God is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things."

6. God has not been sparing in his bounty to us; we should not be grudging in our service to him. He gives us liberally without upbraiding; we should serve him cheerfully without complaining.

He daily loads us with benefits. He affords us a thousand enjoyments in this world; and has provided for our eternal happiness in the next. He has given his word to instruct us in our duty, sent forth his Son to redeem us from guilt, and shed down his Spirit to sanctify us from sin, and make us meet for

heaven. By the mercies of God, let us be persuaded to present ourselves holy and acceptable to him, which is our reasonable service. When we contemplate the bounties of his providence, and the wonders of his grace; the riches of the heavenly inheritance, and the price with which it was purchased, can we think of offering unto God in return that which costs us nothing—a merely external, superficial, heartless religion—or only some future service to be paid in the time of sickness or old age? Is this all that we have to give in acknowledgment of the riches of his goodness? Will he accept the torn and lame for sacrifice? Surely we would not think of making such a return to a human benefactor.

7. We should be willing to offer to our Lord and Savior, that which costs us something, for he offers to us that which cost him much. He offers us the pardon of sin and an inheritance in heaven, which he has purchased by his own blood. “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from iniquity, and purify to himself a people zealous of good works.” “This love of Christ should constrain us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that we who live should not henceforth live to ourselves, but to him that died and rose again.” “Forasmuch as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, let us arm ourselves with the same mind—and no longer live, the rest of our time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” The sufferings of Christ for the sins of men are, with sincere Christians, a powerful argument to holiness of life. Paul felt this argument in himself, and he pressed it on others. “I am crucified with Christ,” says he, “nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life, which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself

for me.” He says to the Roman converts, “ Our old man is crucified with Christ, that henceforth we should not serve sin. As he died unto sin once, and liveth unto God, so reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof, but being made free from sin, have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

We have seen, this day, some of the many ways, in which men offer to God a religion, which costs them nothing—an empty unsubstantial religion without spirit and life : We have seen also the folly and injustice of thinking to satisfy God with such an unmeaning service.

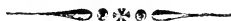
The result of our meditations should be a full resolution, that we will devote ourselves wholly to God ; will consecrate to his glory all that we have, and all that we can do ; will serve him with an undivided heart ; will embrace all his commands without exception ; will bow to his pleasure, when it contradicts our own ; will trust his promises in our greatest darkness ; will be contented with our condition, however perplexed ; will follow the call of his providence, though we know not whither it may lead us ; will pursue the path of known duty, whatever difficulties may embarrass us ; will secure the happiness of the world to come, whatever we may hazard in this world ; reckoning, that all the sufferings and all the enjoyments of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, that shall be revealed.

Let us well understand what religion is in its temper and practice, what assistances accompany it, and what rewards await it ; and then say, whether it can cost us so much in this world, as will justify us in renouncing its prospects in another. We are to

count the cost, but not to magnify it beyond the truth. Against the cost we are to place the gain, and observe how the latter preponderates. Having seen the nature, and contemplated the reward of the service, which God requires, let us take it as it is, submit to it without reserve, and perform it without reluctance—not be slothful, but zealous in it—not wavering and unsteady, but stedfast and unmoveable—not sparing of our labor, but abounding in our Lord's work—not forsaking his service, but enduring to the end. Thus we shall receive the crown of life.



S E R M O N X X V .



Joseph discovering himself to his Brethren.



GENESIS xlv. 3.

— *I am Joseph.* —

THIS Joseph was one of the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob, who lived in the land of Canaan. The partial fondness, which Jacob expresses for this son, together with some extraordinary dreams which Joseph, in his youthful simplicity, related to his brethren, purporting his future superiority in the family, excited in them a spirit of jealousy and envy, which was not appeased, until they had sold him into Egypt for a slave. Here, after passing through various scenes of danger and trouble, he was by a wonderful providence exalted to the presidency of all the country, and made the next in command under the king himself. Being divinely premonished of a long and grievous famine, which was coming on Egypt and the adjacent countries, he in the preced-

ing years of plenty, provided such ample stores, as were sufficient to supply the wants of the people in the unfruitful period, which was approaching. The famine, when it came, was soon felt in Canaan, where his father's family lived ; and ten of his brethren, urged by scarcity, came into Egypt to buy corn for their households. They were admitted to the presence of the governor, who immediately knew them to be his brethren. But his long absence, the change which years had made in his appearance, and especially his unthought of advancement, prevented their recognizing *him*. For particular reasons the governor chose for the present, to remain unknown to them. He made himself strange, affected a suspicion of their integrity, inquired concerning their country and parentage, spake to them roughly, and called them spies. He furnished them, however, with a temporary supply of corn ; but demanded, that to verify their information, and to clear themselves from suspicion, they should come again, and bring with them that young brother, whom, they said, they had left with their father. In the mean time, to ensure their return, he detained one of their number as an hostage.

When they had consumed their first supply, compelled by necessity, they returned to Egypt with their youngest brother, Benjamin, whom they brought solely against the will of their father. Here again they were admitted to a conference with the governor, who treated them with hospitality, but contrived to bring them into such embarrassments, as might awaken reflections on their former ill usage of him, and give him a pretext to detain Benjamin, who was his brother by the same mother. He released the hostage, filled their sacks, and sent them away. But they had not gone far, before they were recalled on a charge, that one of them had stolen the governor's

favorite silver cup, which, by his order, had been artfully put into the young brother's sack, and which, on search, was found there. Astonished and confounded, they return, acknowledge a fact, which could not well be denied, and submit themselves to the governor's mercy. He proposes to detain for his servant the youth, with whom the cup was found and to dismiss the rest. One of the number, in compassion to his aged father, whose heart was bound up in the lad, offers himself to remain a servant in the place of the lad.

The governor, by this time, had carried the artifice as far, as fraternal and filial affection would permit. He felt for his father in Canaan, now anxiously looking for the return of his children—for the return of his youngest son. He felt the anguish which must wring the father's heart, when he should see that this son was not among the rest. He felt for his brethren, now trembling in his presence, and waiting with painful solicitude the result of his deliberations. He felt for Benjamin, an innocent youth, charged with, and, to appearance, found guilty of a crime, which had never entered into his heart. He could no longer refrain himself. He commanded every Egyptian to retire. None remained in his presence, but these strangers from Canaan. What was now to be done, they could not conjecture. In this critical moment many anxious suspicions rushed into their minds. Here stood the governor—his brethren stood at a distance in terror—he partook of their feelings. He wept—he wept aloud. As soon as his voice could force an utterance, he said, *I am Joseph.* When his suffocated voice was again at liberty, he asked, *Doth my Father yet live?* Overcome with astonishment they could not answer him. He saw their embarrassment. Being a little recovered from the first gust of brotherly affection, he said

to them, "Come near to me, I pray you." They came near. And he said, "I am *Joseph* your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. But be not grieved with yourselves, for God sent me here before you to preserve life." By this time he was able to give them a summary relation of his advancement, and to inform them of the continuance of the famine which was begun. He invited them to come themselves and to bring their father and children with them into Egypt, and to dwell in the best of the land. He conversed with them familiarly, kissed them affectionately sent them away laden with his bounties, and charged them to hasten their return.

We will make some reflections on the manner in which Joseph discovered himself to his brethren.

I am Joseph. It is an expression of great *humility*. He was the governor of Egypt, entrusted with its richest treasures, and distinguished by its highest honors. He was arrayed in silken robes, he wore on his hand the royal signet, and around his neck hung a golden chain. He rode in the king's second chariot, and heard the heralds proclaim, "Bow the knee before him." He ruled all the people with such undisputed authority that without him no man lifted up his hand, or his foot in the land. This is the same man, who a little while before was sold for a slave, and confined among criminals in the common prison. So great and sudden an elevation would have swelled a vain heart with pride, and intoxicated an empty head with selfimportance. Few would have borne it with any degree of moderation, or have behaved under it with tolerable decency. But this governor was still himself. He remembered that he was *Joseph a Hebrew*—the son of an old pilgrim, who now sojourned in Canaan, and the brother of

these *plain* and *vulgar* strangers, who depended on his goodness and solicited his clemency.

How amicable is humility, especially in those, whom providence has distinguished by wealth and power. To Joseph this virtue was a brighter ornament, than the royal signet, the golden chain, or the silken robe. It was the virtue of his mind—not the trappings of his dignity, which transmitted his name with honor to distant ages. He might have worn the badges of power, and, like a thousand other pompous mortals, have been soon forgotten. It was his virtue, which embalmed his memory. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit—of a kind and modest deportment is of great price in the sight of God; and it is a high recommendation in the sight of men. “He who exalteth himself shall be abased: He who humbleth himself shall be exalted.”—That we may preserve this ornament unsullied and unimpaired, we must remember what we are—often look to our origin, to the hole of the pit from whence we were digged. Whatever distinctions providence makes among us, we all rose out of the same dust—we all are kept up by the same hand—we are all fed by the same bounty, and must all return to the same parent earth. What have we, that we have not received? What have we for which we are not accountable? Why then should one glory over another?

It was Joseph’s humble virtue, which laid the foundation of his high advancement, and made this an honor to himself, and a blessing to mankind. Ye youths, set out in life with humble thoughts of yourselves, with a pious sense of your dependence upon, and accountableness to your Creator, and with a just regard to your social relations. Humility, cultivated in the heart, and exhibited in the deportment, will secure to you a good name, raise you to

as much distinction as is desireable, and reconcile you to a low condition, if this be the lot assigned you.

I am Joseph. Here is a soft and gentle *reproof*. The governor well knew, that on the mention of his name to his brethren, their past guilt would rush to their remembrance, and no other, admonition would be needful. He had seen that their hearts were not callous to remorse. He had overheard them, when, in their embarrassment, they said one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear him; therefore, is this distress come upon us." He had heard the eldest brother thus upbraid the rest, "Spake I not unto you, saying, "Do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, his blood is required." He doubtless was well pleased with these hopeful indications of virtuous sensibility, and wished they might be carried to true repentance. He knew, that the discovery of his person would awaken severe reflections on their former inhumanity. The cruel transaction could not, at this time, pass unnoticed; but he touched it with the greatest delicacy. He would give them no unnecessary pain: Their own reflections, he was sure, would be sufficiently pungent, without his upbraidings to urge them home. He first simply mentions his own name—a pause ensued—he then calls them near—he repeats, "*I am Joseph*—whom ye sold into Egypt." He hints at their crime; but without menaces or reproaches. He alludes to it, as if he only aimed to palliate it. He makes the only excuse, which his benevolence could devise, "Now therefore be ye not grieved, nor angry with yourselves;" or, as it is better rendered in the margin, "let there not be anger in your eyes;" i. e. anger toward one

another ; for he had heard their mutual criminations ; “ be not angry among yourselves, that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life.”

It could not be Joseph’s intention to exculpate his brethren’s inhuman conduct toward him ; for whatever might be the consequences, the action itself was highly criminal ; nor was its criminality diminished by the happy effects, to which it was overruled. But his intention doubtless was to console their aking hearts, by leading them to contemplate the wisdom and goodness of providence in bringing their evil designs to so merciful an issue.

A penitent will condemn his own sinful acts, whatever may be their consequence. But still it is a sensible relief and consolation to see that providence has graciously interposed to prevent the mischief, which might naturally have ensued from those sinful acts. While he laments his own iniquities, he rejoices in God’s wise and merciful disposals. Joseph, already acquainted with the compunction, which stung his brethren’s hearts, in the remembrance of their former guilty transaction, studies, not to exasperate, but to soothe their pain. He suggests to them, how the evil, which they intended, has been prevented, and blessings unforeseen had been educed. “ God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. It was not you that sent me hither, but God. You thought evil unto me, but God meant it for good to save much people alive.”

Here is an example of kind and tender rebuke. If our brethren trespass, we are to reprove them ; but we must choose out acceptable words. When we remind them of their sin, let us discover a love to their persons, a compassion for their weakness, and a concern for their happiness. Let no resent-

ments mingle with our expostulations, no upbraidings embitter our instructions. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Kind are the strokes of the righteous; they are like excellent oil, which heals a wounded head.

I am Joseph. Here is the language of *forgiveness*. “Though your brotherly affection to me was once lost in envy; though forgetting the ties of nature, you sold me into bondage, I am your *Joseph* still—still I am your *brother*. I remember our relation; no injuries shall obliterate my regards for you. I forget all that is past. I love you, and will treat you as the children of our common parent.” In token of this forgiveness, he kissed them, and wept upon them. He talked familiarly with them; he loaded them with kindnesses; and promised them in their distress every assistance, which his power could give them.

This forgiveness proceeded, not merely from a sudden flow of passion; but from settled goodness of heart. It was permanent; it lasted through life; it was never recalled.

Some years after this, when their father was dead, their apprehensions returned. They said among themselves, “Joseph will now hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil, which we did to him.” They sent messengers to him, with instructions to say in their name, “Thy father did command us, before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee, the trespass of thy brethren and their sin; for they did unto thee evil. And now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.” And Joseph wept, when they spake to him. Encouraged by the favorable report of the messengers, his brethren went to him themselves, and they fell down before his face and said, “Behold we are thy servants.” And Joseph

said unto them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? Fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones." And he comforted them, and spake kindly to them.

How amicable is this forgiving spirit! What a bright resemblance of the example of the Redeemer! How deeply had the patriarch in Egypt embibed that benevolent temper, which long after was taught by the Son of God from heaven! How does his example reprove the implacable, ungracious spirit, which too often appears in the professed followers of Jesus, and the professed believers of his gospel? Do you long remember an injury? Does anger rest in your bosoms? Do you reject overtures of reconciliation? Do you study revenge, or rejoice in the calamities of those who have offended you? Do you take back a promised forgiveness? Do you allow old grudges to spring up afresh, after they have once been suppressed? Do you upbraid an enemy of former wrongs, when he has sought your friendship, and you have pretended to grant it? How unlike are you to this ancient Joseph, who had never read the gospel, nor heard of the example of Jesus?

I am Joseph. Here is a pious *reference* of his brethren to the wonderful works of *providence*.

They easily understood him, as speaking to this purpose, "You remember *Joseph*, your *brother*, and certain transactions, when he was a youth. You recollect the dreams, which, in his simplicity, he related, and which seemed to purport a future superiority over you. And you know how you attempted to defeat those dreams by selling him into a distant country. I am that *same Joseph*. You see that God has accomplished the purpose, which you intended to frustrate. You see that men cannot make void the divine counsels. You see that

God can raise to eminent stations the lowest of the sons of men, and can use the meanest mortals as instruments to effect the grand purposes of his goodness. Revere and trust that providence, which has in me displayed its marvellous wisdom, kindness and power. You see that your Joseph, the lad whom you had doomed to death or perpetual slavery, is employed of God to preserve you and your families from misery and ruin. Go, trace the footsteps of providence, and make thankful returns for the wonders, which you have seen. When you hear the name of your brother, think of the wisdom and goodness of your God."

There are few scenes so wonderful as this; few which bear such striking marks of divine agency. But if we will observe, we may all, in our own cases, see enough to convince us, that there is a divine eye, which watches over us—a divine hand, which guides and protects us. Have not many events, which seemed to be against us, been overruled for our benefit? Have we not been mysteriously extricated from difficulties, which baffled our prudence, and supported under burdens, which exceeded our strength? Have not blessings been brought us by unpromising means, and from unexpected sources? Have not afflictions turned to our comfort, and disappointments operated to our success? In all our ways let us acknowledge God, for it is he, who directs our paths. To trace the works of providence toward ourselves, our families and friends is a pious and useful exercise. This will strengthen our faith, enliven our devotion, sweeten our duty, and confirm our hope.

I am Joseph. This is an expression of *filial affection*; for mark what immediately follows; "Doth my father yet live?" The aged father is first in his thoughts—first in his cares. How tender—how

affectionate—how dutiful the question? He was elevated high in power; but not elevated above his relation to, and solicitude for the old patriarch, from whom he descended. What is his first instruction to his brethren? “Haste ye, go up to my father, and say to him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me Lord of all Egypt. Come down unto me; tarry not. Thou shalt dwell near to me, and I will nourish thee.” While all Egypt bowed the knee before him, he could feel the affection and duty of a son to an aged parent, whom he had not seen for more than twenty years.

How diverse from this example is the spirit of those sons, who despise the infirmities and neglect the necessities of their aged parents? When I see a father who is a burden to his children—when I see the poor old man, who, incapable of labor, has incautiously given them all his substance, now tossed from child to child, unwelcome to them all, I lament his hard lot—I wish him a son, who, like Joseph, can say with a dutiful heart, “Come, my father, dwell near to me: I will nourish thee.” It is the charge of Solomon to his son, “Hearken unto thy father, who begat thee; and despise not thy mother, when she is old.” “The eye that mocketh at a father, and despiseth to honor a mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.”

Once more: Here is an expression of *general benevolence*. “I am *Joseph*, whom ye sold into *Egypt*.”

The mention of his being *sold* into *Egypt*, reminds him of his duty as *lord* of *Egypt*. “God sent me hither to preserve life.” He considered himself as promoted to power, not for his own sake, but for the public good; and to this end he applied the power, which he possessed.

Every man, to whom is committed power, wealth, learning, or any other talents, should remember, that he is a steward of the gifts of God; and that it is required of stewards, that they be faithful. We think that men in high office should act for the good of mankind. But the obligation to do good is not confined to distinguished characters. To whom *much* is given, of them, indeed, *much* is required. But to whom *little* is given, of *them* something is required. Benevolence is a principle, which ought to govern every man, whether in a public, or private station. Every man is to do good, as he has opportunity, and according to the ability, which God has given him. “If there be a willing mind, a man is accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not.” “And whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be” rich or poor, “bond or free.” “He who soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully. Therefore be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not. Always abound in the work of the Lord, for your labor will not be in vain.”



SERMON XXVI.

Abstaining from Evil.

PROVERBS iii. 27.

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

GOD has placed men in a state of mutual dependence, that there may be occasion and opportunity for mutual beneficence. If there were no need of good to be done, and no ability to do good, benevolence would not be a virtue. There is no man so selfsufficient, but that he needs help from others; and no man so impotent, but that he can give some help to others. And Solomon, in our text, prescribes a rule, by which we may judge, when and how far we are bound to assist one another.

We are first, to inquire, “to whom good is due;” and then to consider “the power of our hand to do it.” Good is due, not to those only, from whom we have received good, or to whom we have made promises, but to those also who are in want. “Labor with your hands the thing which is good, that ye may have to give to him that needeth.” The

man who needeth, is one who cannot supply his wants by his own labor ; for he who can labor is required to give to such as need. There are indeed, reciprocal courtesies and kindnesses, which ought to take place among them who can labor ; yea, among the wealthy and opulent, for no man can subsist by himself alone ; but good is especially due to the indigent and helpless. And such we may find every day, for “ the poor we have always with us, and when we will, we may do them good.”

If good is due to such, then the question is, “ from whom it is due. Is it due from us ?” And here we must inquire, “ Is it in the power of our hand to do it ?” There are, perhaps, others, whose power is greater than ours. But their power excuses not us. They may not know the case, or may not attend to it, or may think of our comparative power, as we think of theirs. And if every man leaves it to his neighbor to do the good, which ought to be done by somebody, it will never be done by any body. If we see the case which calls for relief, the only question, in which we are concerned is, whether *we* have power to relieve it. “ Say not to thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give thee, when thou hast it by thee.” “ Give to him that asketh, and from him, that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.”

There are two things implied in this advice of Solomon ; one is that we do not evil to any man ; the other is, that we do positive good according as we see occasion, and feel ability.

1. If we aim to do good, our first care must be to do no evil.

This branch of goodness is certainly in every man’s power. Many plead inability in excuse for not bestowing benefits ; but no man can plead inability as an excuse for not abstaining from mischief.

If you cannot help your neighbor, yet, at least, you can forbear to hurt him. If you cannot contribute to his relief in trouble, yet you can be silent; you need not dissuade other people from relieving him. If you cannot afford direct aid in the promotion of a good cause, yet you are under no necessity of opposing the cause, and diverting the honest intentions of better men.

With respect to this branch of duty, we ought to exercise particular caution, because it is always more in our power to do hurt, than to do good. It is easier to inflict a wound, than to heal it—easier to destroy property, than to replace it—easier to injure a fair reputation than to repair it—easier to corrupt good manners, than to restore them.

Besides: The injuries which we do to a man are more sensibly felt, than our kindnesses. The diminution of his substance or reputation gives him more pain, than an equal addition to either of them would give him pleasure. We can more easily detract from his enjoyment, than we can increase it. The former may be done in a moment, by a single word or action; the latter is ordinarily a work of time, attention and diligence.

For this reason the Author of our nature has put into our constitution stronger restraints from injuring others, than excitements to help them. We sympathize with the distresses of our neighbors more feelingly, than with their felicities. Our compassion for a man, who has suddenly lost half his substance, even though he has enough left, is much more powerful, than our joy would be at an equal addition to his substance, though even then it might not be too large. This natural compassion for human misery is designed, not only to prompt our endeavors for its relief, but also to restrain us from actions which would cause, or increase it.

Hence to do evil is more criminal, than to omit doing good, because it is a more direct violation of the constitution of nature.

Solomon not only exhorts us, in the text, to do good ; but cautions us, as in the following words, not to do evil : “ Devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. Envy not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways ; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.”

We will here mention some of those ways in which we are liable to hurt our neighbors, and which we must cautiously shun, if we intend to do them good.

1. It is possible, we may injure them in our *thoughts*, and do them evil by indulging a *bad* opinion of them.

You will say, “ Whatever thoughts I have of my neighbor, if I keep them to myself, what hurt is done him ?” Less, besure, than if you published them ; but still some hurt is done him. He values the good opinion of others, and yours among the rest. And if you think evil of him without cause, you so far injure him, though you never should speak a word against him.

Besides : “ Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.” If you indulge evil thoughts of him, these thoughts will grow into hatred ; and it is a wonder, if, in some companies and on some occasions, you do not let them out, and throw them into circulation. No man’s reputation is safe, while it depends on the caution of one who hates him.

But though you should keep your thoughts to yourself, they will, at least, influence your own conduct toward him. You will not be so forward to help him in trouble, to defend him against slander,

to employ him in your service, or to trust him with your property, as if you thought justly of him.— And the reserve with which you treat him, will influence the conduct of others toward him. Your evil thoughts, however secret you aim to keep them, will be more mischievous than you imagine.

The religion of Christ forbids jealousies, envyings and evil surmisings. It cautions us not to judge and set at nought our brethren. It requires us in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than ourselves. It enjoins that charity, which thinketh no evil, but hopeth all things.

The better we think of others, the more agreeable will be our feelings toward them, and the more easy the duties, which we owe them.

There are those, whose evil manners determine their character. But we ought always to think favorably where we can. In doubtful cases, our hearts should incline to the charitable side. Charity may go on presumption; censure must always have evidence. If charity errs, it is excuseable; if censure errs, it is criminal. We always have a right to think well of men without direct proof of their goodness: We have no right to think evil of them without positive evidence of their wickedness.

We should distinguish between particular actions and a general character. We may see in others some instances of conduct, which we disapprove, while we esteem their character at large. Their wrong actions may be but imprudences or mistakes, the effects of passion, temptation, or misinformation; not of vicious habit or perverse disposition. A course of criminal action indicates a corrupt heart. That we may think well of men, we must make it a rule to excuse where we can; to condemn only where we must.

This leads us to say,

2dly. Much hurt is done by *slander*.

If a man may suffer injury by our uncharitable opinion of him, much greater injury will he suffer by our proclaiming this uncharitable opinion. By a secret suspicion he is deprived of the favor of *one*; by open slander he is deprived of the favor of *many*.

A good character is what men value more than property. The love of esteem is a primary and natural passion. The love of property is a secondary passion, growing out of the former. In a state of uncultivated nature men pay little regard to property, farther than to supply their real wants; but they naturally love and seek distinction. In a state of civil society men seek property, beyond what their wants require, because this gives them distinction and raises their importance. Hence slander used in our language is a greater crime, and a more sensible wrong, than injustice practised in our dealings, because it tends more to deprive a man of that social esteem and confidence, which he values more than property. And it is often an injury in a double respect. You may take away a man's property by injustice without hurting his character. But if you destroy his reputation, you hurt him in the business of his profession, deprive him of the confidence of his neighbors, and thus injure him in his substance.

Many will take up, and spread around infamous reports of a neighbor, when they would abhor the thought of breaking open his house, or robbing him of his money; and yet the latter is a more tolerable evil, and a less heinous crime. He can better defend his property, than his name, and can more easily obtain redress in the loss of his substance, than in the loss of his reputation. If you destroy his substance, you injure him, and perhaps him only;

at the worst, the injury falls on but few. If you destroy his character, you injure all who are nearly connected with him in business, or affection; and if he is in a public station, you injure society.

We are not bound to think or speak well of *all* men. "Some men's sins are open beforehand going before unto judgment." And if they will take no care of their own reputation, they are not to expect, that *we* should treat it with much tenderness. He who forfeits his character, must blame himself for the loss. But if we rob a good man of his reputation, the guilt lies on us.

Public and notorious crimes may be subjects of our discourse in a way of lamentation, or of mutual warning. The evil, which we know of another, we may mention to a third person to prevent imposition. This is just—this is benevolent. But we are never to speak evil of another without evidence of the truth of what we say, nor without some reasonable cause for speaking what we know. We should never pay much regard to defamatory stories handed round by an enemy of the person defamed, or by one addicted to slandering his neighbors, or by one who loves to sow discord among brethren. If we suspect evil of a man, it is better to expostulate with him in private, than to make our suspicions public. We should be cautious how we speak and what we say of those, against whom we feel a strong prejudice or unfriendly passion—of those who belong to another sect or party, or who have supplanted us in a competition, or opposed us in a favorite design. If we have occasion to speak evil of such persons, let us not say too much, nor convey to others a worse opinion, than we ourselves entertain. Dark hints, and oblique insinuations are the worst kind of slander, because they leave the hearers to suspect any

thing and every thing, which a jealous or malignant heart can suggest.

3. There is need of caution, that we hurt not others in their *substance*.

In a state of society there must be a distinction of property. This is necessary to industry, frugality, the culture of the mind, and the exercise of benevolence, as well to the improvement of arts, and the increase of wealth. In a state of nature, it is observed, men have few vices : It is also true, they have fewer virtues. For vices they seldom have the means ; for virtues they have little opportunity ; the occasions and calls for justice, fidelity and benevolence are but rare. Hence, in such a state, men are generally cruel and ferocious ; for the tender feelings have never been cultivated in the little circles of family and neighborhood ; and a sense of wrong and a regard to right have never been acquired by an interchange of benefits. It was the design of providence, that men should live in society and maintain the exercise of social affections and virtues. Heaven is a state of society ; and to prepare for heaven, we must learn the social tempers here below.

The rule which, which our Savior has given to direct our conduct to one another is, that we do to our neighbors the same, as we wish them to do to us. The rule is plain and obvious ; and if we will honestly apply it, we can judge from our own feelings what is right. We are seldom in doubt, how others ought to treat us : It is only then to change places, and we shall see, how we ought to treat them. We value our own rights, and we know that our neighbors ought not to invade them by force or injure them by fraud. They have rights as well as we, and they value them in the same manner as we do ours. And every violation of them is as criminal

in us, as the same violation of our rights would be in them.

The high crimes of robbery, theft and forgery most men abhor, and few practise. These are such an outrage on society, that we are generally agreed to bring them to detection and punishment. But if it is wrong to take to ourselves another's property by theft or robbery, it is wrong to do it by any kind of deceit or oppression. The law which forbids us to steal, forbids us "to deal falsely, or to lie one to another"—"to go beyond and defraud a brother in any matter." If a man is unfaithful to a trust reposed in him—embezzles goods committed to his care—contracts debts without ability or intention to pay them—takes advantage of men's necessity or ignorance to make undue profits in dealing with them, or avails himself of an unforeseen change of times to defeat the spirit of a fair contract—if by idleness and intemperance he reduces himself to poverty, and thus in a time of infirmity becomes a burden to his neighbors, or by alienating and secreting his property he frustrates the just demands of his creditors, or by any other unfair and indirect means, transfers or retains to himself the property, which belongs to others, he is as really guilty of injustice, as the man who steals from his neighbors; and the crime is very little different; for he takes or detains from them their right without their free consent.

4. We do hurt and injury to men, when we scatter the seeds of *disaffection* and *contention* among them.

Peace and mutual confidence are the happiness of families, neighborhoods and other societies; and every thing which we do to disturb the social harmony, is evil in itself, and tends to vice and misery. It is a precept in the divine law, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people."

Such a character Solomon describes as peculiarly mischievous and detestable. "An ungodly man diggeth up evil, and in his lips is as a burning fire. A froward man soweth strife. A talebearer revealeth secrets, and a whisperer separateth chief friends. Where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."

Some unguarded things may be spoken in the social circle, which would be harmless, if they had died there. But if we take them up and hand them round, we may excite a disturbance, which cannot easily be quieted. The expressions may have been innocently intended at first, but the recital of them has usually an evil design. The words first spoken are so altered in the repetition, as to carry quite a different meaning, and make quite a different impression, from what was originally intended or imagined. There are no greater pests in society, than they, who curiously pry into the concerns of their neighbors, the affairs of families, and the behavior of relatives toward one another—who pick up ill stories of this and that person to spread them in conversation—who tell one neighbor what another said of him, and bring back to the latter what was heard from the former, and perhaps communicate to a hundred more what the two said of each other. Disquietudes and contentions often arise from this foolish curiosity and impertinent loquacity; and perhaps oftener from this cause, than from any real injury, which, the parties at variance have ever received from each other. This busy humor does not always proceed from malice; but sometimes from weakness of mind and vacancy of sentiment, or from a mere love of talking and telling news, and sometimes from idleness and want of employment. The Apostle says, "There are some, who walk disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. They learn to be idle, wandering about from house

to house, and not only idle, but tattlers also, speaking things which they ought not." To prevent this evil, he advises, that all study to be quiet, and do their own business.

If all would attend to their own business, as much as prudence directs, and concern themselves in other people's affairs no more than charity requires, there would be little disturbance in families, contention among neighbors, or animosity in societies.

5. We do men great injury, when we *corrupt* their *religious principles*, and *vitiates* their *morals*.

To strengthen the hands of evil doers, and hinder their return from their wickedness, is termed in scripture a horrible thing. There are none so severely condemned, as they who corrupt the earth with their abominations. Of him who turns from the law of God and draws others after him Moses says, "The Lord will not spare him, but his anger will smoke against him, and he will separate him unto all evil." The chief ground of the woes against the pharisees was, that "they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men." We find not in all the bible a more awful rebuke, than that which Paul gave to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away the deputy of Paphos from the faith of the gospel. "O full of all subtilty and mischief; thou child of the devil; thou enemy of all righteousness; wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Behold now, the hand of the Lord is upon thee." Paul says of the Jews, who forbade the Apostles to speak the word of salvation to the Gentiles, "They please not God, and are contrary to all men. They fill up the measure of their sins always, that wrath may come upon them to the uttermost."

By fraud, oppression and slander we may do much hurt to mankind in their worldly interest. But all this will appear trifling, when we compare it with the

injury done to them in their spiritual interests by infusing into their minds corrupt sentiments, and seducing them to vicious manners. The two cases are as different as body and soul—time and eternity. If we think it would be vile and criminal to cheat a man out of his substance, or rob him of his good name, shall we deem it a light thing to seduce him from religion and destroy his soul?

We are required “to be fellow helpers to the truth—to consider one another, that we may provoke unto love and good works.”

Some of you will probably say, “There is little that we can do in promoting religion among men. Our age and station in life will not allow us to take a distinguished part in a business of this kind. We must leave it to heads of families, aged people, public teachers, who by their office and relation are particularly called to such work. We are young and in a private capacity; we must be excused.”

You may, however, at your age and in your station, do something in so great and good a cause. At least, you may forbear to injure the cause. If you cannot help forward the piety and salvation of your fellow mortals, yet you may be careful not to divert them from a godly life, and hinder them in working out their own salvation. You are under no necessity of setting before them a vicious example, of enticing them into wicked company, and of emboldening them in the practice of iniquity. You are under no necessity of using impious language or of profaning holy time. You are under no necessity of treating with open contempt the instituted means of religion, the word, worship and ordinances of God. You need not plead in defence of impiety, and of those opinions which lead to it. You need not ridicule the virtue and seriousness of others and take pains to bring a religious character into dis-

repute. You need not say any thing against the sacred scriptures, or the doctrines contained in them. You need not spread licentious opinions, nor invite others to read books, which would corrupt their manners and extinguish virtuous sentiments.

How much positive good you may do, it is difficult to say. But it is certain, you can forbear to do evil. No one can plead his impotence, or his poverty or his youth in excuse for not omitting to hurt others; for this is only forbearing to act. This forbearance requires no great abilities. We read of some, who weary themselves to commit iniquity. It need not cost you any weariness to cease from iniquity. If you are active to do evil, in vain you plead an inability to do good. The same ability, by which you do the former, might, if properly directed, as well do the latter.

We all know the difference between virtue and vice. The youth, with moderate instruction and little attention can discern this difference. He is a judge of the nature of religion, so far as it relates to practice. And he can judge also of the truth and importance of doctrines, if he will consider their practical tendency. Opinions, which tend to virtue, he may conclude to be true and important; those, which tend to vice, he must see to be false and dangerous. The difficulty of discerning between truth and error in religion arises not from the obscurity of the matter in question, but from the corruption of the heart in examining, or rather from a disinclination to examine at all. If, in our inquiries, we aim at doing the will of God, we shall find no great difficulty in learning what his will is; for "the meek he will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way."

We ought never to embrace an opinion merely on the authority of another; but we are to examine its

evidence for ourselves ; at least, its practical evidence ; its moral tendency ; for of this we are competent to judge. We should never take pains to instil an opinion into others, till, on this evidence, we are fully convinced of its truth and importance. Let us seriously inquire, whether there is reason to think, that this opinion fully embraced would make them better men. To settle this question, let us inquire whether it has made us better men. Are we become more humble, pious and prayerful ; more attentive to our eternal interest ; more concerned for the salvation of our fellow men ; more meek, peaceable and condescending ; more virtuous in our general temper and behavior ? If we find none of these good effects from it in ourselves, certainly we cannot promise ourselves, that it will produce these effects in others.

Let this be our first aim, in all our social conduct, to be harmless and inoffensive—to do no evil to any man in his character, in his property, or in his virtue. But we must not stop here. As we must be simple concerning evil, so we must be wise to that which is good.

This branch of our general subject may be illustrated in another discourse.



S E R M O N XXVII.



Doing Good.



PROVERBS iii. 27.

Withhold not good from him, to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

THE text enjoins doing good to men. It points out no particular kind of good, but good in general—good of every kind. The objects of this good are those to whom it is due—not due merely on promise, gratitude or justice; but due on any footing—due on the ground of humanity and mutual connexion—of necessity on the one part, and ability on the other. The Apostle says, “Labor with your hands the thing which is good, that ye may have to give to him that needeth.” The necessities of others, in some cases, have a claim upon us equal to that, which arises from a contract made with them, or a benefit received from them. The good to be done is according to the necessity of the ob-

jects, and the measure of our ability. And the *time* of doing it, is when the necessity calls, and our ability permits. "Withhold not good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not to thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give thee, when thou hast it by thee."

We have observed, that there are two things implied in this precept. One is that we do no evil. It is absurd to talk of doing good, unless we abstain from doing evil. While we do as much evil with one hand, as we do good with the other, there is no good done on the whole. What Solomon enjoins is not a life made up of good and evil, or a mere preponderance of good, but good without evil, or a steady course of usefulness according to our relation and ability. We are to abhor evil, and cleave to that which is good—to be simple concerning evil, and wise to that which is good. Where evil is not carefully avoided, good is not honestly intended. Malice and benevolence are incompatible. They cannot subsist together. The Apostle says to the Corinthians, "I pray God, that ye do no evil, but that ye should do that which is honest."

We have shewn some of the ways, in which men often do injuries one to another.

We shall now,

II. Attend to our subject in a positive view.—
 "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due."
 "Do good to all men, as ye have opportunity."

Religion is not merely a negative thing. It contains positive goodness. Abstinence from evil belongs to it; but the love and practice of goodness complete it. The Apostle distinguishes between a *righteous*, and a *good* man. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." The latter is a

higher and nobler character than the former. The righteous man is one who does justice, keeps his word, fulfils legal demands, and commits no real injuries. The good man besides all this, studies to be useful in his place, and to promote the virtue and happiness of all around him. He can sacrifice his own private interest for a greater and more extensive benefit to mankind. He seeks not merely his own profit, but the profit of many. To justice he adds brotherly kindness and charity.

The man, who is barely righteous, may pass for a valuable member of society; for though he has no public spirit, yet the public will avail itself of some advantage from his ability and property. But a man may be useful in society on earth, and yet not fit for the pure and benevolent society above.

Many entertain too low ideas of religion, as if it wholly consisted in an abstinence from gross vice. But the gospel makes it consist in positive holiness and goodness. It requires us not only to put off the old man with his deeds, but also to put on the new man, which is created after the image of God.

In reading the parables and discourses of our Savior we shall find, that the characters, which he excludes from heaven, and condemns to eternal punishment, are not usually taken from the profligate and abandoned, but from the decent and orderly part of mankind. He thus teaches us, that his religion consists, not merely in specious manners, regular behavior, and abstinence from vice, but in a holy, pious, humble and benevolent spirit and conduct. The young ruler mentioned by the evangelists doubtless passed among his neighbors for a virtuous and amiable man; and our Savior observed in him something, which attracted his attention and regard. But when this man was put to a trial, it appeared, that religion, though not wholly neglected, had been but a subor-

dinate object, and the love of the world reigned supreme in his heart. The prosperous farmer, who, foreseeing a plentiful harvest, enlarged his barns, and proposed to himself a long and cheerful enjoyment of his goods, stands in the story, not as a vicious and debauched, but rather as a discreet and good humored man. All his fault lay in an attachment to worldly enjoyments, and a deadness of heart to real piety and goodness. He laid up treasure for himself, and was not rich toward God. The unfaithful servant in the parable is condemned, not because he had lost, but because he had neglected his talent—not because he had been mischievous, but because he had been unprofitable. The sinners, who, from under the gospel, shall be condemned at the last day, are not described in general, as abandoned to profligacy of life, but as destitute of virtuous and holy tempers, and regardless of the duties, which respect the Redeemer and his faithful friends. The dreadful sentence against them is grounded, not so much on the hurt which they have done, as on the omission of the good, which they ought to have done.

The reason why our Lord has so often repeated such instructions and warnings, is doubtless because we are too apt to satisfy ourselves with a negative, superficial and partial religion, and to hope that, on the foot of such a religion, we shall be well accepted, though we feel no concern to do good, to serve the interest of the gospel, and to promote the happiness of mankind.

The ways in which we are to do good will here naturally come under our consideration.

1. We are to do good by *diligence in our calling.*

Every man is bound to have some occupation—some stated, regular employment. And this ought to be such as may be useful to mankind. No man

has a right to acquire property by a business which is wholly nugatory and trifling ; much less by an occupation which would necessarily be hurtful and injurious, because every man is bound to be useful in some way or other.

And as every man should have a calling, so he should be diligent and faithful in it. This is the advice of the Apostle, "Let ours maintain good works," or as it is in the margin, "let them profess honest trades for necessary uses, that they be not unprofitable. Let every man abide in the calling, wherein he is called ; and be quiet and do his own business."

In a secular, as well as in a sacred calling, every man's principal object should be the same ; not the acquirement of worldly property for himself, but the advancement of happiness among others. As the minister, in preaching the gospel, must aim not merely at his own profit, but at the profit of many ; so the laborer, in working with his hands, must aim, not merely to supply his own wants, but also to give to them who need. When benevolence, or a regard to the general good governs us in the choice of our profession, and in the discharge of the duties of it, then, whether our profession be secular, civil or sacred, our industry is a virtue, and our labor a part of religion.

Industry is itself a virtue. It is an aid to every other virtue. It contributes to health of body and improves the strength of the mind. It is a security against temptations and a guard against vice. The scripture speaks of the idle, as being often too busy in other mens' matters, as wandering about, and speaking things which they ought not, and thus sowing discord, separating friends, and disturbing social peace.

2. We are to do good by attending to the *appropriate duties* of our several *relations*.

The great Ruler of the world, in order to the general happiness, has assigned us various relations. Every relation has its special duties, in the faithful performance of which the general good is promoted. The relations subsisting among men, the Apostle illustrates by comparing them to the relations between the members of a human body. When these regularly perform their respective offices, the body is supported and preserved in health. If the operation of any part is suspended, pain, debility, and sometimes death ensues. So it is in families and larger societies.

The parent has the immediate charge of his children. He is not only to nourish them in their helpless infancy, but, as they come forward in years, he is to train them up in such knowledge of secular business, habits of industry, and scientific acquirements, as may qualify them, in their turn, to support themselves, educate a family, and be useful to mankind. He is also to consider them as probationers for another world, and to assist them in a timely preparation for it. He is to teach them their duty to God, the Redeemer and their fellow mortals, call their attention to their eternal interests, state the terms of future happiness, and urge their compliance with them. The heads of the family are to live together as heirs of the grace of life, and by their concurring influence to educate the subjects of their common charge in knowledge, virtue and piety, and thus form them for the part, which they have to act in this world, and for the felicity proposed to them in another.

A family thus educated is not only a comfort to the heads, but a blessing to the world. From one religious household a happy influence may spread to many others, and descend to distant generations.

The ministers of religion are to warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom, that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Civil rulers are ordained of God to be terrors to evil doers, and a praise to them who do well, and to attend continually to the common happiness. Thus, acting under the steady influence of piety and benevolence, they will be ministers of God for good to those over whom they are placed.

Men thus pursuing the design of their respective relations, and fulfilling the obligations, which result from those relations, are doing good to those to whom it is due.

3. We are to do good by *works of charity* to the needy and impotent.

That diversity of conditions, in which God has placed us, evidently tends more to general virtue and happiness, than a perfect equality could do. If all were indigent and helpless, none could receive succor from his neighbor. If all were alike rich and opulent, riches would lose all their use and value, because no man would give his labor or skill in exchange for them; but every man must depend on himself. Consequently the various arts which contribute to the happiness of man, would cease; or rather they would never have been introduced. Riches is a relative term. If there was no difference among men, there would be no room for a comparison; and no man would be deemed rich, because no man would be found poor.

In this diversity, there is to be a reciprocation of benefits. The strong must bear the infirmities of the weak; the healthful must minister to the necessities of the sick; the rich must supply the wants of the destitute. This is to do good to them to whom it is due.

If God has given us health of body, it is not merely that we may enjoy the pleasures of eating, drinking and sleeping, but that we may relieve the distresses of those, who are deprived of these enjoyments; or if he has bestowed on us a distinguished portion of worldly goods, it is not that we may live more at ease, and assume higher importance than our neighbors, but that we may supply the wants of the poor, and mitigate the pains of the afflicted. To us as stewards God has committed his goods, and a part of them we are to distribute among the members of his household according to their various exigencies. Paul says to Timothy, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they trust not in uncertain riches, but that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time that is to come."

The rich, we all see, have important duties to perform. And there are duties incumbent on the poor also. They are to be industrious in their places, frugal in using the fruits of their industry, cheerful and contented in their condition, attentive to the care of their souls and to the virtuous education of their families. Thus they may be as really useful, and do as substantial good in the world, as the rich. For the happiness of society depends as much on their faithful and virtuous industry, as on the enterprize and liberality of the opulent. The rich could on more subsist without them, than they without the rich. The king himself is served of the field.

4. We are to do good by our *conversation*.

No corrupt communication should at any time proceed out of our mouth, but that only which is good to the use of edifying, and which may minister grace to the hearers.

We are to do good by instruction. This is a duty incumbent not only on parents toward their children and on ministers toward their people, but also on Christians toward one another. "The lips of the righteous feed many." If Christians, laying apart all vain disputation, would charitably converse together on the important subjects of religion, they might greatly assist one another, and much advance the common interests of truth and holiness.

There may be occasions for brotherly reproof. It is a command in the law of Moses, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him." There is a similar command in the gospel of Christ. "If thy brother trespass against thee rebuke him; and if he repent forgive him."—We are to watch over one another, not with jealousy and hatred, but with candor and love—not to espy faults where there are none, or to publish faults when we find them; but to give seasonable counsel and reproof, when there is occasion, and thus to assist each other's repentance and improvement.

"Exhort one another daily," says the Apostle, "lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works." Christians may usefully communicate to each other their experiences in the religious life. We are not, indeed, to make the experience of others a standard by which to judge our spiritual state; or our experience a standard, by which to judge theirs. This would be to substitute human experience in the place of divine truth. Nor ought we to disclose our secret exercises for the sake of gaining applause, like the pharisees, who prayed in the corners of the streets to be seen of men. Nor ought we to demand of others an account of their secret exercises, for the sake of judging their hearts; for we are to judge nothing before the time. But

then there are many cases, in which Christians may lay before others their fears, perplexities and temptations, in order to obtain counsel and consolation; and in such cases Christians, who have experienced similar trials, may greatly strengthen their brethren. This friendly intercourse will awaken intercession, enliven affection, and warm religious zeal. It will improve spiritual knowledge, recal the remembrance of things already known, confirm good resolutions, rouse into action the slumbering principles of piety, counteract the influence of worldly objects, and relieve the mind from the distractions of earthly cares. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."

5. We are to do good by *example*.

It is the command of the Savior, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." The Apostles inculcate the same precept. "Let not your good be evil spoken of—walk in wisdom toward them who are without—provide things honest in the sight of all men—shew out of a good conversation your works with meekness of wisdom."

Virtuous example is attended with peculiar advantages. It gives force to our instructions and reproofs; supports the credit of our Christian profession; exhibits religion in real life, and shews it to be not merely a speculative, but rather a practical scheme. This displays the beauty and usefulness of religion before the eyes of men, and puts to silence the ignorance of the foolish and the objections of the captious. This instructs the weak and simple in an easy and familiar manner, adapted to their capacity. However difficult it may be for the young to learn the sublime doctrines of the gospel by their own study, or from the instructions of others, they will find no difficulty in understanding what are its prac-

tical duties, when they see them exhibited in the daily walk of professing Christians. And whatever doubts some may pretend concerning the evidences of the gospel, yet if they should behold Christians in general living agreeably to its precepts, and exercising that piety, benevolence, humility, peaceableness, contentment of mind and sobriety of manners, which it inculcates, they would have no evil thing to say of it, but be constrained to confess, that it is excellent in itself, and happy in its tendency.

That our example may do good, it must be steady and uniform, not fluctuating and inconstant—it must embrace the whole compass of practical religion, not confine itself to particular duties—it must regard things great and essential, not merely circumstances and forms—it must be familiar without meanness—cheerful without levity—strict without austerity—open without ostentation, and condescending without sinful compliance. And especially it should appear to proceed from the conviction and disposition of the heart, not to be assumed and affected merely to serve a turn.

By such an example much good will be done. And in this way every man, who loves and feels religion in his heart, may do good daily. If he has not knowledge to instruct others in religion, yet he may shew what it is by his practice. If he dares not reprove the wicked, or exhort the careless—if he has not learning or capacity to confute gainsayers, or to silence cavillers, yet he may safely set an example of religion before all whom he sees, and leave them to judge, whether it is worthy of their choice. He may practically say to them, “If this religion seems evil to you, then find a better; as for myself, this have I chosen, and in this will I abide.”

6. We may all, if we have hearts to pray, do good by our *prayers*.

As God has placed us in a mutual connexion, so he requires us to serve one another in works of charity. Intercession is one exercise of that charity, which we owe to mankind; and there is the same reason to believe, that God will make our intercessions, as that he will make our instructions, or reproof, or alms, or any other work of charity, beneficial to our fellow men. It is his invisible influence, which gives efficacy and success to these, as well as to our prayers.

What a cheap and easy way we have to do good? We want nothing, but faith in God and benevolence to men, to do more good than we can conceive.

You perhaps excuse yourselves from works of liberality, because you have little property, or from works of instruction, because you have little ability: But you cannot, on any such ground, excuse yourselves from prayer. For this exercise of charity you have the same ability as if you were ever so rich, or ever so learned. The success of prayer depends not at all on your worldly possessions or your mental talents and acquirements, but wholly on the reasonableness of the things, which you ask, and the sincerity of your heart in asking them. Were your worldly abilities ever so large, your alms could extend to but few; but be your abilities ever so small, the benefits of your prayers may extend to thousands, to a whole nation, to the world, to distant generations. Were your powers of mind and your knowledge of arts ever so great, yet there are many things needful for those around you, which your power and wisdom cannot effect. But the power, wisdom and goodness of God are infinite. And prayer to such a Being may procure blessings richer and greater than you ask or think.

You often see distressing cases, in which you say, You wish you could afford relief. Let these cases

awaken your prayers to him, who can afford relief. You see the afflicted mourning the loss of near friends, and you wish you could comfort them. Go, commend their case to God: He can impart comforts which they will feel. If you should speak to them, perhaps you will speak only to the ear. God can speak to the heart. If you really pity them, give them a share in your intercessions. This you can give them, if you have nothing else to give.

You may, now and then, see an afflicted person, cast among strangers, and far removed from the friends in whom he used to trust. You think, that, if his friends were about him, he would find it a consoling circumstance. You cannot place him among his former friends, but you can act the part of friends; you can implore for him the presence of God's grace, which will refresh him more than the sympathy of a thousand mortals.

You sometimes see careless sinners running headlong toward destruction. You wish to arrest their attention and restrain their progress. What can be done? Some of them you have warned in vain; some are so placed, that you cannot address them on the subject of their danger; or perhaps you seem incompetent to an office of this kind. There is one thing, however, which you may do under any circumstances. You may pray, that God would send them suitable monitors, would awaken their stupid hearts, would bring them to seasonable repentance, and save their souls from death. And you know not, but your prayers will avail much.

You often hear of some in poverty and adversity, who are beyond the reach of your charitable hand. But these are not beyond the reach of your benevolent prayers. Go, commend them to the care of that wonderful Being, whose immensity embraces them, as well as you, who is alike present in all

places, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.

You know, there are thousands and millions in the world who have never heard of salvation by Christ ; and among those who have heard of it, you know there are many, who enjoy not the means to obtain it. You lament their unhappy situation. You wish that the light of the glorious gospel may shine unto them. Toward spreading the gospel among them it is but little that you can do, and this little you resolve to do, and wish you could do more. More you can do. You can pray daily, that the word of God may have free course and be glorified through the world—that heralds may be sent forth to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation among the perishing sons of Adam, and that the hearts of them who hear, may be opened to receive with joy the glorious tidings proclaimed.

If we will not attempt any good for our neighbors, for the church, for our country, for mankind, in a way so cheap and easy as this, what pretence can we make to Christian benevolence ? We may have a kind of mechanical compassion, which is awakened by the sight of an object in distress ; or there may be some favorite political design, which prompts our exertions. But if no serious and humble prayers are mixed with our compassion for distress, or with our exertions for the public good, there is no virtuous benevolence in our hearts. True benevolence to men will warm our devotions toward God, on whom all human happiness depends.

We have seen our obligations to do good, and the various ways, in which it may be done. In some or other of these ways each of us may do something, perhaps much to promote the general happiness. If we would all unite in the work, we might soon introduce a pleasing change in the state

of families, churches and other societies. The miseries of the world arise from the selfishness of those who dwell in it. When there are perilous times, it is because men are lovers of their own selves. When benevolence prevails, happiness will increase and spread. Men, under the influence of this principle, will not hurt, but serve one another. Let us therefore do good to all, as we have opportunity, especially to them, who are of the household of faith. Let us pray always with all prayer, and watch thereunto with all perseverance. Let us strive together in our prayers, that the word of the Lord may be glorified among us, and that the whole earth may see his salvation.




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