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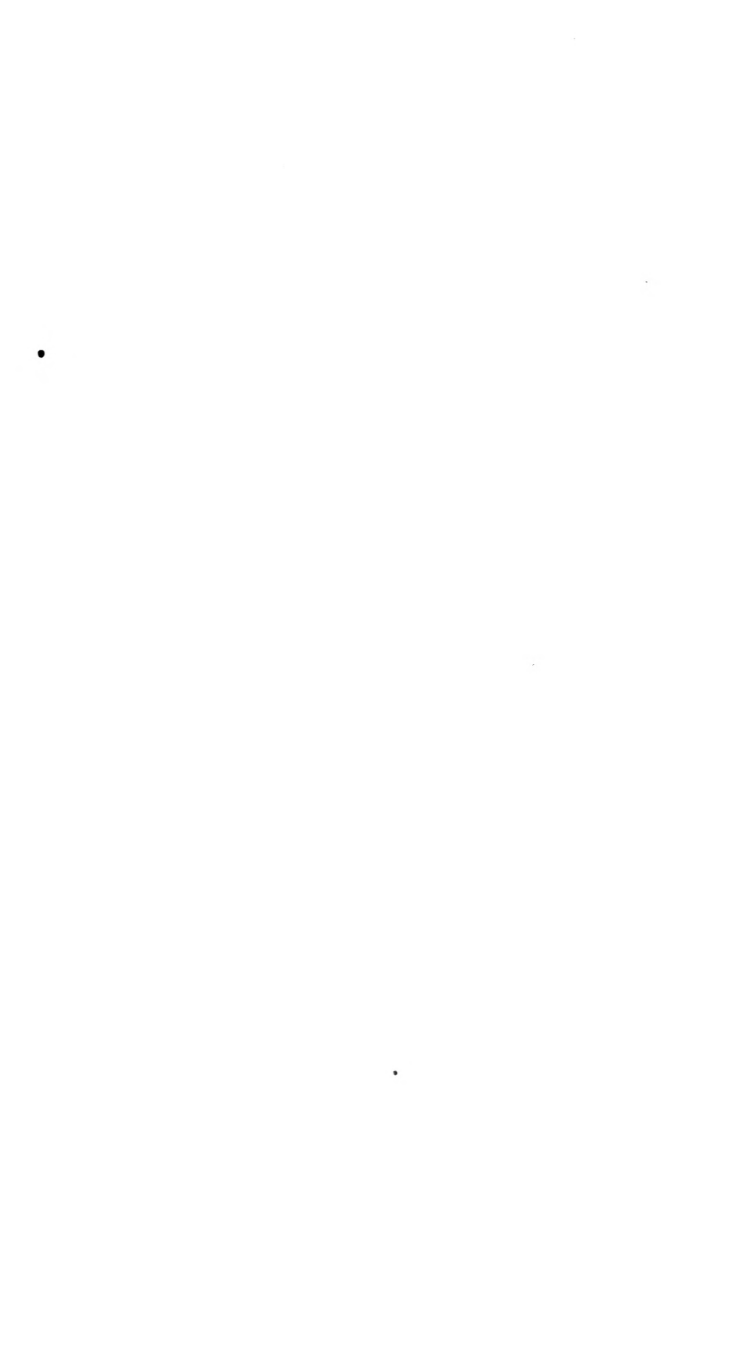
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*Increase Matthews'*  
**SERMONS**

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.*



**VOLUME V.**

— \* \* \* —  
PUBLISHED AT WORCESTER :  
BY **ISAIAH THOMAS, JUN.**  
SOLD AT HIS RESPECTIVE BOOKSTORES IN BOSTON AND WORCESTER.

— \* \* \* —  
**ISAAC STURTEVANT, PRINTER.....1810.**

THE NEW YORK  
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# CONTENTS.

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## SERMON I.

The Fear of God.

*A Sermon to Little Children.*

*Psalm xxxiv. 11.*

Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

## SERMON II.

The Duty of Speaking to the Young.

*Zechariah ii. 4.*

— Run speak to this young man.

## SERMON III.

Youth invited to the Lord's Supper.

*A Communion Sermon.*

*Exodus xii. 26, 27.*

And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the house of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.

## SERMON IV.

Early Piety the Comfort of Old Age.

*A Sermon to Young People.*

*Psalm lxxi. 5.*

For thou art my hope, O Lord God: Thou art my trust from my youth.

39X335

## SERMON V.

The Infirmities and Comforts of Old Age.

*A Sermon to Aged People.*

*Psalm lxxi. 9.*

Cast me not off in the time of old age ..... Forlake me not when my strength faileth.

## SERMON VI.

Dry Bones Restored.

*Ezekiel xxxvii. 3.*

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.

## SERMON VII.

Birds and Beasts Preaching to Men.

*Job xii. 7.*

Ask the beasts now, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee :—

## SERMON VIII.

Joab laying hold on the Horns of the Altar.

*I. Kings ii. 30.*

— And he said, Nay, but I will die here.

## SERMON IX.

Nothing to be refused, when the Lord hath need.

*A Communion Sermon.*

*Mark xi. 3.*

And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? Say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.

## SERMON X.

The Gate of Heaven strait, and many shut out of it.

*Luke xiii. 24.*

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

## SERMON XI.

The Causes, why many who seek, cannot enter at the strait Gate.

The same Text.

## SERMON XII.

The awful Condition of those who shall be excluded from the kingdom of Heaven.

The same Text.

## SERMON XIII.

Pilate's Inscription on the Cross of Christ.

*A Communion Sermon.*

*John xix. 19—22.*

And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross; and the writing was, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." This title then read many of the Jews, for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not "the King of the Jews;" but that he said, "I am the King of the Jews." Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

## SERMON XIV.

The Disciples gazing after their ascending Lord.

*A Communion Sermon.*

*Acts i. 10, 11.*

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up; behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

## SERMON XV.

The Rainbow around the Throne.

*A Communion Sermon.**Revelation iv. 3.*

And there was a Rainbow round about the Throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

## SERMON XVI.

No Temple in Heaven.

*A Sermon preached on the first Lord's Day after the Dedication of a New Meeting-House.*

*Revelation xxi. 22.*

And I saw no temple therein ; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

## SERMON XVII.

Universal Praise for Redemption.

*A Communion Sermon.**Isaiah xlv. 23.*

Sing O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it : Shout, ye lower parts of the earth ; Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein ; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

## SERMON XVIII.

The Wheels of Providence.

*A Fast Sermon, April 1806.**Ezekiel i. 16.*

— Their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

## SERMON XIX.

The Temper of a Christian with regard to Moral Good and Evil.

*Romans xii. 9.*

Abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good.

## SERMON XX.

Moral Reflections on Floods.

*A Sermon delivered February 22, 1807.**Amos ix. 5.*

The Lord of hosts is he that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn, and it shall rise up wholly like a flood and shall be drowned as by the flood of Egypt.

## SERMON XXI.

The Impiety of alledging God's Promise, as a reason for the neglect of Duty.

*Matthew iv. 5, 6, 7.*

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and sitteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

## SERMON XXII.

The Anointing of the Spirit a sure evidence of our Title to eternal life.

*Delivered to an Association of Ministers.**I. John ii. 27.*

But the anointing, which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

## SERMON. XXIII.

The death of the Young lamented and improved.

*A Funeral Sermon.**Job xiv. 19.*

— Thou destroyest the Hope of man.

## SERMON XXIV.

**Ezekiel's affliction in the Death of his Wife, and his Behaviour under it.**

*A Funeral Sermon.*

*Ezekiel xxiv. 18.*

So I spake to the people in the morning, and at even my wife died ; and I did in the morning, as I was commanded.

## SERMON XXV.

**The Univerfal Obligation of Religion.**

*II. Kings xvii. 40, 41.*

Howbeit, they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children : as did their fathers, so did they unto this day.

## SERMON XXVI.

**True Religion pure and simple.**

The same Text.

## SERMON XXVII.

**Folly conspicuous in a Virtuous Character.**

*Ecclesiastes x. 1.*

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour ; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor.

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# SERMON I.

.....  
*The Fear of God.*  
.....

MY CHILDREN,

*DAVID, in the thirty-fourth Psalm, and the eleventh verse, speaks to you in these words :*

“ Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

**D**AVID was appointed, when he was young, to be king over Israel, God chose him, in preference to his brethren, not because he was ruddy, and of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon ; but because he was of a pious disposition—a young man after God’s own heart. “ For the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

This godly king desired, that all his people should fear God ; for, then, he knew that God would make them prosperous and happy. He desired, that children, as well as others, should learn to fear God ; for they were a part of his people ; and if they feared God when they were young, he hoped they would serve him when they were old ; and would also teach their children to serve him ; and thus the people would be virtuous and happy from generation to generation.

He calls upon children to *hearken to him.*

You, who are children, need instruction. Knowledge is not born with you. You have not had time to learn much by study and experience. What you obtain in your childhood, must come chiefly by information from others.

You have need of knowledge, for you have souls to be saved, as well as they who are older. And the religion by which you are saved must begin with knowledge.

If you would understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God, you must incline your hearts to understanding—You must hear instruction and not refuse it.

You must hearken to your parents. God has commanded them to train you up in the way in which you should go—to teach you knowledge and make you understand doctrine—to give you line upon line, and precept upon precept. It is their duty to point out to you the narrow way which leads to life, and to caution you against, and restrain you from, the broad path of sin and death. God will punish them, if they neglect to instruct and warn you. They know what is useful, and what is hurtful to you—they are concerned for your happiness. This is the reason why they so often speak to you about God and heaven, about sin and hell; and why they sometimes deny you the things which you desire.

You must hearken to them—not only hear, but remember what they say, and obey them in the Lord, for this is right. When you are absent from them, you should think, what they have told you; not to lie, or swear, or quarrel, or spend your time foolishly; and you should behave as if you were within their reach, and under their eye.

You must hearken to ministers. Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, as soon as he rose from the



dead, met with Peter, one of his apostles and ministers ; and almost the first thing he said to him was, "Peter, if you love me, feed my lambs ;" i. e. teach my little children. Christ calls you his lambs to signify that you should, like them, be innocent and harmless. He commands his ministers to teach you, that you should be holy and without blame before him in love. If ministers are to teach you, then you must hearken to them. When you, on the Lord's day, go to his house, remember that he is there. He has said, that where his disciples meet together, he is in the midst of them. John beheld Jesus, on this holy day, walking in the churches. And He has eyes like a flame of fire. He sees every thing that is done or even thought. Go then, take your place decently—stay in it quietly—watch your thoughts carefully—hear God's word diligently—endeavour to understand what you hear, and to remember it, that you may repeat it when you go home, and practise it every day.

Consider now, what the good king of Israel promised to teach children. He says "I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

"To fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man."

1. You must know, that there is a God ; a great, wise and good Being, who created you at first, preserves you still, and supplies your wants continually. You cannot fear and serve him, until you know him.

You have often been taught, and I suppose you believe, that there is a God. You cannot see him, for he is a spirit—No man hath seen him at any time. He is invisible. But his works you may see, wherever you go, and wherever you look : hence you know that there is a God.

If you should go into the wilderness, and there should find a house neatly built and finished off; but should find no person near it; what would you think? Would you suppose the house grew there, just as the trees grow? No; you would know somebody had been there to build it, as certainly as if you had seen it done. "Every house is builded by some man: And he that built all things is God." You know that this world, and the things which are in it, did not make themselves; and therefore you certainly know, there is some unseen Being who made them; and this Being is great, and wise and good.

2. If there is a God, you ought to fear him. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all that are about him."

If you would know what it is to fear God, consider what it is to fear your parents. You understand what the word means, when it is applied to them. Its meaning is much the same, when it is applied to God. To fear your parents is to esteem and honour them, to please and obey them, to speak well of them, and behave decently to them. The same tempers and dispositions are implied in fearing God. You must remember, however, that as God is infinitely greater, and wiser, and better, than the best earthly parents; so you must regard him more than them.

I will here teach you why you must fear God; and how you must fear him.

FIRST: I will shew you, why you must fear God.

1. You must fear him, because he is a *holy* Being.

"He is of purer eyes than to behold evil; he cannot look on iniquity." "He cannot be tempted of evil; neither tempteth he any man." The

angels are often in scripture called holy ; and good men are sometimes honoured with the title of saints, or holy persons. But the holiness of God so much exceeds the holiness of the most perfect creature, that it is said, “ He only is holy.” “ He charges his angels with folly.” “ The heavens are not clean in his sight.” “ He humbleth himself to behold the things which are in heaven.” The glorious train of angels in God’s temple above, cover their faces before him, and cry, “ Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts ; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

When Moses, in the wilderness, saw a bush on fire, and not consumed, he knew that this denoted the special presence of God ; and therefore it is said, “ He hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”

When the prophet Elijah heard the still voice of God, “ he wrapt his face in a mantle.” He had before felt a strong wind, and a violent earthquake, which rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks ; and he felt them without any terror upon his mind. But when he heard a voice from the holy God, though it was still and small, yet it seemed solemn and awful ; and he covered his face, because he was afraid of God’s presence.

Now if such holy men, and holier angels fear God, how much should you fear him ? He knows and hates every sinful thought, wicked word, and vile action. How dare you, then, do, or speak, or think, any thing which you know to be wrong ?

2. You should fear God, because he is always *present* with you.

God is sometimes said to be in heaven, because he there makes some special displays of his glorious perfections ; but really he is every where. He is on earth : He is in this place : he hears what

I am speaking; and he knows what you are thinking. "He searches you, and knows you. He knows your down-sitting and your up-rising, and understands your thoughts afar off. He compasses your path and your lying down, and is acquainted with all your ways. There is not a word in your tongue, but lo, he knows it altogether. You cannot go from his spirit, nor flee from his presence. Darkness and light are both alike to him." Do you not fear this God?—You are afraid to do wickedly in the presence of your parents. You speak and act many things, when you are out of their sight, which you do not choose they should know. But remember, you cannot hide yourselves from God. He always observes you. He looks you through and through. How dare you ever tell a lie? He hears you, and he abhors the deceitful child. How dare you speak profanely? He knows every word you say, and he will not hold you guiltless when you take his name in vain. How dare you entertain wicked thoughts? He perceives them all; and a heart that devises evil imaginations, is abomination to him.

When you are in company, and at your diversions, think of God's presence; thus you will be made more watchful against sin. If you are afraid at any time to be alone, think that a gracious God is with you, and put your trust in him. When he guards you, nothing can hurt you. Pray to him in secret; he can hear you in every place, and will reward you openly.

3. You should fear God, because he is *powerful*. You fear your parents, because they have power to punish you, when you offend them. God has more power than they, more than all men in the world, more than all creatures in the universe.

If he created this world and all creatures in it ; if he created the sun and moon, and all those wonderful bodies of light which you see in the evening ; and if he moves, and preserves them all ; then he is great, and of great power, and nothing is too hard for him.

You sometimes see a little of God's power, in mighty winds, violent storms, and terrible lightning and thunder. But these are only "the hiding of his power." He can destroy the world ; yes, all worlds, as easily as he made them : And the scripture tells us, he will destroy them. "The skies shall pass away with a great noise, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." Then all good men and good children will ascend on high, to dwell forever with God, with Christ, and with holy angels : but the wicked shall be turned into hell ; they shall go away into everlasting punishment. Dreadful thought !

Children, do you not believe, that God has spoken this, and will do as he has spoken ? How dare you, then, sin against him ? Who knows the power of his anger ? What a fearful thing it is, for guilty creatures to fall into his hands ?

4. You should fear God because he is *righteous*.

He not only hates sin, but will punish impenitent sinners. He often punishes wicked men and wicked children in this world, and will punish them more terribly in the world to come.

You have heard how he once poured a flood of water upon the earth, and destroyed all its inhabitants young and old together, except eight persons, because all but these had corrupted his way. You have heard, how he rained down upon Sodom a storm of fire and brimstone from heaven, and consumed at once all the people who lived

there, except Lot and two of his children ; because their wickedness was great, and they laughed and mocked at pious Lot, who warned them to repent. You have heard, how he made the earth open its mouth, and swallow up Korah, and a number of ungodly people, and their wicked children with them ; because they murmured against him, and would not obey his commands. They all sunk down alive into the pit, with such dreadful outcries, that the people who stood near fled away, for fear that the earth would swallow them up too. You have heard, how a number of profane children, who mocked at a godly prophet, were torn in pieces by wild beasts—you have heard, how Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead in a moment for telling a lie—you have heard, how the sons of Aaron were consumed by fire from God, because they were profane in his house, and would not honour him, when they drew near to him.

From these things you know, that God will punish sin. If such is its punishment in this world, What will it be in the next ? The men of Sodom, Christ tells us, must appear at the judgment. They suffered much in the destruction of their city. They must suffer much more in the place of torments. And yet it shall be more tolerable for them, than for those sinners who will not hear and obey Christ speaking in his gospel.

You should fear God, because he is *gracious* and *merciful*.

There is forgiveness with him that he may be feared. You are therefore required to fear the Lord, and his goodness. Though he hates sin, and will punish obstinate sinners, yet he will forgive those who repent. Have you not often seen, how ready your parents are to forgive your offen-

ees, when they see that you are sorry for them ? Now, as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them who fear him. If a parent, who is evil, will give good things to his children, how much more will God, who is merciful as no other is, give his holy spirit to them who ask him ? He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but had rather that they would turn and live. He therefore commands them to repent—He calls to them, “ Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die ? ” He sent Jesus Christ into this world to call sinners to repentance. He gave up his own son to death in their stead, that they might live through him. Through Christ he will freely forgive all, who, being really sorry for their sins, forsake them, and pray for grace that they may, and resolve through grace that they will, walk in newness of life.

Now you should be afraid to sin against God, who has done so much for you, and is so ready to pardon and save you.

Do you not sometimes think how kind and bountiful God is to you ? How he gives you health and food and raiment ? How he preserves and keeps you from day to day ? Many have died younger than you : and many of those who live, have not all those comfortable things which you have. And besides these earthly comforts, he has given his word to instruct you ; his son to die for you ; his spirit to work in you ; and his promises to encourage you. Though you have sinned, if you repent of sin, and pray to him, he will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and will remember your sins no more.

The goodness of God should lead you to repentance : But if you despise the riches of his goodness, you treasure up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath.

I have shewn you, why you should fear God. I will now,

SECONDLY, shew you, how you should fear him.

If you fear him as you ought, you will be careful to please him in every thing, and watchful not to offend him in any thing.

1. If you fear God, you will desire to know what he requires of you. You will not live carelessly, and run along blindly, doing any thing, and every thing, whether right or wrong, just as it happens to please your inclination ; but you will prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. You will read his word as you are able. If you cannot read it well, you will learn to read it better. You will attend when you hear others read it. You will hearken to your parents when they instruct you ; and you will make enquiry, when you are in doubt, what you ought to do. You will not give all your vacant hours to sport and play : but will take pains to improve in the knowledge of God and his will, that you may fear him more, and serve him better.

2. If you fear God, you will pray to him. And you will pray often—every day, every night and morning. You will humbly ask him, not only to supply your outward wants, and preserve you from death, but also to forgive your sins and save your souls. You will daily look back and consider what evil words you have spoken, sinful actions you have done, and foolish thoughts you have indulged ; and you will ask God's mercy to forgive what is past, and his grace to keep you in time to come.

God loves to hear children pray to him. He has promised, that they who seek him early shall find him. It was said of king Josiah, that while he was yet young he began to seek the Lord, and



did that which was right in his sight, and declined not to the right hand, nor to the left. And God made him to prosper. You must, as he did, seek unto God betimes; for God is nigh to them who call on him; especially to those who seek him early. David says to Solomon his son, "Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and knoweth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever."

3. If you fear God, you will remember the sabbath-day, and keep it holy. This is God's day; a day on which you are to honour him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasures, nor speaking your own words. You must keep this day holy, that so you may serve God better every day. You must employ the whole of the day religiously; and especially keep your hearts, when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools. We read of some who are in almost all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly. Let there be none of these among you. Think how pious Jacob felt, when he considered himself in the presence of God. "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is no other than the house of God: This is the gate of heaven."

4. If you fear God, you will govern your tongues, knowing that for every sinful, every idle word that you speak, you must give an account in the day of judgment.

David says to children, "I will teach you the fear of the Lord—What man is he that desireth life, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile."

You must not take the name of God in vain ; must not mock at holy things ; must not talk of God, of heaven, of hell, in a careless, unmeaning, profane manner. If you thus talk, God will not hold you guiltless. You remember, that when little children scoffed at a good old prophet, God, in anger, sent bears among them, which tare them in pieces. What then will become of you, if you mock God himself? Never speak falsely. If you fear God, you must keep your lips from guile—from lying. “ A lying tongue is abomination to the Lord.” All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, in the place prepared for the devil and his angels : And it is just they should have their part there, for they imitate the devil ; they act as his children. He was a liar from the beginning, and is the father of liars.

Abhor all filthy and unclean talk. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is pure and wholesome, and fit to be heard. Let not uncleanness be once named among you, nor foolish talking and jesting ; but let your speech be always with grace ; with decency and propriety, as becomes virtuous and holy children.

5. If you fear God, you will not contend and quarrel with one another, but will be friendly and peaceable. When David teaches you the fear of God, he says, “ Depart from evil, and do good ; seek peace and pursue it.”

How odious it is for children to fall into violent passions with one another ; to threaten and strike in anger ; and to use vile and provoking names ! Christ says, “ They who are angry with others without a cause, and call them fools, shall be in danger of hell fire.” He calls children “ his lambs.” You

know that lambs are innocent creatures. When you quarrel with one another, you act, not as Christ's lambs, but rather as young bears and wolves.

6. If you fear God, you will endeavour to do good according to your ability : and before, you will be careful to do no mischief, to have no concern in any wicked plans that are proposed. If sinners entice you, you will not consent ; but will turn from them and pass away : you will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness ; but will rather reprove them : you will say to evil doers, " Depart from us, for we will keep the commandments of God." We read of some, who sleep not, except they have done mischief ; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. Never join such parties as these ; for " a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, and feet that are swift in running to mischief, are abomination to the Lord." And " a companion of fools will be destroyed."

7. If you fear God, you will honour your parents : For this is his command, " Honour thy father and mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth." Speak of them with respect, behave toward them with reverence, obey them with cheerfulness, and regard their will, when you are absent from them, as well as when you are present with them. Solomon says, " The eye that mocketh his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." His meaning is, Such ungracious and wicked creatures, as mock and despise a parent, while children, will probably prove rogues and villains, when they grow up ; so that God, in his wrath, will give them up to an untimely death,

and leave them to be devoured by ravenous beasts and birds.

8. If you fear God, you will betake yourselves to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of lost sinners.

He came to seek and to save them that are lost. When you compare your hearts and lives with God's holy law, you see that you have transgressed it. This law condemns every one who continues not in all things written therein to do them. Christ by his death hath redeemed us from the curse of the law—you can have redemption only by faith in him as a dying Saviour. The fear of God, as a holy and righteous Being, will lead you to Christ, who came to save you from the wrath to come. The law of God is a schoolmaster to bring you to Christ, that you may be justified by faith. Christ invites all weary and heavy-laden sinners, all who feel their guilt and see their danger, to come unto him, that they may find rest to their souls. Them who come to him, he will in no wise cast out.

FINALLY: If you fear God, keep his commandments. Do what he requires, and shun what he forbids. Keep out of the company of wicked children, as much as you can, lest you learn their ways, and get a snare to your souls. When you see evil in other children, reprove them; if they are so proud and scornful, that they will not regard you, desire those who are older to reprove them. "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide the multitude of sins."

Thus, my children, I have taught you, what it is to fear God, and why you should fear him. I hope you have hearkened, while I have been speaking. Forget not what has been said. Think of it after you go home, and pray God to impress

it on your hearts. If you knew you should die, in two or three days, would you not regard what has been spoken? You know not how soon you shall die. Many die young. How happy it is to be always ready. If you live to be old, death is not far off. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days." God has called you to obtain salvation through Christ. Give diligence to make your calling sure. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. If you despise God's calls and resist his grace, when you are young, perhaps you will be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and rejected of God forever.

Hear then and regard the words of David in our text and the verses which follow:—"Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days, 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 cry. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off their remembrance from the earth. Evil shall slay the wicked. But the Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.



## A PRAYER FOR CHILDREN.



*ALMIGHTY God! Thou hast created me by thy power, preserved me by thy care, and supported me by thy goodness. From thee I derived my being, my reason, and all my powers. I am indebted to thee for all*

that I have ; I am dependent on thee for all that I want ; and I owe to thee all that I can do. I would be humbled before thee for all my childish follies and youthful vanities ; for the corruptions of my heart, and the iniquities of my life. I pray thee, O God, to deliver me from my guilt, and cleanse me from my pollutions. Form my mind to the early love of true and substantial wisdom. Teach me to love, fear and serve thee, with all my heart. May I honour my Divine Saviour, know the truth as it is in him, feel the power of his doctrines, obey his commands, and be conformed to his example. I desire especially to imitate his example of youthful piety, virtue and wisdom. O that like him, I might not only grow in stature, but also increase in wisdom, and in favour with God and man. May I embrace the good, and abhor the evil which I see in others ; and, by my example, do something to encourage good and discourage evil, in all that I associate with. May I be a companion of them who fear God, and wisely shun the snares of wicked company. May I be kept from temptations, or, when they meet me, be enabled to overcome them. Give me grace to keep my heart diligently, to govern my tongue wisely, and to use my time profitably. May I daily mind the one thing needful, and faithfully attend to the care of my soul. May I daily act in the fear of God, and with a sense of the judgment to come. May I daily think of dying, and do something in preparation for my great change. And when death shall remove me from this world, may I, of thine abundant mercy in Christ Jesus, be received to thy presence in heaven. Take me under thy care this day, [or this night,] and, both by night and by day, may I be kept from sin. And, whether I sleep or wake, may I be preserved from harm ; and unto thee I will ascribe the praise, through Jesus Christ my Redeemer.—Amen.

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## SERMON II.



### *The Duty of Speaking to the Young.*



ZECHARIAH ii 4.

—Run speak to this young man.

**T**HIS young man was the prophet Zechariah, who seems to have enjoyed the spirit of prophecy in his youth. He flourished toward the end of the captivity, when things were ripening for the restoration. The intention of the first part of his prophecy is to encourage the Jews in rebuilding their ancient city and temple. As he was conversing with an angel, whom he calls “the angel that talked with him,” he saw another angel, with a measuring line in his hand, going, like an architect, to lay out the plan and take the proportion of the city, in order to its being rebuilt. And the angel, who talked with him, went forth, and this other angel went out to meet him, and said to him, “Run speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited, as towns without walls; for the Lord will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her.”

This message to the young prophet was sent on a special occasion. There may be *many* occasions which call on *us* to address the young. Other young men are to be spoken to, as well as the

prophet ; others are required to speak to them, as well as the angel to speak to Zechariah ; there are other subjects on which the young need to be addressed, as important as that which called the prophet's attention. I shall therefore improve our text as a general direction to speak to the young.

You will ask then, *what young man* is to be spoken to ?

Every one needs to have something said to him. But there may be special occasions to speak to some. You will find some who are ignorant, and need to be instructed ; some who are rash and precipitant, and need to be warned ; some who are wicked and ungodly, and need to be reprov'd ; some who are inattentive to their duty, and need to be exhorted. Every one has his temptations, his dangers, his weaknesses, and his failings, and needs to be addressed in a manner suitable to his peculiar situation and character.

But what *occasion* is there to speak to the young man ?

Speak to him, because he is *unexperienced* ; he has not had time for much observation and improvement. Hence through want of knowledge, he is liable to commit many gross mistakes, and to take many dangerous steps. Give him, therefore, the advantage of your better judgment, clearer foresight and riper experience.

Speak to him, because *temptations await him*, of which he is unapprized. This is with him a giddy age ; a critical period. His passions are strong, his imagination lively, his self-confidence bold, and his forethought but short. Hence temptations more suddenly surprize him, more easily overcome him, more powerfully bear him away, than, we hope, they will do at a riper age, when his senses are better exercised to discern both good and evil.



Speak to him, because *one wrong step* may be followed with a train of mischievous consequences. It is of importance that he begin well ; that he set out right ; that he early take the path in which he should walk ; that he be secured from the fatal tracks, into which incautious souls are easily decoyed. One false step will make way for another, and that for a third, until the poor thoughtless wanderer will be so bewildered in the mazes of error ; so entangled in the snares of vice, that he will not know by what means to extricate himself, nor by what steps to return back to the good way, from which he has departed.

Speak to him, because he may have many *bad advisers*. His wicked companions will intice him to evil ; and perhaps their fair speeches will cause him to yield. Many seducing suggestions will be made to him ; many flattering arguments will be urged upon him, to draw him away from truth and virtue. Give him your wholesome cautions, that he may cease to hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge.

Speak to him, because *the interest of his soul* is depending. It cannot be a matter of indifference what course he takes, for with this his eternal state is connected. The path of sin is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death. The path of righteousness is the way of life, leading up to the kingdom of glory. As you would save a soul from death, apply the means in your power to convert the sinner from the error of his ways.

Speak to him, because from your *silence* he will conclude that his way is *right*, or not dangerously wrong. There are many cases, in which, not to reprove is to countenance an error ; not to condemn is to excuse a fault ; not to restrain is to embolden a transgression.

Speak to him, because the virtue and happiness of *others* may greatly depend on *his* conduct. If he runs into the path of vice, you know not how many he may draw after him. These again may decoy and mislead many more. His pernicious influence may spread wide and last long. It may reach down to succeeding generations, and extend itself on each side, more and more, in its progress. One sinner destroys much good. You know not, how much evil you may prevent, and how much good you may promote, by speaking to one young man. By speaking to him, you may speak to hundreds.

Speak to him, because he is *young*, and there is hope that you may do him good. There may be some older sinners who are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and become callous and unfeeling to reproof. The young are not yet so far gone in vice. There is in them some sensibility of heart ; some regard to honour ; some apprehension of futurity ; some tenderness of conscience ; and a word properly spoken may have a happy effect.

You will next enquire, *whose business* is it to speak to the young man ?

It is the business of every one who sees, that he needs to be spoken to, and who can do him good by speaking. Particularly,

His *parents* ought to speak to him. They are commanded to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; to train him up in the way in which he should go. By divine authority they are charged with his instruction, guidance and education. If they forbear to execute the charge, how God will resent the neglect, they may learn from the example of his vengeance on the house of Eli, of which he says, " I will judge the

house of Eli forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

If the youth be removed from the government of his parents, *they*, under whose *care* he now lives, should speak to him. As he is become a member of their family, they are bound, as they see occasion, to advise and reprove him. Every head of a family has authority within his own house; and he can, if he will, maintain order and government there. Let his example be pure and blameless, and his instructions and reproofs will be powerful and efficacious. If there be those in his family, who, by reason of age, are beyond the reach of his authority; or, by reason of perverseness, spurn the orders of his house, he can, at least, remove them. Let every householder adopt David's resolution, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way: I will walk within my house with a perfect heart: I will set no wicked thing before my eyes. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. Mine eyes shall be on the faithful, that they may dwell with me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell in my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

*Ministers* ought to speak to him. Christ has given it in command to them to feed his lambs. It is a part of Paul's charge to Titus, "Exhort young men to be sober minded." John wrote to little children and to young men, "that the word of God might dwell in them, and that they might be strong to overcome the wicked one." Ministers are to regard the weak as well as the strong, and children as well as those who are of full age. They are to give every one his portion, and to distribute in Christ's family both milk and strong meat.

*Aged* people should speak to him. Their years, gravity and experience, if accompanied with righteousness, give dignity to their persons, weight to their counsels, and authority to their reproofs. On the contrary, their silence and connivance will embolden the youthful transgressor, and strengthen his hands, that he will not depart from iniquity. Paul says to Titus, "Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine, that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, charity and patience: The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, that they may teach the young to be sober, discreet and good."

*Youths* ought to speak often among *themselves*; to reprove, admonish, and encourage one another, as there is occasion; to exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and to be fellow helpers to the truth.

If youth, in general, were disposed to testify against the wicked practices of their associates, they would soon discourage them. Many are emboldened in their wickedness, because they meet with some who treat it with a kind of jocular and mirthful approbation. Now if you would frown upon it, express your abhorrence of it, and show that you cannot bear them who are evil, the guilty would be ashamed of themselves. The advice which the apostle gives to Christians concerning their treatment of a disorderly brother, is fit to be observed by you in your conduct toward a disorderly companion. "Note such an one, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed: yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

You will now ask, in what *manner* must we speak to him that is young?

Speak to him *speedily*. Delays in important matters are attended with great danger. If you think of any thing necessary to be spoken to him, take the first good opportunity to speak it. You may not have another. *You* or *he* may soon be dead.

Speak to him *early*, before he has gone to an irreclaimable length in an evil course. "Whom shall he teach knowledge?" says the prophet, "Whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them who are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breast."

Speak to him *seasonably*, when you find him in a proper frame to hear you; when his passions are calm, his thoughts composed, and his mind open to instruction.

Speak to him *frequently*; for "precept must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little." The Jewish parent was commanded to "talk with his children, when he sat in the house, and when he walked by the way; when he lay down, and when he arose."

Speak to him *pertinently*; for "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." If you see him ignorant, enlighten him; if you see him rash and presumptuous, check and caution him; if you see him careless, awake him; if you see him inattentive to danger, warn him; if you see him engaged in wickedness, reprove and restrain him; if you see him turning to the path of virtue, encourage and strengthen him.

Speak to him *plainly*, but *tenderly*. Choose out forceable, but acceptable words; such as may reach the heart without irritating the passions. "As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold; so is a wife reprover on an obedient ear." "Ye pa-

rents, provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged.”

Speak to him *seriously* ; that he may see, you are not trifling, but in earnest ; are not influenced by passion or ill humour, but by a regard to his interest, and a sense of the importance of what you say. The seriousness of your address will, we hope, command his attention.

In this manner you must speak to the young man.

Well ; and what shall we say to him ?

Tell him that he has a God to serve.

The voice of nature proclaims the existence of a Deity : We see innumerable objects around us, which evidently could not bring themselves into being, but must owe their existence to some first cause. He who is the first cause of all things, must be eternal, infinite and independent. And such a Being must possess every perfection ; wisdom, power, justice, goodness ; and whatever is necessary to constitute a perfect character. Yea, the works which we behold demonstrate these perfections in their Author. “The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.” The belief of the existence and providence of a God is the first principle of religion. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Lead the youth, then, to an early acquaintance with the Creator. Direct his thoughts to the most easy and obvious proofs of the divine perfections and government. Teach him to view his maker as always with him, supporting his nature, inspecting his actions, attending to his words and observing his thoughts. Teach him to consider God as a hater

of sin and a lover of righteousness. Teach him to regard every blessing as the gift of God's bounty, and every affliction as the correction of his hand, and to direct his heart to God in grateful acknowledgements of the former, and humble submission to the latter. Teach him that he is accountable to God for all that he thinks, speaks and does, and that a view to the divine approbation should govern all his conduct.

Tell him that he has a *soul* to save ; that the power within him, which thinks and reasons, loves and hates, rejoices and grieves, is spiritual and immortal ; dies not with the body, but survives its dissolution, and will live in another world ; that he was not made merely to eat and drink, sport and play for a while in this world, and then to die like the brutes ; but to serve God in his spirit here, and prepare for an eternal enjoyment of him hereafter ; that, therefore, it must not be his principal care to adorn and feed the body, but to improve and cultivate the mind ; to furnish it with knowledge, store it with virtuous principles, and enrich it with noble sentiments ; to subdue the passions, restrain the sensual propensities, enlarge the understanding, and become like to God in purity, truth and goodness. Remind him of the *evidences* of his immortality. Teach him to consider his natural desire of life, as an intimation that there is a life beyond this ; and the powers of reason and reflection as marks of his superiority to the brutes, and proofs that he was designed for a nobler purpose, than they. Teach him, that as God is a holy and righteous being, he will make a difference between the virtuous and the wicked ; and since good men often suffer, and bad men often prosper in this world, there must be another

world, in which this difference will be made. Direct his mind to those plainer evidences of a future state, which he may find in the holy scriptures ; not only in the declarations which they contain, but also in the facts which they record relative to Jesus Christ, who died, rose and ascended, and now lives in glory.

Tell him, that he is a *fallen creature*. And that he may be apprized of the sinful inclinations and corrupt tendencies of his heart, lead him to compare himself with the divine law in its purity and perfection. Tell him how sin entered into our nature, and death into our world ; even by the revolt of the first parent of our race. Instruct him in the strictness of the divine law, which condemns, and must in its nature condemn every transgression of, or deviation from its own commands. Hence lead him to see, that by the deeds of the law no man can be justified before God, or claim a reward at his hands ; but, on the contrary, every soul, considered in himself, and in relation only to the law, lies under guilt and condemnation.

Tell him, that there is a *Saviour* provided for sinners ; who this Saviour is and what he has done. Teach him, that God, in his boundless compassion to fallen men, sent down from heaven his divine son, who, being manifested in our flesh, obeyed the precepts and suffered the penalty of the law for us ; wrought wonders to prove his heavenly mission ; marked the way to heaven by his doctrines ; exemplified in his own life that manner of life which he has enjoined on us ; and, after his death on the cross, rose again and gave many infallible proofs of the reality of his resurrection, then ascended to heaven to prepare a place for us, and there lives to make intercession for them who come to God by him. Teach him, that, through the righteousness and intercession of this Saviour, the



greatest sinners may obtain the pardon of sin, and the life to come.

Tell him *what he must do* to be saved ; that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour whom God has sent ; that saving faith in Christ is nothing less than a hearty consent to, and compliance with his gospel ; that it includes a persuasion of his divine mission, a love of his heavenly doctrines, a submission to his holy precepts, a conformity to his excellent example, a repentance of known sin, and a resolution and care to walk in newness of life ; that this faith purifies the heart, works by love, and forms a new creature ; that consequently no man can justly pretend to be a believer in Christ, as long as he indulges a temper, and leads a life opposite to the gospel of Christ ; that true faith is only *that*, which is accompanied with repentance from dead works, and a life devoted to the service of God.

Tell him, that faith is *the gift of God* ; a fruit of divine operation ; a consequence of God's opening the heart. This is the doctrine of scripture. In the sinful and corrupt nature of fallen man there is an opposition to the spiritual and holy design of the gospel. This opposition must be conquered ; this enmity must be subdued ; pride must be brought down ; the stupid heart must be awakened ; prejudices against the truth must be removed. How shall the word produce these great effects ? It must come as a sword in the hand of the spirit. It must come with demonstration of the spirit and with power. It is mighty only through God. Therefore allow not your young man to indulge the vain self-flattery, that believing to his own salvation is no more than what he may do at any time, when he may see occasion ; and hence be led to imagine, that an early attention to his

salvation is needless ; but put him in remembrance that, since faith is the gift of God and a fruit of the spirit, and since the spirit's most usual time to work is the period of youth, it highly concerns him to listen to the calls of grace, comply with the motions of the spirit, and engage in the work of his salvation now in this peculiarly acceptable time, lest being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and through an evil heart of unbelief, he depart from the living God.

Tell him how he must seek the gift of divine grace. Since faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, he must frequently read, diligently hear, and carefully examine this word ; attend to the evidences of its truth and the importance of its contents ; consider his own immediate concern in its discoveries ; pray for divine direction and illumination ; guard against the temptations which would harden him in the practice of his sins and divert him from the care of his soul. Caution him against evil company, dangerous amusements, and the follies, vanities and lusts which are especially incident to his age. Instruct him to seek the favour of his maker immediately, earnestly, constantly and perseveringly, and yet to seek it humbly, and with a sense of his unworthiness.

Tell him of the *sins* which, you see, most easily beset him, and from which, you apprehend, his greatest danger arises ; warn him to avoid them ; furnish him with arguments against them ; represent to him the destructive influence they will have on his reputation, comfort, interest, and especially on his soul ; show him, how they harden the heart, waste the conscience, grieve the spirit, defeat the word, dishonor God, provoke his wrath, and terminate in misery. Point out to

him the baleful influence of his evil communication and example to corrupt the hearts, viciate the morals, and ruin the souls of others ; hold up to his view the awful judgment of God against those who corrupt the earth with their abominations. The smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever ; and the saints will give glory to God for his righteous judgment.

Tell him of his *duty* in its various branches ; the duty of fear, trust, resignation and obedience which he owes to God ; of faith, gratitude and love which he owes to the redeemer ; of benevolence, truth, justice, condescension and peaceableness, which he owes to mankind ; of sobriety, charity, temperance and humility, which he owes to himself. Represent to him the beauty, amiableness and importance of these virtues. Whatsoever things are true, just, pure, honest, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy, bid him think on these things.

Tell him that he must *die*. He is apt to put away the thoughts of death. Urge him to consider, that death is as certainly appointed for him, as it was for his ancestors, who are already gone to the grave ; that, though he is now in the bloom of youth and vigour of health, he is no more sure of life, than his grandfire who stoops with age and bends on his staff—apply for his awakening the deaths of others, and especially the deaths of the young—press upon him the wise man's exhortation, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work in the grave, whither thou goest."

Finally. Tell him of an approaching *judgment*, at which both small and great must stand before God. Remind him that God will judge the secrets of all hearts—will disclose the hidden things

of darkness—will try every man's work of what fort it is—will render to all according to their deeds whether good or evil—to them, who by patient continuance in well doing have fought for glory, honour and immortality ; eternal life : but to them who have not obeyed the truth, but have obeyed unrighteousness ; indignation and wrath. If you see him, in contempt of all your warnings, still resolved to walk in his own ways, and in the sight of his own eyes, bid him remember, that for all these things God will bring him into judgment.

These are the subjects on which you should talk to the young, and to which you should often call their attention.

And now, that I may discharge a part of my own duty, I turn myself to the young. You have seen that it is the duty of parents, ministers, the aged, and all who regard your happiness, often to speak to you. And surely, if it is our duty to speak, it is yours to hear us, when we speak. If you will not hear, we may as well be silent. We shall, indeed, thus deliver our own souls ; but we shall aggravate the destruction of yours. Therefore hear instruction, be wise and refuse it not. Be of a teachable disposition. Receive our commandments humbly ; take our reproofs thankfully ; regard our counsels seriously ; if you doubt their propriety, examine them honestly, and propose your objections modestly ; if you find them to be just and pertinent, follow them conscientiously. Consider, weigh and apply the things which have been spoken in your hearing.

There is a God, who made and preserves you : fear and love him with all your hearts ; honour and obey him in all your ways. You have immortal souls, which must live, and be happy or

miserable, in a future world : make your souls your first care. You are fallen creatures, transgressors of God's law, and as such you are exposed to the wrath of God : awake to a sense of your danger ; flee from the wrath to come. A Redeemer has appeared, died and risen, that he may deliver you from that wrath, and bring you to glory and happiness in heaven—Flee for refuge to him, and lay hold on the hope which he has set before you.

That you may obtain salvation through him, commit yourselves to him by faith ; renounce sin by repentance ; seek the grace of the spirit by prayer and attendance on all appointed means ; watch against sin and against the temptations which await you ; be not conformed to the world, but prove what is the acceptable will of God ; be not weary in well doing, for in due season you will reap, if you faint not. That you may be quickened in your duty and in the work of your salvation, think much on death and the judgment to come. “ Hear the conclusion of the whole matter ; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

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## SERMON III.

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*Youth invited to the Lord's Supper.*

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EXODUS xii, 26, 27.

And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.

WHEN God selected the seed of Abraham for a people to himself, he prescribed to them the form of worship, which he would accept. Among the various ordinances which he instituted, a principal one was that of the *passover*. The institution, occasion and design of this ordinance are related in the chapter where our text is.

The great Jehovah was now about to deliver his chosen people from their long and grievous oppressions in Egypt. This deliverance he determined to effect in a manner which should demonstrate his power and supremacy in distinction from the pagan divinities. To perpetuate the remembrance of this great salvation, he instituted the passover, to be observed by the Israelites on that solemn night, when he sent forth his angel to destroy all the first-born in the Egyptian houses, and thus subdued the stubborn spirit of the Egyptian king, to dismiss this afflicted people.

The instructions concerning the festival were these. On the tenth day of the month *Nisan*, which answered in part to our *March*, and was thence forward to be the first month of their ecclesiastical year, every family of Israel, or, if one family was too small, two neighbouring families joining together, were to take a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, and shut it up until the fourteenth day, and then slay it in the evening. In the blood of the lamb they were to dip a bunch of hyssop, and sprinkle with it the doors of every house where the lamb was eaten, and to continue in the house until the morning. This was the condition of their exemption from the judgment, which, in that night, was to fall on the Egyptians. This lamb was to be dressed whole; not a bone of it was to be broken; it was to be roasted with fire, and eaten all at once, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs; and if any part was left, it was to be burnt with fire; and they were to eat it in the posture and habit of pilgrims, with their girdles around their loins, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands.

After the Jews were settled in the land of promise, some of these circumstances were omitted, and others were added. The first passover was celebrated in their own houses: after the order of divine worship was settled, all the males were to appear before God in Jerusalem. The first passover was eaten in a standing posture: but it appears, by our Saviour's example, that it was afterward eaten in the more easy posture of guests sitting around a table. In the first institution there is no mention made of the use of wine: but this in future time was added to the solemnity. To this there are some allusions in the book of Psalms;

and there is express mention of it in our Lord's celebration of the festival.

To commemorate the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt was the primary design of the passover, and to this design the circumstances of the festival were pertinently adapted. The sacrifice was a lamb without blemish to signify their obligation to innocence and holiness of life. It was set apart from the rest of the flock, to denote that they were a peculiar people unto God. As the most expeditious manner of preparation, it was roasted with fire, to signify that they were to hold themselves in readiness for an immediate departure. The whole was eaten by them, or consumed with fire, that no part of it might be profaned by the Egyptians. It was eaten in the posture of travellers, to indicate their expectation of orders to begin their march. It was seasoned with bitter herbs, in memory of their cruel bondage and in thankfulness for their deliverance. The bread eaten with it was made without leaven, in recognition of their sudden emigration, which allowed them no time for the usual method of preparing their bread.

This festival, however, had a farther and more important design, which was to lead the thoughts of the Jews to Jesus Christ, and to the great redemption effected by his death. Hence the apostles call him *our passover*—the *lamb of God*—a *lamb slain from the foundation of the world*—a *lamb without blemish and without spot*. The order, that not a bone of the paschal lamb should be broken, is said to have been fulfilled in Christ, whose bones, contrary to the common usage, were left unbroken at his crucifixion. His *blood* is called the *blood of sprinkling* in allusion to the sprinkling of the blood of the passover. **And Christians are directed to**



keep the gospel feast, with the *unleavened bread* of sincerity and truth.

The Jewish passover, then, was an ordinance of much the same nature and design as the Christian supper. The former had the same intention with respect to the Jews, as the latter has with respect to Christians, which is to lead their minds to the Saviour. The chief difference is, that the passover prefigured his future death; the supper commemorates his death already past. *This* was instituted at the time when *that* was abolished, and doubtless succeeded in its place.

Our divine Lord, knowing, that the time of his death was at hand, said to his disciples, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." As it was the last passover which he should ever see on earth, and the last that ever ought to be celebrated, he felt a peculiar solicitude to attend it with his disciples; and his desire probably was increased by the consideration, that this would be a favorable opportunity to institute his commemorative supper.

At the stated season for the celebration of the passover, he foresaw, that he should be in the hands of his enemies; he therefore solemnized it the day before. And as soon as he and his disciples had done eating of the *paschal* supper, he instituted his *own*. He took some of the bread which was on the table, and, having consecrated it by prayer, brake it and gave it to his disciples. And then he took some of the wine prepared for the passover, and, in like manner, blessed that, and distributed it among them. On this occasion, he instructed them, that the bread and the wine were symbols of his body broken, and of his blood poured forth to procure pardon for sinners, and to ratify the promises of the covenant. And

he required them to attend upon this ordinance, not in remembrance of the redemption from Egypt, of which the passover was a memorial, but in remembrance of a more glorious redemption soon to be accomplished by his own death. He adds, "I will not henceforth drink of the fruit of the vine until the day, when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom." The same he had said just before concerning the cup in the passover. And his meaning was, that he should not any more partake of either of these ordinances personally; but he should rejoice to behold the things signified by them happily accomplished under his new dispensation, which was now about to be introduced.

From these observations it is manifest, that the sacramental supper is appointed to succeed the passover; that both have respect to the Saviour, and to the benefits procured by his death; and that the supper in the Christian church has much the same use, as the passover had in the Jewish church. The instructions therefore relative to the passover may, in many respects, be applied to the Christian institution.

We will particularly attend to the instructions contained in the passage selected for our text.

I. The paschal institution respected the *whole congregation*. "Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever—and when ye shall come into the land, which the Lord shall give you, ye shall keep this service."

There were some ceremonial pollutions, which disqualified a Jew for an *immediate* attendance on this solemnity; but his *general* obligation to observe it, nothing could cancel; for this was founded in divine authority. The sacred nature of the ordinance required all to make suitable *pre-*

paration for it, that they might attend upon it acceptably ; but the necessity of preparation was never a just cause for *customary* neglect. In the time of Hezekiah, many who had not opportunity to observe the usual forms of purification, ventured to eat of the passover otherwise than it was written ; but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "The good Lord pardon every one who prepareth his heart to seek unto God, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." The external form was of use only as a mean of preparing the heart, which was the main thing necessary to an acceptable attendance.

This observation may be applied to the supper. The obligation to attend upon it is common to all Christians. The command of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me," was indeed first given to the twelve. But Saint Paul tells us, that it respected all Christians, in all ages, down to the time of Christ's second coming. No man, who believes the gospel, can claim a right to live in disobedience to this, more than to every divine command.

There are indeed, certain moral disqualifications for an acceptable attendance on the supper. But whatever they be, we must remove them, that we may attend on the ordinance ; not plead them in excuse for neglecting the ordinance. We ought not to come to it with impenitent, unbelieving hearts, or with malevolent, unsocial passions. What then ?—Are we to turn from it ?—No : we are to make preparation for it by examining ourselves, by repenting of our sins, by repairing injuries, by seeking reconciliation with offended brethren, and by cultivating benevolence toward all men. Whether we come to the ordinance or not, we can have no right to indulge a wicked

temper either toward God or men. And one use of the ordinance is, to make us watchful against such a temper; and to awaken us to repentance, when we discover this temper in us, or perceive it stealing upon us.

II. Our text teaches us, that, as the ancient passover, so also the Lord's supper, was particularly designed for the benefit of the young. "When your *children* shall say, What mean you by this service? then shall ye say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover."

One use of the passover was to excite the attention and enquiry of *children*, that they might thus be prepared to receive instruction from their parents concerning the great things, which God had done, and still would do for his people. The publick celebration of this festival, from year to year, was designed to be the means of transmitting the knowledge of religion from one generation to another down to the latest period of that dispensation.

In times of national degeneracy, this ordinance fell into disuse. But whenever there was a revival of religion, the restoration of the festival and a regular attendance upon it were some of the first favourable appearances. Thus it was in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, those pious kings, whose reigns were distinguished by an active zeal for religion.

It was common for the *young* to attend the passover. They were conducted thither by their parents, that they might observe the solemnity and learn the design of it. Luke tells us, it was the custom for children to repair to this festival, as soon as they were twelve years old. It was at the time of the passover, that children in the temple sung, "Hosanna to the son of David." Jesus was pleased with the pious strain.

Now as the Lord's supper is an institution parallel to, and succeeding in the place of the passover, we may conclude, that this, as well as the other, was designed for the use and benefit of the young ; and that they are under some special obligation to attend upon it. One obvious use of it is to awaken in their minds religious thoughtfulness, and to draw from them pertinent enquiries, that the parent may thus be led to instruct them in the great redemption purchased for a guilty world by the death of Jesus Christ, whose death is represented in this ordinance.

The young seem generally to imagine, that the ordinance was not intended for persons of their age. That their fathers ought to observe it, they have no doubt ; but for themselves they think it is a matter of little concern. In most churches the number of communicating youths is very small. Few approach the table of their redeemer, until they become settled in a family state : and there are many, who even then neglect it. But let me tell you, my young hearers, that as soon as you are able to discern the Lord's body in the holy supper, and to understand what is meant by this service, you, as well as others, are bound to attend upon it. We find, that, in the time of the apostles, there were in the church little children, as well as young men and fathers.

You will perhaps say, "We have not sufficient knowledge."

Then seek knowledge. Content not yourselves with what you have attained ; but endeavour to abound more and more. You have been taught, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Surely you should be solicitous to know, who this saviour is—what he has done and suffered for you—and what you must do to be saved.

If you have this knowledge, and with it a desire to obtain, and a resolution to seek salvation through Jesus Christ, you have such preparation, as will warrant your approach to his table.

You will say, "We are afraid, we shall not live so as to honour the religion of Christ."

Be then so much the more watchful over yourselves, prayerful to God, and diligent in your attendance on all the instituted means of piety.

Doubtless you have cause to fear, lest you dishonour your Saviour by a conversation which his gospel forbids. But is this a reason why you should not confess his name?—Why you should not even resolve, or promise, or endeavour to honour him? No: It is a reason, why you should be more careful what manner of persons you are.

Perhaps some will say, "Our past conversation has not been such as becomes the gospel of Christ."

Is this an excuse for neglecting a plain institution—an institution designed especially for *you*?—No: It is high time for you to repent and walk in newness of life. Let not sin reign in you, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof; but yield yourselves to Christ as those who are alive from the dead, and your members instruments of righteousness to him.

You will say, "We do not know that we are in a converted state." Give diligence then to make your calling sure; and, with this view, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue, knowledge. But, in the mean time, neglect none of the commands of God. It is not by the neglect, but by the practice of duty, that you are to prove the reality of your conversion.

The apostles exhorted sinners to repent and turn to God: but they never advised the serious and enquiring to delay their entrance into the

church, until they had proved the sincerity of their repentance by doing works meet for repentance. When Peter's hearers, pricked in their hearts, enquired, what they must do to be saved; he said to them, "Repent and be baptised for the remission of sins, for the promise is to you." And they gladly received the word; and the same day, were added to the church three thousand souls. The apostle could not know, nor could they themselves know, without longer time of trial, that they were savingly changed; but he, the same day, admitted them into the church, without intimating the expedience of farther delay.

You will say, "The man found at the marriage feast, without a wedding garment, fell under a severe punishment." It is true; and so did they, who refused to come to the feast at all. What then shall we do? Let us come to the feast, and put on the wedding garment. This guest, with many others, was called into the king's house out of the highway. Where should he get a wedding garment: he had none of his own; and his fellow beggars had none to give him. At the king's house, there was clean raiment, as well as rich food. Here both were free; and here the beggar must come for both. His fault was not, that he *came* to the feast, for he was commanded to come; but that he sat there in his *dirt* and *rags*, and would not put on the clean garments brought him from the king's wardrobe.

Your coming into the church, and attending on instituted ordinances, will not be your condemnation; these things are required of you: but if, under all your advantages, you continue in the love and practice of sin, *this* will be your condemnation. It is not your observance, but

your misimprovement of divine institutions, which involves you in guilt.

“ But ought we to come into the church, and approach Christ’s table, while we know, that we have no regard to religion ?” If this is your character, you neither ask the question, nor desire an answer, on a religious account. You cannot feel a conscientious solicitude about your duty in this matter, when you have no regard to it in any thing else. It is time for you to awake out of sleep, to repent of your sins, and seek God’s mercy and grace, for the renewal of your souls and the remission of your guilt. When any ask me, what is their duty in a particular case, I suppose them to be serious, and I answer them accordingly. If they have no desire to know or intention to do their duty, their question is trifling, and the answer will be impertinent. If you are regardless of religion, I can only exhort you to consider your ways, and think on your danger, that you may be awakened to juster sentiments. But if you already believe the gospel to be true, and feel it to be important ; if you have a concern to secure its blessings, and a resolution to obey its precepts, then go, and attend on all the means which God has appointed to confirm your hopeful beginnings, and accomplish your good intentions.

“ But we are anxious to obtain grace for our conversion : and some tell us, that, if once we venture to the Lord’s table before we are converted, there is little hope, that we can ever be converted afterward.” My children, they tell you wrong. Paul was of a different opinion. The churches in Galatia, formed by his ministry, soon turned unto another gospel, than that which he had preached to them ; and he was afraid, that he had bestowed on them labour in vain. But he travailed in



birth for them again, that Christ might be formed in them. Rest not in ordinances as your security ; make them not a substitute for holiness ; but improve them as the means of holiness. Gospel sinners will be shut out of Christ's kingdom, not because they have eaten and drunk in his presence, and heard him teach in their streets, but because they have still been workers of iniquity.

But does not the apostle say, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself?" Yes : This man brings guilt, or judgment on himself, because he discerns not the Lord's body. So did the Corinthians, who took one before another his own supper, and one was hungry and another was drunken ; and so do all who eat in a profane and impious manner. It is not in this manner, that I advise you to eat. But examine yourselves, and so eat of this bread and drink of this cup. The apostle does not warn these disorderly partakers to partake no more, but exhorts them to repentance of what is past, and amendment for the time to come.

If Jesus has appointed this ordinance especially for your benefit, there is a peculiar ingratitude attending your neglect of it. The Redeemer, in his whole work, seems to have had a particular and distinct regard to the young. He himself became a child, that he might exhibit to children an example of early piety ; and one branch of piety, which he early exemplified, was an attendance on divine ordinances. At the age of twelve years we find him at the passover. He has invited the young to come to him ; he has expressed his high approbation of youthful religion : never did he appear better pleased, than when he met children in the temple at the passover, and heard them sing, "Hosanna to the son of David." He

has cautioned his disciples, that they offend not his little ones, nor cast stumbling blocks in their way. He has represented them as under the guardianship of angels. In the view of the general destruction of Jerusalem, the distresses which would come on children, affected him with such deep sensibility, that he almost forgot his own. While he was going to the place of execution he said to the sadly sympathizing women, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." He has given it in solemn charge to the pastors of his flock, that they pay particular attention to his lambs.

What think you of all this, my children? Are you not bound to come to this ordinance?—an ordinance which Jesus has appointed for you, and in which he exhibits himself as dying for you—dying to purchase a salvation, which you need—and need no less than others? Do you not think, that he will be pleased with your attendance at his table, as well as with the songs of the youths in his ancient temple? Do you not think, that this Saviour, who in the days of his flesh was so attentive to the young, and so delighted with early indications of piety, will accept your pious and humble approaches to his ordinances?

There are some who, in their tender age, have felt their minds impressed with a sense of religion, and have thought, that they soon would openly dedicate themselves to their Saviour, and come to his table. But by delay their serious thoughts and resolutions have languished and died away. Ah! I have known such instances. Are there not now among you some of this description? What think you of these early impressions? Were they not the kind invitations of your Saviour to come and take a place in his family, and eat at his table?

Did he not stand at your door and knock? Was not this his call to you? "Hear my voice and open the door, and I will come in and sup with you, and you shall sup with me? What a pity, that you did not attend? What an advantage you might have gained by complying with his first call? Accept his invitation now. It is not yet too late. Hear his voice while it is called to day. It is still a day of salvation.

How beautiful is the church in which our sons are as plants grown up in their youth, and our daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace? How pleasing the prospect, when we see children devoting themselves to God taking hold of his covenant, and youths walking in his ways and encouraging one another in his service? We then anticipate the virtue and felicity of many generations, and promise ourselves, that we shall see the good of Jerusalem all the days of our life, and that our children's children will see the church in peace.

III. We may farther observe, that we ought to attend upon divine ordinances with a rational view of, and a serious regard to their proper use and design.

Moses says, "When your children shall ask, what mean you by this service? ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the house of the Israelites in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians."

Moses here supposes it to be agreeable to the common sense of mankind, and even to the early ideas of children, that there is some meaning in every service which we perform to the deity. God never requires of us any useless and unmeaning ceremony. In our attendance on his instituted service, we should well understand what it means.

All positive institutions are intended for the promotion of real holiness ; and our observance of them is no farther acceptable, than they are made subservient to this end.

The ordinance of the supper is designed to shew forth Christ's death ; and to call up in our souls the devout remembrance of him. We are, therefore, to attend upon it with a pious regard to him—with a sense of our guilt and unworthiness—with repentance of, and resolutions against every known sin—with faith in his righteousness to justify us, and in his grace to sanctify us—with gratitude for his condescension and kindness in giving himself for us—with love to the brethren, and benevolence to all men, to which we are called by his example exhibited to us, and recognized by us in this ordinance. As we eat at the same table and partake of the same bread, we are to consider ourselves as members of the same family, and to study the things by which we may edify one another. The apostle says, " The cup of blessing is the communion," or joint participation " of his blood ; and the bread which we break is the communion of his body ; for we being many are one bread and one body, as we are all partakers of one bread ;" or of the same loaf. " The things which the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God ; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils ; nor be partakers of the table of the Lord and the table of devils."——" Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God ; giving no offence, even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

I would observe once more,

4. It is incumbent on parents to instruct their children in the nature and design of God's ordinances, and to encourage their attendance upon them. "When your children shall enquire, What mean you by this service, then shall ye say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover."

In like manner parents are to teach their children, what is meant by the Lord's supper. It is a symbol of his sacrifice for the sins of men.

There are some who deter their children from this ordinance by too awful representations of it, as if it sealed the guilt and destruction of those who received it in unregeneracy. It would be more agreeable to the sweet and benevolent spirit of the gospel to represent the ordinance as a token of God's grace and mercy to sinners, and as a mean of access to him through the Redeemer. It was not instituted to perplex and ensnare, but to edify and comfort humble souls. It was not intended to terrify and affright, but to strengthen and encourage the tender and fearful.

While we warn the young not to approach it with thoughtless temerity, or with the indulgence of known iniquity, let us invite them to come humbly and penitently. Let us lead them to view the ordinance, as designed no less for their use than for ours. Let us assist them in gaining a good knowledge of the gospel, and exhort them to use this and every divine ordinance as the means of spiritual improvement. Let us recommend to them the religion of Jesus by our own holy example. Let us smile on any hopeful dispositions, which we discover in them, and contribute all in our power to their spiritual nourishment, that they may grow up in all things into Christ, and come to the stature of perfect men in him.

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# SERMON IV.

*Early Piety the Comfort of Old Age.*

A Sermon to Young People.

PSALM lxxi 5.

For thou art my hope, O Lord God : Thou art my trust from my youth.

**M**Y young friends, I may venture to say, there is not one of you, but who wishes to live to old age. And if you desire many days, certainly you desire to see good in them all, even in the last of them. It is not a painful and disconsolate, but a pleasant and cheerful old age, which you desire. I cannot promise you long life, continued health, or great riches ; nor can I assure you, that your declining years will be free from bodily pains and worldly afflictions. But I can tell you, how old age, if you should arrive to it, may be very comfortable ; yea, more so than your youth. For instruction in this matter I will refer you to the experience of an aged man, whose words I just now read to you. They are the words of David ; and words which he wrote, when he was

old and grey headed, and when he suffered great and fore troubles. In this condition, and in this period of life, his chief comfort arose from a recollection of that course of humble piety, which commenced in early life. "Be thou my strong habitation, to which I may continually resort—for thou art my hope, O Lord; thou art my trust from my youth." Imitate his example; and whatever may be your outward condition, you will experience his comforts.

"Trust in God" supposes a full belief of his existence, perfections and government. This belief is the first principle of all religion. "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him."

It implies also a knowledge of those gracious promises, which he has made to those of *our* race and in *our* condition. A general knowledge of his *character* gives an assurance, that he will never *injure* us; but without a particular discovery of his kind intentions toward *us*, we can feel no assurance of *positive* good. For divine goodness is free; it is under no obligations, and subject to no demands; but is exercised under the direction of sovereign wisdom. And, before, fallen and guilty creatures, such as *we* are, can ground their hope of future happiness on nothing less than the promise of God, because it is manifest that such creatures deserve punishment; and whether this punishment may, on any terms, be remitted, none can tell, without a declaration from God himself.

God's promises are conditional; and we become interested in the blessings promised only by a compliance with the conditions required. Trust in God therefore implies a submission of heart, and a conformity of life to those rules of duty, which he has prescribed. We are required "to trust in

God and do good"—"to commit ourselves to him in well doing"—"to rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." If we look for good, without applying the means to obtain it; if we expect the bounties of providence without diligence in our calling; preservation from evil without circumspection in our walk; the forgiveness of our sins without repentance toward God; the presence of God's grace without calling on his name; or the final salvation of our souls without a patient continuance in well doing; our pretended trust in God is nothing better than presumption, insult and mockery.

David says, "Thou art my trust from my *youth*." He professes to have made religion his deliberate choice, the will of God the rule of his conduct, and hope in God the comfort of his soul, in that early period of life, which too often passes away in trifling and vanity.

David's history verifies his profession. He was but a youth, when he went forth to the conflict with the giant of Gath, who bade defiance to the armies of the living God. The king of Israel judged him too young for such an encounter. "Thou art not able," says he, "to fight with this Philistine, for thou art a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." But David was strong in faith, and his faith he strengthened by recurrence to past experience of God's merciful protection in times of danger. He answers the king, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep in the wilderness; and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went after him; and when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard and slew him. The Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and of the bear, shall deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine; and he shall be as one of those."



As David *began* a life of piety in *youth*, so he *continued* it to *old age*. He says, "O God, thou art my trust *from* my youth—Thou hast taught me *from* my youth, and *hitherto* I have declared thy wonderful works." The religious knowledge, and the pious principles, which he had early imbibed, governed his conduct in all the subsequent stages of his life.

In his history we find imperfections, and one instance of gross and complicated iniquity ; but not any habitual vice. His great transgression was followed with a profession of deep repentance—his imperfections were occasions of godly sorrow—his infirmities called up his daily vigilance. Repentance with him was not a transient exercise, but an habitual temper. Hence he prays, "Remember not against me the sins of my youth ; but according to thy mercy remember me for thy goodness sake, O Lord."—"Who can understand his errors ? Cleanse thou me from secret faults : keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins ; then shall I be innocent from the great transgression." Conscious of remaining corruptions, "he laid God's judgments before him, and watched to keep himself from his own iniquity"—from the sin which most easily beset him. Sensible of his liability to err, "he thought on his ways ;" and when he found himself going astray, he stopt, and "turned his feet into God's testimonies ; and he made haste and delayed not to keep the commandments of God." Distrusting his own wisdom and stability, he held his ears attentive to reproof, and his mind open to conviction. "Let the righteous smite me," says he, "it shall be a kindness ; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head."

When the prophet expostulated with him for his great transgression, he discovered no resentment at the freedom, which his monitor used with him ; but humbly received, and honestly applied the rebuke, and penitently confessed, " I have sinned against the Lord." David did this thing secretly, and might imagine, that it remained a secret still. What inward exercises of penitence preceded the prophet's reproof, we cannot say. Now, for the first time, he was explicitly admonished ; now he found that his iniquity was no longer to be concealed ; now he confessed his guilt, and declared his repentance before men.

In all his life he was distinguished by a devout spirit ; by a humble submission to divine corrections ; by a wise improvement of various afflictions ; by a constant observance of the ways of providence ; by a faithful attendance on the worship of the sanctuary ; by a conscientious performance of domestic duties ; and by a thankful acknowledgment of mercies and deliverances. Few men appear to have walked through life in such an intimate communion with God, and under such an impressive sense of God's presence and government, as this good man, who, from his youth, had chosen God for his hope and trust.

This early choice of religion was a spring of comfort to him in his declining years. In a time of affliction he prays, " Deliver me, O my God, for thou art my trust from my youth. By thee have I been holden up from my childhood. My praise shall be continually of thee."

In David's example we are taught, " that early piety lays the surest foundation for comfort in old age."

This is a truth, in which you, who are now young, are deeply concerned, and which you

ought most seriously to apply. You love many days, that you may see good. But how many so ever your days may be, they will all pass away, and the last of them will come. You cannot then see good, unless you now take up, and carry along with you, into that period, something better than the world can give; for the world, however liberal it may seem for a while, will then take back all its former gifts.

The best thing, which you can then have to comfort and refresh you, is the remembrance of early piety, and a consciousness of a patient continuance in well doing. If you wish to have this consolation at that time, a pious life must be your choice now. This will, on many accounts, be your best support.

1. Early religion will prevent many evils, which would be a torment in old age.

If you now are determined to cast off the great concerns of religion, and to walk in your own ways, and in the sight of your own eyes, be assured, that bitter things are written against you, and that your old age will sadly possess the sins of your youth in pains of body, remorse of conscience, and the terrors of wrath to come; or, which is worse than all, in a stupidity of mind, which, though it may render you past feeling for a season, will make your destruction more certain and more awful.

And besides the evils which await *you*, there are mischiefs incalculable and inconceivable, which you are bringing on *others*; and especially on those with whom you most frequently associate. Many will be seduced into vice by your vain conversation—many will be corrupted in their manners by your ungodly example—many will be hardened in guilt by your profane contempt of re-

ligion. And these will be influential in seducing, corrupting and hardening many more. There is no possibility of foreseeing how long the evil may continue, how far it may run on, and how widely it may spread around, after it has once been put in motion. "One sinner destroys much good."

Now suppose you should live to old age, and in that solemn period should feel a serious sense of the judgment before you; will it not be painful to reflect on such a life as has been described? It will then be too late to recall the evils which you have done. They who commenced the journey of life in your company, will generally have finished their course, and passed to the judgment. The few who are left, will be placed at a distance from you. They will be out of the reach of your counsel and admonition: or if you can speak to some of them, perhaps they will, by this time, have become too insensible to feel, and too obstinate to follow your good advice.

In this stage of life, you will probably see families, which sprang from you, and which, in consequence of your example, live, as you have done, without religion, without the fear of God, without regard to his worship. In a few days you must go to answer before God for your own personal conduct, and for the important trust committed to you. What answer will you be prepared to give? In the perplexity of conscious guilt, from what source will you derive comfort? God demands from you the service of your youth; if you will not give him this; behold, you have sinned against him; and be sure your sin will find you out.

2. Early piety will render you instruments of much good in the world. Your zeal and forwardness in religion will provoke very many. And,

in the time of old age, will it not be a pleasing reflection, that you have not lived in vain ; but, according to your ability, have brought honor to God's name, and done good to mankind ? That by your youthful example you have encouraged some of your fellow youths to forsake the foolish and live, and to go in the way of understanding ; to seek unto God betimes, before their hearts were hardened through the deceitfulness of sin ; to come forward with an open profession of religion, and to walk agreeably to the religion, which they profess ? Will it not be a pleasure to think that these pious youths, animated by your example, have extended and spread among others the good, which you began ; and that there are, within your knowledge, many pious and virtuous people, who perhaps might have continued and perished in their guilty course, if you, like some, had lived in the contempt of religion, and in the neglect of your salvation ? And if you should have posterity, who may live on earth after you are gone, will it not be a great consolation and joy to see them walking in the truth, maintaining religion in their houses, promoting peace and virtue in society, and spreading among their neighbors, and handing over to their successors the pious sentiments, which they received from you ? Or whatever may be their conduct, will it not be a solace to your minds to reflect, that you have faithfully discharged your duty to them, have seasonably instructed them in the truth, and have affectionately exhorted them to a holy life, and to appeal to God and them, as witnesses how holily and justly and unblameably you have behaved yourselves among them ?

3d. Early religion will be a comfort to your old age, because it will be attended with a con-

sciousness, that you have approved yourselves to God.

Religion, you know, is a service due to God. And if it be due to him at all, it is as really due in youth, as in old age. If you neglect it while you are young, you as impiously defraud and rob God, as if you should neglect it when you become old; for you are as much God's creatures, as dependent on him for happiness, and as accountable to him for your conduct now, as you will be then. If there be any service which you owe to God, the obligation commences with your intellectual capacity, and continues through all stages of life; and you can no more plead an exemption from it at one time, than at another.

Now if you should live in the neglect of religion until old age invades you, and should at that time retain any moral and intellectual sensibility, you must condemn yourselves for having wasted your best days in folly and vice, and reserved for God the poorest and most useless part of life—that part in which you are least able to serve him and do good to mankind. This will be like offering the blind, the lame and the torn for sacrifice. And surely you may well be afraid, that such an offering will not be accepted at your hands. If after a life of impiety, you should be so happy in the last stage of your mortal existence, as to exercise a sincere repentance, yet how painful must this be? The iniquities of a long life will stand in order before you. The matter of your repentance will be, not mere infirmities, or accidental offences, but an habitual course of wickedness from your earliest youth to that sad hour. How awfully will you have filled up the measure of your sins; what remorse and anguish will seize your minds; how will your hope tremble, when it attempts to lay hold on mercy?

To those who seek God early there are many encouraging promises. But what promise will you find for such as refuse to seek him until they are old? These have lost the benefit of all the encouragements given peculiarly to youth; for they have gone beyond this period. Their hopes must now rest on more general declarations of God's mercy.

But how pleasant may be the last stage of life to him who can look back and say, "Thou, O God, art my hope, and my trust from my youth. Thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. I have feared thee from my youth, and have not wickedly departed from thee." Such a man carries with him into old age, peace of mind, self-approbation, hope of glory, and joy in God. He can adopt this pious language; "Thou art my portion, O God. I have said, that I will keep thy statutes. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth, that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

4. Early piety gives comfort to old age, as it lays a foundation for eminent improvement in religion.

He who begins the religious life, when he is old, has but little time before him for progress in divine knowledge, for the correction of wrong biases, for the extirpation of evil habits and the formation of virtuous ones. The holy temper wrought in him will exist under great imperfections, and his spiritual exercises will meet with many difficulties and obstructions. Consequently he cannot experience that comfort and pleasure in religion, which he wishes to enjoy; especially in so near views of another world.

But they who make religion their early choice and habitual practice, are continually advancing in the divine life. The graces wrought in them by the spirit of God, in their renovation, are strengthened by exercise, and the duties of the Christian life are facilitated by use. And the virtues, which are most important to old age, such as sobriety, contentment, patience, devotion and heavenly mindedness, come into familiar and agreeable operation. It is no easy matter for an old man to be calm and cheerful under his present trials, if he has been anxious and fretful in all his former days. It is difficult for him now to have his conversation in heaven, if it never has been there before. He can have little relish for devout and spiritual exercises, if they are all new to him, and he now begins to learn them. My friends; that religion may bring its consolations home to your hearts in that evil day, you must gain a familiar acquaintance with it in your better days.

5. Religion begun in youth, and continued through the subsequent stages of life, will be a safe ground for strong hope in old age.

The man, who believes, that within a few weeks or months, he shall enter into the eternal world, must, if any sensibility be left, earnestly desire a good evidence, that he shall be happy there. But this evidence cannot ordinarily be acquired in a day or week. It must be the result of experience and self-examination. There must be opportunity to prove the inward temper and to compare it with the word of God. A sudden and hasty confidence is generally deceitful, and always precarious. There is no doubt, that some, even in old age, may be the subjects of a renovating change; but the reality of such a change must be



doubtful to them, until they have had more time to prove themselves, than the aged have reason to expect. Such persons, though they die safely, yet cannot wholly disburden themselves of previous anxieties and fears.

Therefore, my friends, take up religion in season, carry it with you through life, cherish it in your old age ; then you will have comfort in the decays of your nature, and good hope in your death. Your constancy and improvement in religion from early life will be an evidence in your favour, in which you may place confidence. How pleasant will be this period, when you can review a long life with conscious approbation, and can look forward into the eternal world with the full assurance of hope ? How bright will be the evening of your life, when light breaks in on your eyes from the heavenly world ? How cheerfully may you step forward into the valley of death, when the light of God's countenance gilds your passage ? " If you prepare your hearts and stretch out your hands to God ; if you put away iniquity from your hands and wickedness from your souls, then shall you lift up your faces without spot ; yea, you shall be steadfast, and shall not fear ; your age shall be clearer than the noon day ; you shall shine forth, you shall be as the morning."

6. Early religion brings this additional advantage to old age, that it ensures a more distinguished degree of glory in the future world.

The scripture assures us, that the heavenly rewards will be measured out to good men according to the works which they have done for God, and the attainments which they have made in holiness. " They who have sowed bountifully, will reap also bountifully ; and they who have sowed sparingly, will reap sparingly." They who have spent

a long life in the steady practice of religion, must have acquired more virtue in their hearts, brought more honour to God, and done more good to men, than they who never attended to religion before the last stage of their probation. Consequently they have a capacity to enjoy, and a title to receive a proportionably larger measure of heavenly felicity. There are some, who will scarcely be saved; and some whose reward shall be great. The late penitent will be found in the former class; the early Christian in the latter. And, O how pleasant must be the contemplation of death to such aged saints, as can depart in the full persuasion, that an entrance will be ministered to them abundantly into the kingdom of God, and that there they shall receive an exceeding and eternal weight of glory?

I have reasoned with you, my young friends, on the supposition, that you will live to be old. And now say, Does not religion, on this ground, appear to be your highest wisdom? Is not your judgment brought fully over to the side, for which I have been pleading? Then fix your resolution immediately.—Do you hesitate?—There is another argument in your case, which certainly forbids delay. It is not certain that you will live to be old. And with respect to each of you individually, this is not probable. You see some die old; you see more die young. The uncertainty of life is a powerful reason, why you should choose God for your hope and your trust from your youth. Even though you should be spared to old age, this early choice is, on many accounts, highly reasonable and advantageous; if you are to die in youth, and God knows whether this be not your destiny, then the choice, which I have recommended, is absolutely necessary. For this is the only time you can have.


If any of you, my aged brethren, have let this time pass away unregarded, you have lost your best time ; and I deplore your loss. But for heaven's sake, lose not what remains. Be humble for past neglect, apply with diligence to the work, which you ought to have begun before. Death is advancing ; it lingers not. Time is passing ; it slumbers not. It is high time to awake out of sleep. Wherefore, let me apply to you the words of the apostle, "Awake, ye that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. And walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

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# SERMON V.



## *The Infirmities and Comforts of Old Age.*



### A Sermon to Aged People.



MY AGED BRETHREN AND FRIENDS,

*YOU will permit an aged man, like yourselves, to speak, this afternoon, a few words to you.... Or, if you please, he will in your hearing speak to himself..... Pertinent to our case, and worthy of our adoption, is the petition of the Psalmist in*

PSALM lxxi. 9.

Cast me not off in the time of old age..... Forfake me not when my strength faileth.

**T**HERE is little doubt, that David was the author of this Psalm. And from several expressions in it we learn, that he wrote it in his old age. He prays in our text, "Cast me not off in the time of old age." And, in verse 18, "Now, when I am old and grey headed, forfake me not." But David, when he died, was but about seventy years old, and he probably wrote the Psalm some years before his death; perhaps in the time of

Abfalom's rebellion ; for he fpeaks of " enemies, who then took counfel together, and laid wait for his life." And we find not that he was ever in this perilous and critical fituation after that rebellion. David, then, realized old age earlier than fome feem to do. He noticed its firft appearance ; he brought it near in his meditations, before it had actually invaded him ; or, at leaft, when he began to perceive its approach in the decline of his ftrength, and the increafe of his grey hairs. But many choofe to view it as diftant—" Grey hairs are here and there upon them, and they perceive it not." They enjoy, in a comfortable degree, the pleasures of life ; and that evil day, in which there is no pleasure, they put far from them.

It would be wife for us to imitate David's example ; to think of, and prepare for the evil day, before it comes ; to feure God's gracious prefence now ; and in our daily prayers to afk, that " he would not caft us off in the time of old age, nor forfake us when our ftrength faileth."

The Pfalmift here reminds us, that old age is a time when ftrength faileth : and that at fuch a time God's prefence is of peculiar importance.

I. Old age is a time when ftrength faileth.

There is then a fenfible decay of *bodily* ftrength.

As we come into the world, fo we depart, impotent, feeble and helpiefs. From our infancy we gradually acquire ftrength, until we arrive to our full maturity. We then for a few years continue ftationary, without fenfible change. After a little while we begin to feel, and are conftained to confefs an alteration in our ftate. Our limbs lofe their former activity ; our customary labour becomes wearifome ; pains invade our frame ; our fleep, often interrupted, refrefhes us lefs than

heretofore ; our food is less gustful ; our sight is bedimmed, and our ears are dull of hearing ; “ they that look out at the windows are darkened, and the daughters of music are low ; ” the pleasures of reading and conversation abate ; our ancient companions have generally withdrawn to another world, and the few who are left are, like us, shut up, that they cannot go forth. Hence social visits are more unfrequent and less entertaining ; and our condition grows more and more solitary and disconsolate.

With our bodily, our *mental* strength usually declines.

The faculty, which first appears to fail, is the *memory*. And its failure we first observe in the difficulty of recollecting little things, such as names and numbers. We then perceive it in our inability to retain things which are recent. What we early heard or read, abides with us ; but later information is soon forgotten. Hence, in conversation, aged people often repeat the same questions and relate the same stories ; for they soon lose the recollection of what has passed. And hence perhaps, in part, is the impertinent garrulity, of which old age is accused. You see, then, my young friends, the importance of laying up a good store of useful knowledge in early life. What you acquire now, you may retain : later acquisitions will be small and uncertain. Like riches, they will make themselves wings and fly away. In the decline of life you must chiefly depend on the old stock ; and happy, if you shall have then a rich store to feed upon.

When memory fails, other faculties soon follow. The attention is with more difficulty fixed, and more easily diverted : the intellect is less acute in its discernment, and the judgment more fallible in its decisions.

The judgment is the last faculty which the pride of age is willing to give up. Our forgetfulness we cannot but feel, and others cannot but observe. But we choose to think our judgment remains solid and clear. We are never apt to distrust our own opinions; for it is the nature of opinion to be satisfied with itself. It is certain, however, that judgment must fail in some proportion to the failure of attention and recollection. We form a just judgment by viewing and comparing the evidences and circumstances, which relate to the case in question. If then any material evidence, or circumstance escapes our notice, or slips from our memory, the judgment formed is uncertain, because we have but a partial view of the case. In all matters, where a right judgment depends on comparing several things, the failure of memory endangers the rectitude of the decision.

When we perceive a decline of bodily and mental strength, fear and anxiety usually increase. Difficulties once trifling now swell to a terrifying magnitude, because we have not power to encounter them; want stares upon us with frightful aspect, because we have not capacity to provide against it; the kind and patient attention of our friends we distrust, because we know not how long we may be a burden to them, and we have nothing in our hands to remunerate them, except that property which they already anticipate as their own. "The grasshopper now becomes a burden; we rise up at the voice of the bird; we are afraid of that which is high, and fear is in the way."

This state of infirmity and anxiety, painful in itself, is rendered more so by the recollection of what we once were, and by the anticipation of what we soon shall be.

We contrast our present with our former condition—Once we were men ; now we feel ourselves to be but babes. Once we possessed active powers ; now we are become impotent. Once we sustained our children and ministered to them with pleasure ; now we are sustained by them ; and we are sure, our once experienced pleasure is not reciprocated. Once we were of some importance in society ; now we are sunk into insignificance. Once our advice was sought and regarded ; now we are passed by with neglect, and younger men take our place : even the management of our own substance has fallen into the hands of others, and they perhaps scarcely think us worthy of being consulted. And if we are, now and then, consulted, perhaps our jealousy whispers, that it is done merely to flatter our aged vanity and keep us in good humor.

Such a contrast Job experienced, and he found it no small aggravation of his adversity. Looking back to former days, he says, “ When I went out of the gates through the city, the young men saw me, and hid themselves ; the aged arose and stood up. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me, because I delivered the poor and fatherless, and the blessing of those who were ready to perish, came upon me. But now they who are younger than I have me in derision. They abhor me and flee from me. They mar my path, and set forward my calamity.”

And not only the remembrance of what is past, but the fore thought of what is to come, aggravates the calamity of the aged man.

In earlier life hope stood by him to comfort him in all his troubles. If he was disappointed in his business, he hoped to succeed better in a fu-



ture essay. If he met with misfortune, he hoped by and by to retrieve it. If he lost his health, he hoped by time and medicine to regain it. If he suffered pain, he hoped it would be short. Whatever calamity he felt, he looked forward to better days. But now hope has quitted its station and retired from his company. "His days are spent without hope." The joys of life are fled, never to return. He anticipates the increase of infirmities and pains from month to month, and the probable event of total decrepitude and confinement, and the entire loss of his feeble remains of sensibility and intellect.

Well might Solomon call this an evil day.

In the probable expectation of such a day, there is no solid comfort, but in the hope of enjoying the presence of God. Therefore, as we observed,

II. We ought to adopt the prayer of David, "Cast me not off in the time of old age : Forfake me not when my strength faileth."

In the first place, the Psalmist may here be supposed to request, that God would not cast him off from the care of his providence.

When we have reached old age, or find ourselves near it, we may reasonably and properly pray, that God would excuse us from those pains of body and infirmities of mind, with which some have been afflicted ; that he would place us in easy and unembarrassed circumstances, and in connexion with kind and faithful friends ; that he would free us from worldly carefulness and anxiety, and allow us liberty for those devout exercises, which are suited to prepare us for our momentous change. David had seen the gross misbehavior of some of his children, and was now probably suffering under the cruel persecution of an ungracious son, who wished the father's death, that he might pos-

sees the father's throne. In this situation the old man prays, "Deliver me out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. O God, be not far from me; make haste to my help." Under this severe affliction he doubtless requested, that God would incline the hearts of his children to treat him with filial duty and affection, and to study the peace and comfort of his declining age.

The happiness of the parent, in the latter stages of his life, depends much on the good behaviour of his children; and particularly on their kind attention to him. I pity the aged man, who, when his strength fails, looks anxiously around, and sees not a son on whom he can lean: no; not a child, who will reach out a hand to sustain his sinking frame, and guide his tottering steps. But I congratulate the happy old man, who sees his children about him, all attentive to his wants, listening to his complaints, compassionate to his pains, and emulous each to excell the other in acts of filial duty. I honour the children, when instead of seeing the old father tossed from place to place, unwelcome wherever he is sent, they adopt the language of Joseph, "Come to me, my father; thou shalt be near to me, and I will nourish thee." Such filial kindness soothes the pains, and cheers the spirits of the parent. It makes him forget his affliction, or remember it as waters which pass away.

But, secondly, what David principally requested was, that God would grant him the presence of his grace. Thus he prays, in another Psalm, "Cast me not away out of thy presence; take not thy holy spirit from me; restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit."

His outward man was decaying ; but he solicited such supplies of grace, as should renew the inward man day by day. In his increasing infirmities he could take pleasure, when the power of God rested upon him ; for however weak in himself, he was strong in the Lord.

1. In this prayer he asks grace, that he may maintain a temper and behaviour suited to his age and condition.

It becomes the aged to be *grave* and *sober*, for they stand on the brink of the eternal world. And who would not be sober there ? If we should ever happen to see such men light and vain, addicted to frothy discourse, fond of dissolute company, and seeking guilty amusements, we should be shocked at the spectacle. We should naturally conclude, that their hearts were totally alienated from God and religion, and completely stupified by the habits of sin.

It becomes them to be *temperate* and *vigilant*, and to avoid every indulgence, which might tend to increase the peevishness and irritability naturally incident to a period of pain and infirmity.

It becomes them to be *patient* and *resigned*. As they are subject to peculiar trials, and the strength of nature fails, they should implore the presence of that good spirit, whose fruits are gentleness, meekness and long suffering. They should call to mind former mercies, and meditate on God's works of old. They should consider that their time is short, and their trials will soon be over. " Now for a season, if need be, they are in heaviness through manifold temptations ; but if patience has its perfect work, the trial of their faith, which is more precious, than that of gold which perishes, will be found to praise and honour at the coming of Christ. And these light afflictions, which are but for a mo-

ment, will work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

2. They should pray for grace, that by a pattern of piety and heavenly mindedness, they may recommend religion to others. They are required to be found in *charity*, as well as patience ; not only to bear their troubles with fortitude and dignity, but to exhibit in all things a behaviour, which becometh holiness, that they may teach the young to be sober minded. This is the best exercise of their charity.

David, in his old age, felt a benevolent concern for rising posterity. Hence he prays, “ O God, forsake me not, when I am old, until I have shewed thy strength to this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.”

The aged man, taken off by his infirmities from the active business of life, can in no way do more service for God and for mankind, than by exhibiting a visible example of contentment and humility, piety and spirituality, faith and hope, in the near views of another world. He thus demonstrates the excellence and power of religion, and calls on all around him to embrace and cherish it, that like him, they may bear affliction with serenity, and meet death with fortitude.

3. David here solicits communion with God. “ Cast me not off.” Deny me not free access to thee. “ Turn not away my prayer, nor thy mercy from me.”

The good man, in all circumstances, would maintain a heavenly intercourse. But he desires and values this privilege most in a time of affliction, and in the near expectation of death. Our Saviour, who was, at all times, filled with a devout spirit, exercised this spirit most fervently and frequently toward the close of his life. And so ought

the aged saint. As he is discharged from the labours and occupations of the world, let him dismiss his worldly affections and thoughts, and give himself, more than formerly, to self examination, meditation and prayer. Viewing the time as at hand, when, taking leave of all earthly things, he must enter into a new world, mingle in new connexions, and appear in the presence of God, let him employ himself in the contemplation of heaven and in the exercises of devotion, more constantly than he could ordinarily do in former years, when the world had greater demands upon him. Looking forward to the last stage of life, and realizing the condition in which he may then be placed, let him often ask beforehand, that God would give him, at that time, the spirit of prayer in a superior degree; would grant him, under nature's weakness, ability to collect and arrange his thoughts, and a fervour of pious affection in making known his requests. This, in a similar case, was the employment and the comfort of the Psalmist. "My soul," says he, "is full of troubles, and my life draweth near to the grave: mine acquaintance are put far from me; and I am shut up, that I cannot go forth." And what could he do in this condition? One thing he could do; and this he did. He applied himself to prayer, which is the best relief of an afflicted soul. "I have called daily upon thee, and to thee have I stretched out my hands. Unto thee have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. Let my prayer come before thee; incline thine ear to my cry."

4. David, in this petition, "Cast me not off in the time of old age," requests that, by the power of divine grace working in him, his faith and hope might hold out to the last; and that, by the

sensible displays of divine light, and by increasing evidence of his title to salvation, he might be freed from the distressing apprehension of being finally cast off and forsaken of his God. Thus he prays, on another occasion, "Cast me not away out of thy presence. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

In all seasons and conditions of life, the hope of glory is much to be desired, and earnestly to be sought. This will lighten our afflictions and sweeten our mercies; defend us against temptations and smooth the path of duty; dispel the gloom which hovers round the grave, and brighten the prospect of eternity. But this hope is never more important, or more delightful than in old age.—Now the joys of life have fled, and earthly prospects are cut off; now the day of probation is expiring, and the solemn hour of retribution is at hand. How unhappy the case of those, who are going down to the grave without hope, and going to judgment with a consciousness of unpardoned guilt; who, in the review of life, see nothing but vain amusements, sensual pleasures, earthly affections and avaricious or ambitious pursuits: and in the contemplation of futurity see nothing before them, but death, judgment and fiery indignation? But how happy the aged Christian, who can look back on a life employed in works of piety to God, and beneficence to men, and who now feels the spirit of devotion and charity warmed within him, and acting with fresh vigor to confirm his hopes of heaven, dispel the fears of death, and light up fresh joys in his soul? He can take pleasure in his infirmities, regarding them as kind intimations, that "now is his salvation nearer, than when he believed."

Such was Paul's felicity, when he was ready to

be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me in that day." How did Paul obtain this felicity? "He counted not his own life dear to himself, that he might finish his work with faithfulness, and his course with joy." He kept under his body to bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway." That we may obtain the full assurance of hope, we must be followers of them, who by faith and patience inherit the promises; and in this course we must give diligence to the end.

Our subject powerfully applies itself to us, who are advanced in age. We begin to feel the decays of strength, and to perceive the indications of our approaching dissolution. In a few days, we must go the way, whence we shall not return. Soon we shall see man no more with the inhabitants of the earth; but shall be placed in new relations and in a new condition. While we tarry here, our infirmities will probably increase; our days and nights will become more wearisome; the pleasures of sense will lose their relish; the burden of worldly business will be too heavy for our bending shoulders; the implements of our labour will drop out of our palsied hands, and we shall have no more a portion in any thing that is done under the sun. And it is not improbable, that some of our last months may be spent in helpless confinement of body—ah, and perhaps too in derangement or stupor of mind.

Looking forward to such a season, let us daily pray, "O God, cast us not off in the time of old age; forsake us not when our strength faileth,

Give us kind and patient friends, who will cheerfully minister to our necessities and bear our infirmities. Vouchsafe to us rich supplies of thy grace, that we may sustain our own infirmities; may enjoy communion with thee; may maintain our heavenly hope, and by a pattern of Christian piety, charity and spirituality, may commend to those who stand around us that Divine Religion, which is our support, our comfort, and our joy. And if, in thy sovereign wisdom, thou shouldst see fit to deny us the privilege of reason, let the prayers which we now offer be graciously remembered; and grant us pious and prayerful friends, who will send up petitions to thee in our behalf. And whether we shall then be capable of making a petition to thee, or not, we now humbly ask, That thou wouldst not cast us out of thy presence, nor take thy holy spirit from us, but by thine own wonderful and secret operation make us more and more meet for heaven; and when our flesh and our heart shall fail us, be thou the strength of our heart, and our portion forever.”

My brethren, if we wish to enjoy the comforts of religion at last, we must cultivate the temper, and keep up the exercise of religion now. It will be no easy matter to take up the business then, unless we have been accustomed to it before.


You, my friends, who are in the midst of life, and you who are young, are not uninterested in this subject. You all think, that we, who are aged, need the comforts of religion. God grant, that we may have them. Do you not sometimes think of us in your prayers? We hope you do. But know, if you live to be aged, (and you all desire many days) these comforts will then be as necessary for you, as they are now for us. But how can you be sure of them then, unless you ob-



tain an interest in them now ? To have the comforts of religion, you must have religion itself. Embrace it, therefore, in your hearts ; cultivate the holy tempers which it requires ; maintain the good works which it enjoins, and ascertain your title to the eternal blessings which it proposes.— Thus lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time, which is to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life.

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# SERMON VI.



## *Dry Bones Restored.*

EZEKIEL xxxvii. 3.

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered,  
O Lord God, thou knowest.

**T**HE Jews, having been, for many years, captives in Babylon, viewed a return to their own land as an event much to be desired, but utterly to be despaired of. They were under the power of their enemies, who at that time would not, nor was it thought they ever would, consent to release them from their bondage. The aged people, who felt an attachment to their native country, were dying off, and the youth were coming forward with a predilection for the land of their captivity. Judea was possessed by strangers and surrounded by enemies; its temple, buildings and walls were in ruins; and how should they ever repossess it; or, if they should return, what enjoyment could they find there? Their captivity was a punishment for their sins; and in this idolatrous country there was little prospect of a reformation. They were losing the religious sentiments and manners, which some had brought with them, and which a few still retained; and they were sinking deeper into depravity, than when their calamities

began. What hope then could there be of their re-establishment in their ancient country and privileges?

To revive the desponding spirits of the pious people among them, God sends to them the prophet Ezekiel with the relation of a remarkable vision.

The prophet seemed to himself to be placed in the midst of a valley filled with human bones. He passed by them round about; he viewed them; he observed, that they were numerous, but exceedingly dry, as if they had lain in the open air for a length of time; and that they were scattered promiscuously over the ground, as if they never could be collected and reduced to order. God says to him, "Son of man, can these bones live?" The prophet answers, "O Lord God, thou knowest." God then commands him, "Prophecy on these bones, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." So he prophesied, as he was commanded; and "as he prophesied, there was a noise and a shaking; and the bones came together, bone to his bone, and sinews and flesh came upon them, and skin covered them. But there was no breath in them." God farther directs him, "Prophecy unto the wind," or breath, "and say, Thus saith the Lord, Come, breathe on these slain, that they may live. So he prophesied, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army."

This vision is applied to the desponding Jews to console them in their captivity. The Lord says to the prophet, "These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our part. Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, O my peo-

ple, I will open your graves, and I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

This vision was designed to represent to the captives, not merely a restoration to their former privileges, but also a happy revival of pure religion. This is one important blessing promised, "I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

This was an instructive and encouraging vision to the captive Jews; and it may be useful and monitory in its application to us. We will endeavour to improve it in some reflections relative to ourselves. It teaches us,

First; That among a people enjoying the revelation of God, religion sometimes falls into such a low condition, that there appears but little prospect of its revival.

In Ezekiel's time, the Jews were like dry bones, in which there was no principle of animation. In some former periods their state was little better. Such was their degeneracy, that the ministers of religion were in perplexity, how to address them with effect. "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear. Their ear is uncircumcised and they cannot hearken. The word of the Lord is a reproach to them, and they have no delight in it." God himself speaks, as if his wisdom, goodness and patience had been exercised toward them even to weariness, yet without success. "Ye men of Judah, what could have been done more, that I have not done? I looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as the morning cloud; as the early dew it goeth away." When

God asked Ezekiel, whether the dry bones in the valley could live; the prophet, not knowing what answer to give, referred the question back to him who proposed it. The revival of such bones must be eminently a work of God; this was plain. But whether God would revive them, or whether he could do it consistently with the honour of his character, and the ends of his government, he only knew. In contemplating the state of this people the prophet's only hope was in the power and mercy of God. "Lord God, thou knowest."

Sinners, under the dominion of sin, are said to be *dead*, as having in them no active principle of spiritual life. Speaking of the Ephesians in their gentile state, the Apostle says, "they were *dead* in trespasses and sins." He adds "*We*, Jews, had our conversation among *them* in times past, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and mind." The recovery of both to a spiritual life the Apostle ascribes, not to any principle naturally inherent in them, but to the quickening power of divine grace. "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace are ye saved."

This description is applied, not to unbelieving gentiles and Jews only, but also to some degenerate churches. Some of the churches in Asia had a name to live, but were *dead*. Their members in general were destitute of the power of godliness; and in their best members zeal languished, and love grew cold.

What is spoken of those ancient churches may be applied to others in latter times. When licentious opinions and immoral practices prevail; when family religion becomes unfashionable; when the sabbath and the instituted worship of the sanc-

tuary are treated with neglect ; when the number of professors is small, and its proportion, in a time of increasing population, evidently decreases ; when the youth are generally indifferent to religion, and few of them join themselves to the church of God by an open profession of their faith ; when the discipline of the church is laid aside, and professors live like the men of the world ; when they, who pretend to feel the power of religion, withdraw from their brethren, instead of co-operating with them in the common cause ; when the ceremonies of religion, which were instituted as means of union, are made occasions of uncharitable controversy and separation ; we may then suppose ourselves in the midst of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. And if it were asked, whether these bones can live ; we could only answer, " Lord God, thou knowest."

But in this vision we are taught,

Secondly ; That, in the most unpromising seasons, there is room to hope, and reason to strive for a revival of religion.

God is *able* to make dry bones live.

When Christ taught his disciples, what difficulties might oppose their passage, and obstruct their entrance into the kingdom of heaven, they asked with astonishment, " who then can be saved ?" He answered, " With God all things are possible." He can so order events in his providence, as to awaken the careless from their slumbers. He can impress divine truth on the stony heart, and bend the iron neck to obedience. He can quicken to holy sensibility the soul dead in trespasses and sins.

The same almighty grace, which can change one soul, can change thousands. The spirit of the Lord is not straitened. He that begins a good work, can spread it far around, and make its re-

ful glorious. The dry bones in Ezekiel's valley were *all* made to live and stand on their feet, an exceeding great army.

God is *merciful*. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; his pleasure is, that they turn from their way and live. He has given his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He strives with sinners by his good spirit, and reproves them by his word, that they may turn to wisdom's way. Who can say, he has never been a subject of this divine striving ? Who can say, he has never felt a conviction of his sins, a remorse for his iniquities, a sense of futurity, and a concern for his salvation ? To what shall men impute these uninvited sensations, but to the excitations of the spirit of grace ?

He has opened to guilty mortals a door of hope in the glorious discoveries of the gospel. He has sent forth his heralds to proclaim to sinners his gracious pardon, urge them to repentance, and pray them in his name to be reconciled to him. He hearkens and hears whether any speak aright. He waits to be gracious. He exalts himself that he may shew mercy.

Amidst such wonderful overtures, the guilty have encouragement to repair to God, and say, " Turn thou us, and we shall be turned ; take away iniquity and receive us graciously." The godly have encouragement to pray, " Revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years, and in wrath remember mercy."

God is *sovereign*. He shews mercy in his own way, and on his own terms. He requires sinners to seek his mercy for themselves, and saints to seek it for others. Ezekiel was sent to prophesy to the dry bones, before they were framed into bod-

ies ; and to prophesy to the wind, before breath came into them.

God brings about the purposes of his providence and grace by the intervention of *means*, and usually by the intervention of *human* means. We are not to expect miracles in the latter, more than in the former. In both we are to be workers together with God. He has directed us to work out our salvation, because he works in us ; and to be fellow helpers to one another, because he works with us. When he comes to bring salvation, he looks whether there be any to help.

Why has he commanded ministers to preach the word, to be instant in season and out of season, to exhort and rebuke with all long suffering and doctrine ? Why has he commanded parents to train up their children in knowledge and piety ? Why has he commanded Christians to consider one another, and provoke unto love and good works ? Why has he commanded them to pray for the success of his word among the careless and ungodly ? Surely it is his will that sinners should repent and be happy ; and it is his good pleasure to hear the prayers and succeed the labours of the faithful in so benevolent and pious a work.

We cannot say, how soon good men will receive an answer to their prayers, and see the fruit of their labours. But God has taught them not be weary in well doing—to pray always and not faint. Their prayers will not be lost—their labours will not be in vain.

Some may think, no good has been done, because they have seen none. But, in this case, we are not competent judges. There may be good done which we have not seen ; or good may arise which we see not yet. Perhaps we have not done enough. The time for God to work visibly may



not be come. We must patiently continue in well doing. But though no harvest should be gathered, faithful labourers will receive their reward. Elijah, discouraged by unsuccessfulness, retired to a cave. But God called him forth to his work. "What dost thou here, Elijah? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Let us never think, we have done as much as we ought, when there is more that we can do.

Wonderful works of divine grace have been seen *in times past*. Great sinners have been reclaimed. Malignant enemies of truth have been conquered. High looks have been brought low. Proud hearts have been captivated to the obedience of Christ.

Times of general declension have been followed with happy revivals. The church of Israel often fell into deep degeneracy. But by the influence of pious rulers, acting in conjunction with zealous prophets, extensive reformatations were effected. How deplorable was the religious state of the Jews in the time of the captivity. They were mingled among the heathens, had imbibed their sentiments and learned their manners. Few retained the spirit of true religion. The stated worship of God, if not wholly discontinued, was enjoyed but imperfectly, and under great restraints. They were like dry bones scattered in a valley. But by the spirit of God co-operating with the ministry of a few remaining prophets, they were made to live. In the land of idolatry, they were awakened to a sense of their iniquities, and the iniquities of their fathers, and by repentance obtained a happy restoration to their former privileges. They returned to their own land with weeping and supplication, and sought the Lord their God. They asked the way to

Zion with their faces thitherward. They said one to another, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant not to be forgotten."

This was a reformation beyond the probability of the means, which they enjoyed. They had sunk into idolatry in their own land, where the worship of the true God was maintained; and who would have expected, that they should be reclaimed from this dreadful corruption, while they dwelt in the midst of idolaters? But so it was. Deprived of their privileges, they began to appreciate them; and to improve to better purpose such means as they had.

During the captivity, there were some prophets among them. God sent prophets with them to Babylon; and some he raised up there to preach to them repentance, instruct them in the truth and guard them against the corruptions, which surrounded them. The labours of these good men God blessed to the conversion of many, and thus prepared the people for the resumption of the privileges, which they had once despised.

God is pursuing a similar method now. Many of our citizens have gone into the wilderness, where there is a famine of hearing the word. Some of them probably left the stated ordinances of God without regretting the loss. But God has mercifully sent his word after them. He has remarkably awakened the benevolent zeal of many Christians to send missionaries into the wilderness. And much success has attended their labours. Multitudes, realizing the value of a privilege, which once they little regarded, are now seriously attentive to the word, whenever they have opportunity to hear it. Many have been awakened to a sense of the importance of religion; have introduced it into their families, and seem to have em-

braced it in their hearts. New churches have been formed, and in some of them ministers have been settled. It is hoped, that, under the culture of faithful labourers, the wilderness will become more and more like a fruitful field.

This leads us to another observation,

Thirdly; Whenever there is a revival of religion among a people, it is effected by the preaching of the word. Before the bones in the valley were raised and animated, Ezekiel was caused to pass round about them, and observe the shocking condition in which they lay. Then he was commanded to prophesy upon them, and to say, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." His prophecy on the bones was emblematical of his ministry to the captive Jews. God said to him, "These bones are the whole house of Israel. Prophecy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, I will open your graves and cause you to come forth, and ye shall know that I am the Lord, and I will put my spirit within you."

Though the Jews, generally, were, like bones, hard, inactive, senseless, yet the prophet was to preach to them, and call upon them to hear God's word.

Sinners, on account of their indolence, inattention, and want of an inward principle of holiness, are represented as *dead*. This moral deadness is a reason, why the word ought to be preached to them; for it is a mean, which God has appointed to awaken them. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

If it be necessary, the word should be spoken, it is necessary sinners should hear. "Ye dry bones, *hear* the word of the Lord." Hearing the word does not constitute men saints; but it is a mean of their becoming such. "God begets them by the word of truth."

We have never known any remarkable reformation effected, but by means of the word. It is by this, that God instructs the ignorant, awakens the careless, humbles the selfconfident, undeceives hypocrites, converts finners, and saves them who believe. God could by an immediate energy change men's hearts. But he chooses to treat them as intelligent beings. He calls them to come and reason with him. He gives them his word, and requires them to hear it and attend to it. The operation of his spirit is indeed necessary to the radical renovation of their tempers. But an attendance on the word is the ordinary mean of their obtaining this gracious operation.

Before Ezekiel prophesied to the dry bones, there was no noise, or shaking among them. They lay scattered in the valley. When he prophesied, they began to move and come together. The word often produces an external reformation in finners, before the spiritual life really begins. The bones in the vision came together; but there was no life in them. Then Ezekiel prophesied to the wind, and prayed, that this might breathe on them; and they lived and stood on their feet. This may denote the power of religion in the soul.

As there may be a human form without animal life, so there may be a religious form without spiritual life. The renovation of the mind is a work of divine grace. "We are saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." But as in the creation of the first man, the body was formed, before life was infused, so in the new creation, there is a reformation of the outward man, before a holy principle is wrought in the soul. The sinner, under sensible convictions and awakenings, renounces the gross forms of vice, and attends to

external duties on the natural principles of hope and fear. Such a correction of manners usually precedes that renovation of heart, which consists in a direct and universal love of righteousness.

Renewing grace is to be sought by prayer. "For this God will be enquired of."

Where a general revival of religion begins, a spirit of prayer will be apparent in many; in the teachers and professors of religion, and in those who are the subjects of convictions and awakenings. When the prophet prayed, "Come, O wind, breathe on these slain, the breath came into them, and they lived." Previous to the conversion of the Jews in the latter days, God will pour on them the spirit of grace and of supplication. Whenever we see such a spirit poured out, we may expect happy consequences to ensue. It is a token that God is about to perform some great and good work. The apostle exhorts the Christians in Rome to strive together with him, in their prayers, for the success of his ministry. If God gives a spirit of prayer, he has something else to give. He has not said to us, "Seek ye me in vain." "The effectual fervent prayers of the righteous avail much." Where they agree together concerning any thing, which they would ask, and which they ought to ask, it will be done for them by their heavenly father.

There is one thing more here to be observed,

Fourthly; When Ezekiel prophesied on the bones scattered promiscuously in the valley, they *came together*, bone to his bone, and sinews came upon them. This circumstance in the vision suggests to us, that where a real revival of religion takes place among any people, there will be order, harmony and peace. Religion is not altogether a private and personal thing; it is, in its nature,

social, friendly and benevolent. It seeks the general good. It studies the happiness of all within its reach. And wherever it extends its proper influence, it brings men together into a well regulated society. It puts every member and bone of the body in its natural place, and binds the parts one to another by the joints and sinews of reciprocal affection, and mutual kindness.

There is sometimes a noise and shaking among dry bones, which is followed with quite different effects. The bones, instead of coming together, each in its place, to form a regular, compact body, fly off from one another, so that they can form nothing like a body ; or they meet in total confusion and disorder, one bone rushing into the place, and one member assuming the office of another, and all without sinews to hold them together, and without joints to perform regular movements.

Thus they form, not a proper body, but a misshapen, discordant mass. Such a shaking as this, is very different from that which the prophet saw in the valley.

Where real religion has dominion in the soul, it subdues turbulent passions ; it introduces and enlivens kind affections ; it brings all the faculties into subjection to God, and into harmony with one another. Where it spreads among a people, it inspires them with mutual love, joins them together in the same mind, softens their hearts to sympathy in affliction, and prompts them to encourage and aid one another in their spiritual interests. In a word, it forms such a body, as the apostle describes ; a body united to, and depending on its proper head, from which all the parts, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, increaseth with the increase of God. Such a body will grow unto a perfect man, and will rise

to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Charity is the bond of perfectness. It is this which completes the Christian character. It is this which consummates the beauty, and consolidates the strength of a Christian society. This is the mark which discriminates true religion from false zeal.

The edifying of the church in love is the end of all divine ordinances. We are to come together in the church, to worship together in the sanctuary, to sit together at Christ's table, to eat of his bread and drink of his cup, that we may be united together in one body, and may grow into an holy temple in him.

How joyful would it be to behold a revival like that, which the prophet beheld in vision—to see dead sinners arising from the dust, animated with spiritual life, casting off their filthy garments and putting on the robes of righteousness, engaging with united zeal in works of piety and charity, encouraging each other in a devout attendance on all divine institutions, and keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Such a revival will be seen in the latter day. Let us pray, that something of the same kind may be seen now.

Awake, ye that sleep, arise from the dead; Christ will give you light. Awake, awake, put on strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem. Arise, shake thyself from the dust. Let not the unclean pass through thee. Cleanse thyself from all thy filthiness, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Then shall thy children break forth into joy, and sing together. Then shall the waste places become fruitful fields, and their dew shall be as the dew of herbs. Then the Lord shall make bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and the ends of the earth shall see his salvation.

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## SERMON VII.

*Birds and Beasts Preaching to Men.*

JOB xii. 7.

Ask the beasts now, and they shall teach thee ; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee :—

ONE of the fathers of the Roman church, taking in the most absolute sense Christ's command to his disciples, "Go, preach the gospel to *every creature*," went and preached to *birds* and *beasts*. This certainly was no part of Christ's commission to his apostles. But though men are not commanded to preach to beasts and birds ; yet God in his providence has appointed *these* to preach to men. Job, to confute certain erroneous opinions advanced by his friends, refers them for instruction to the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven. "Ask them, and they will teach you."

The scripture instructs us, not only by plain doctrines and precepts, but also by pertinent images and allusions. Among other methods of instruction, it refers us to certain dispositions observable in the animals around us. For though these creatures are not capable of moral conduct, yet there are in them certain instinctive actions, which are emblems of human virtues. Hence the scripture often sends us to them for instruction and reproof. To them our text calls our attention.



But lest, in the contemplation of these inferior creatures we should seem to descend below the dignity of a religious subject, we will confine ourselves to the examples presented to us by the scripture itself, which always treats the most familiar subjects with such a dignity, as gives them importance and commands respect.

I. The beasts reprove our *unmindfulness* of, and *ingratitude* to our Divine Benefactor.

“Hear, O heavens,” says the prophet, “and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me. The *ox* knoweth his owner, and the *ass* his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider.”

The prophet here selects for an example those creatures which are generally esteemed dull and intractable. Yet even *these*, he says, rebuke the unthankfulness of men; for they look to the hand from which they have been fed, and repair to the crib from which they have been supplied. They wait for their master’s bounty, and receive it with tokens of gratitude. But man, thankless man, forgets the *heavenly benefactor*, who daily loads him with benefits, and gives him all things richly to enjoy. Man lives on God’s goodness, yet God is seldom in his thoughts. He seeks his supplies without a sense of dependence, and eats his meals without an acknowledgment of obligation. He rises to his labour without imploring the divine blessing, and lies down to sleep without asking the divine protection. He has been, from his youth, sustained by God’s care, and yet continues in rebellion against him.

Look to your domestic animals: are they as unmindful of you, as you are of your God? Do they treat you with the neglect, with which you

treat your heavenly parent? The want of language to express a sense of dependence they supply by significant actions. You have language: employ your tongue in prayers and praises to God. You have reason: let his mercies persuade you to glorify him in all your actions. While you live in disobedience and unthankfulness to God, without a sense of his goodness, and without a regard to his will, the beasts, which serve you, reprove and condemn you.

II. How many are there, who, while they enjoy a fulness of worldly good, are *discontented* with their worldly condition, and always *murmuring* against the ways of providence, as if these were partial and unequal? Do you see this disposition in the brutes? “Doth the wild ass bray, when he hath meat? Or loweth the ox over his fodder?”

The brutes have their natural wants; and when *these* are supplied, they are contented. But man is ever craving, and can never have enough. His avarice has no limits; his ambition knows no bounds. The wants of nature are few and small. The wants of imagination are endless and insatiable. The world is full of complaints. Every one seems more or less dissatisfied with his own condition, and desirous to exchange it for that of some other man. The general enquiry is, “Who will shew us any good?” But what do you want? Have you not much good now? You enjoy health, liberty and competence. You have food to eat, raiment to put on, houses to dwell in, and friends to converse with. You have security in your persons and properties, ability to labour in your callings, and capacity to enjoy the fruits of your labour; you use them as your own, dispose of them as you please, consume what you need, and lay by the rest for future occasions. And why are

you not contented?—One murmurs at the unequal distributions of providence; another complains of the injustice of his fellow men; this man is dissatisfied with one thing, and that man with another, and almost every man with something. But all this murmuring proceeds from unreasonableness, from pride, avarice, ambition and lust. Pride demands more homage, than men are willing to bestow. Avarice seeks more property than the world has to give. Ambition aspires to more power than can be lodged in mortal hands. Luxury afflicts itself by seeking more pleasure than an animal can enjoy. It is the disappointment of these restless passions, which is the ground of all our complaints. The beast is free from these passions, and contented when his real wants are supplied: man, who is endued with reason, should subdue these passions; then he will be contented in his place. This is the instruction of religion, “Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for ye brought nothing into the world, and ye can carry nothing out of it.”

III. The fowls of the air reprove our *inattention to the warnings* of providence.

“The stork in the heavens,” says the prophet, “knoweth her appointed time, and the turtle, the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord: How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Surely in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.”

The fowls exactly mark and punctually obey the admonitions of the seasons. No astronomer is more accurate, than they, in observing; no seaman is more careful, than they, in following

the aspects of the heavens. They descry the prognosticks of approaching storms, and seek secure retreats. As winter advances, they fly to warmer regions ; and again they return with the returning spring. But how inattentive are men to the signs, which warn them of threatening dangers, and which call them to immediate repentance, as the means of safety ?

God instructs us by his word, and admonishes us by his providence. The language of his providence is explained by his word. When iniquities abound, we are taught, that judgments are preparing. When judgments are abroad, we are exhorted to learn righteousness. The calamities, which fall on others, we are commanded to regard as warnings to ourselves. But how inattentive are men in general to these admonitions ? A sudden death will perhaps have a temporary effect on some : but how few are awakened to prepare for a death as sudden ? The prevalence of mortal sickness creates an alarm within the circle of its ravages, and excites a solicitude to prevent, or escape its attacks : but rarely does it produce a general and durable reformation ? We hear of such a calamity at a distance ; we make it a subject of enquiry and conversation ; we speculate on the natural causes, the probable preventives, and most approved remedies ; and thus let it pass away as an uninteresting piece of intelligence. While others are destroyed from morning to evening, they perish without any regarding it. A mortality near to us affects us more sensibly, than a mortality at a distance ; but whether distant or near, its moral instructions and admonitions are the same. In both cases, it alike teaches us the uncertainty of our health and life—of our children and friends ; and the importance of an imme-

diate preparation for the events, which await us in this changing, dying world. And yet how few apply it to this wise and serious purpose? Do not the fowls, who observe the temperature of the air, and the aspect of the skies, discover a wisdom, which condemns our folly? They regard the seasons appointed them for changing their climes: we neglect the season assigned to us to prepare for a greater change; a change of worlds. When we see their attention to the tokens given them in the course of nature, let us pay equal attention to the admonitions given us in the course of providence.

IV. The scripture sends us to the fowls to learn *heavenly affection* and *zeal*. "They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings, *as eagles*; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

The eagle is described, in the book of Job, as a fowl of vigorous wing, elevated flight and penetrating eye. "She mounts aloft, makes her nest on high, and her eyes behold afar off." She loves the sublimer regions of the air, soars above the clouds, and lives in the beams of the sun. If she descends to the earth, it is to collect her food; soon she returns to dwell in her favourite skies. She is an emblem of Christian faith and hope, heavenly mindedness and zeal. She delights in a lofty ascent. Shall Christians cleave to the dust? We are, indeed, like the eagle, to seek on earth food for the support of our bodies: but our souls must rise on the wings of hope and faith to dwell in a higher region and a purer sky.

The gospel opens to our view a glorious world, where God manifests his wonderful perfections, where the redeemer displays his lovely character, and where saints rejoice in adoration and praise.

That is a distant world ; but our eyes, like the eagle's, should see afar off. We should look beyond this cloudy atmosphere, into the regions of eternal day—regions which need not our sun, being always enlightened with the glory of God. “ If ye be risen with Christ,” says the apostle, “ seek the things, which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God ; set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth ; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God ; and when he shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

If the eagle, forgetting her wings, should rest on the ground, and feed on the dunghill, she would be a proper emblem of such inconsistent Christians, as place all their affections, and employ all their cares on this world, while they profess to live by the faith and hope of a better.

V. The fowls *rebuke* our unreasonable *carefulness* and *anxiety* about the things of the present life.

“ Take no thought for your life,” says our Lord, “ what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment ? Behold the fowls of the air ; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they ?”

God's providence over his creatures is exercised in a manner adapted to their different natures. Some insects and animals are endued with an instinct, which directs them, in summer, to provide stores for their supply in winter. But the fowls, which are formed for passage, have no occasion for winter stores ; for when supplies fail in one place, they can with speed and facility pass to another. They have neither store-houses, nor barns, but

commit themselves to providence in the way, in which nature guides them. In this way God supplies their wants. "He gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. These all wait on him, and receive their meat in season." Men are endued with intellect, forethought and a capacity for labour; and for them God provides by smiling on their prudence and industry. "They are to work with their hands the thing which is good, that they may have lack of nothing, and may have something to give to such as need." "He who gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he who sleepeth in harvest is a son who causeth shame." While we pursue the duties of our calling with diligence, and use the fruits of our labour with temperance, we are to trust the care of providence without anxiety. This is our Lord's meaning, when he says, "Take no thought for the morrow." That thoughtfulness for the things of the world, which is attended with immoderate desire, perplexing fear, distrust of God and neglect of duty, is condemned by religion, by reason, and even by nature itself. "Take no such thought for these things; for these are the things, after which the gentiles seek; but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and these things shall be added to you, as far as you need, and your heavenly father seeth, how far you need them." What good will your anxiety do you? Can you by this add a cubit to your stature, or a moment to your life? God has hitherto preserved your life: can you not trust him to preserve it still, and to afford you its conveniences? Look up to the heavens; and see how he sustains the fowls. They live on his bounty without anxiety. What he gives, they enjoy with cheerfulness. What he scatters they gather and are filled with good. Can you not

trust the providence, which supports *them*? Pursue, like them, the course, which he has marked for you; and doubtless you will receive such things as you need. "Commit yourselves to him, for he is a faithful creator. Cast all your cares upon him, for he careth for you."

VI. These thoughts naturally introduce another lesson. Solomon sends the sluggard to the *ants*, that from them he may learn *diligence*, *prudence* and *forethought*. "Go to the *ant*, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in summer, and gathereth her food in harvest."

The man, who neglects the proper season of business; who gives to sleep and amusement the time which he oweth to his own and his family's support; who substitutes fruitless wishes for active labours; who raises imaginary difficulties that he may excuse himself from necessary duties, we call a sluggard; and Solomon calls him so too. But many, who are the reverse of this character in common life, deserve it in the moral sense. Wholly occupied in the affairs of the world, they pay no attention to the culture of their minds, the correction of their tempers, the reformation of their lives, and their preparation for the world to come. It is the diligent hand which makes rich, in spiritual, as well as in temporal treasures. How much soever one may labour for treasures on earth, if he lay up none in heaven, he is still idle, and still poor.

Solomon counsels the sluggard to consider the *ways*, and learn the *wisdom* of the *ant*. She looks well to the *future*, "providing her meat in summer:" she improves the favorable *opportunity*, "gathering her food in harvest:" she attends to her work with diligence, while the season lasts.



Thus she lives through winter, in which a thousand more gay and musical insects perish with hunger and cold.

All this she does, though she has no *guide* to prescribe her work ; no *overseer* to urge her diligence, and no *ruler* or *judge* to punish her neglect. How does this small and contemptible creature reprove the folly and negligence of men ?

Many give themselves to indolence, pleasure and diversion, while their worldly necessities urge them to industry. Many devote themselves to the cares of the world, when there is one thing needful, which demands their attention. Many bestow all their thoughts and labours upon the interests of this mortal state, when they ought to look forward to the eternal world, and provide for a happy existence there. How is the day of salvation neglected ? How is the fine season of youth wasted ? How are sabbaths profaned ? How are the warnings of providence despised ? How are the strivings of the spirit resisted ?

Thus thousands live in sloth and negligence, though they have a guide, overseer and ruler. There is a conscience within them, which re-proves their neglect ; there is a law given them to direct their conduct ; there is an allseeing God, who inspects their actions, and who will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil, and will render to every man according to his doings.

Go, then, to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise.

I shall add only one example more. That in all our Christian conduct we may learn to unite innocence with prudence, and simplicity with caution, Christ refers us to the *serpent* and the *dove*. “ Behold,” says he to his disciples, “ I send you forth,

as lambs among wolves : be ye therefore wise as *serpents*, and harmless as *doves*.”

Our Lord, when he was on earth, would not commit himself to men ; for he knew what was in men. The same caution he enjoins on his disciples. “ If they persecute you in this city, flee to another.” This probably is his intention, when he says, “ Be ye wise as serpents.” For the wisdom of the serpent lies principally in his art to obtain his sustenance, and in his caution to avoid his enemies. But then our Lord instructs them, that with their wisdom they must join *innocence*, of which the *dove* is a pattern. She is ever harmless and inoffensive : she never molests other creatures : she makes no war on birds of different species : with those of her own species, she associates in amity and peace ; and in her special friendships she is distinguished by her fidelity and love.

In times of danger, we are to consult our safety. When evil threatens us, we are to foresee it, and hide ourselves. But whatever unjust designs we may suspect, we must use no sinful artifice to defeat them. Whatever injuries we receive, we must indulge no thoughts of revenge. This is Saint Peter’s advice to Christians in a time of persecution ; “ Let none of you suffer as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters ; yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing. And let them, who suffer according to the will of God, commit themselves to him in well doing. For who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good ?” But if any be so malignant, as to harm you for your goodness, remember, “ that when ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye.”

We might farther pursue these illustrations under the guidance of scripture ; but perhaps they have already become tedious.

There is one reflection, which here naturally arises ; that the beasts may be of moral, as well as secular benefit to us. We employ them in our service, use them for our food, and from them collect materials for our clothing. But this is not all the use which we are to make of them ; we are to learn *wisdom* from them. And perhaps one reason, why God has placed us in a condition, which requires us to be conversant with them, is that we may thus gather moral instructions from the actions which we see in them.

It is, however, a humbling thought, that we should need instruction, and should so often meet reproof from the animals, which we despise. Surely we are much fallen from the dignity of rational beings ; we are much depraved in the disposition of our hearts ; we are much corrupted in our sentiments and actions ; else God would not send us to learn wisdom and virtue from these inferior creatures. God has given us understanding, and made us wiser than the beasts of the field, or the fowls of heaven. But our understanding is darkened through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts. Our reason is enslaved to passion and lust. Our judgment is perverted by earthly affections. Hence the brutal creatures are so often proposed to us as emblems of the wisdom and virtue, which we have lost and which we ought by all means to regain. Their example, however, is but a subordinate auxiliary to means more excellent and wonderful.

Let us rejoice in the rich and glorious provision which God has made for our recovery from this dishonorable and dangerous apostacy. He has

given us a revelation from heaven. This teaches us, that all have sinned, and fallen under condemnation to death and misery—that a saviour has come to redeem us by his blood—that the divine spirit is shed down to renew us by his influence, and that God gives his holy spirit to them, who ask him. Convinced of our guilt and depravity, let us repair to the God of grace, supplicate his pardon in the name of his son, and implore the kind influence of that good spirit, which is able to renew our hearts, subdue our lusts, brighten our understanding and purify our souls. And under this heavenly influence let us aspire to improvement in knowledge and virtue, and to the purity and perfection of our nature, that we may be qualified to associate with angels, and with them to dwell in the immediate presence of the creator.

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## SERMON VIII.



*Joab laying hold on the Horns of the Altar.*



I. KINGS ii. 30.

— And he said, Nay, but I will die here.

**T**HIS is the resolution of Joab, who had fled to the altar, as his last refuge, when he knew, that king Solomon had determined to take away his life.

This Joab was a man of great distinction in the reign of David. The king made him the chief commander of his army, and principal counsellor in war ; and the duties of his high station he executed with wisdom, fidelity and courage. By his long continuance and eminent services in his office, he had acquired such unbounded influence among the soldiery, that he assumed, in some cases, an imperious controul over the king himself.

On certain occasions he expressed some sense of religion. David's order for numbering the people "was abominable to Joab," and he remonstrated against it as what would be "a cause of trespass to Israel." Before his famous battle with the combined forces of Syria and Ammon, he addressed the officers of his army in a speech, which sa-

voured highly of patriotifm and piety; “ Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people and the cities of our God. And the Lord do that, which feemeth him good.”

But though he occasionally expreffed fome pious fentiments, yet in his habitual temper he was haughty, deceitful and ferocious. In an infidious and treacherous manner, and from mere jealoufy and envy he affaffinated two men, Amasa and Abner, who were more righteous than himfelf. After the fuppreffion of Abfalom’s rebellion, Joab threatened the king with another and more dangerous infurrection, if he continued to indulge his immoderate grief for the death of an unnatural fon. When, in the decline of David’s life, Adonijah ufurped the throne, Joab joined the party of the ufurper, though he muft have known, that the king intended to make Solomon his fucceffor. This complication of crimes induced David to leave it in charge to Solomon, that he fhould not fuffer Joab to go down to the grave in peace.

Solomon, after his father’s demife, being firmly feated on his throne, caufed Adonijah to be put to death; and he depofed and banifhed Abiathar the prieft, who had been deeply concerned in the late ufurpation. Joab, hearing what meafures the king was taking, and being confcious of his own crimes, and perhaps knowing David’s charge to Solomon, expected, that his own fate muft foon follow. He therefore fled to the tabernacle and caught hold on the horns of the altar. Solomon, being informed of Joab’s flight to the altar, fent an officer to fall upon him. The officer came to him and faid, “ Thus faith the king, Come forth,” that the altar be not ftained with thy blood. Joab replied, “ Nay, but I will die here.” On a fecond order from the king, he was executed in that place.

In the land of Israel cities of refuge were appointed for the security of the man, who had slain his neighbour unawares ; and the tabernacle, at the door of which stood the altar of burnt-offering, was in some cases allowed to be a place of refuge for the manslayer. But neither the cities nor the tabernacle were to yield protection to a wilful murderer. When it appeared, on examination, that the man came presumptuously on his neighbour to slay him with guile, the divine order was express, "Thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die."

Joab must have been too well acquainted with the law of God, to suppose, that a wilful murderer and a rebel against the government, such as he was, could be saved from death by fleeing to the altar.

The preservation of life was not his object in this action ; for he expected still to die. He said, "I will die here." It is probable he viewed this flight to the altar as an act of religion, which became a dying sinner, and would procure him pardon and acceptance with an offended God. His crimes were such as no sacrifice of beasts could expiate, for the law had provided no atonement for presumptuous sins. If he must die, he would die on the altar, and make himself the sacrifice, and his blood the atonement. If this last act was accompanied with repentance of his sins and faith in the mercy of God, he certainly was forgiven. Whether this was the state of mind in which he died, the story is silent, and we cannot judge.

There is, however, one very serious and important truth here suggested ; "that men, who have lived all their days without a regard to religion, may wish for the benefit and protection of it, when they die."

In the history of Joab's life, there is nothing which indicates a governing sense of moral obligation and a future retribution. We find him guilty of the most flagrant crimes; but we never hear from him any expressions of remorse; we never see him at the tabernacle seeking the mercy of God by prayer, nor at the altar presenting a sacrifice for any of his sins. His life seems to have been spent in the pursuit of military glory. To this object he could sacrifice the lives of better men than himself, when they stood in his way. And if he ever resorted to religion, it was in some critical conjuncture, when danger nearly threatened him.

But now Joab has finished his military and political career. He is no longer to command an army, or direct a cabinet. He is grown old. He has filled up the measure of his crimes. Justice has drawn the sword, and the day of execution is come. He sees no escape; he flees to the tabernacle and lays hold on the altar. Here he remains fixed, and here he resolves to die. He wishes to be protected, in his death, by that religion, which he had neglected in his life.

This is no singular case. Similar examples are recorded in scripture, and similar examples occur to common observation.

Pharaoh, that impious contemner of God, and hardened oppressor of the people of God, could relent under a judgment, which threatened destruction to himself and his realm. He could then acknowledge his dependence on a superior invisible power. He could call for the servants of Jehovah in haste, and urge their intercession in his own and his country's behalf. He could say, "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you; now therefore forgive my sin, and intreat the Lord,



that he may take away from me this death only." But, "when he saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart." Of Ahab king of Israel it is said, "There was none like him, who sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord." But when he heard the awful sentence of destruction, which God denounced against him and his house, "he rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his flesh, fasted and went softly." Yet after this he could threaten and imprison a prophet of God for honestly warning him of his danger, and could treat a premonition from God with insolent contempt. When God wrought wonders in the wilderness to supply the wants of his people, "they sinned yet more against him and tempted him in their hearts: but when he slew them, then they sought him; they turned and enquired early after him; and they remembered, that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer; yet they flattered him with their lips, and they lied to him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant." The Psalmist speaks of it as a common case, that, "when fools," the despisers of religion, "are by their sins brought near to the gates of death, then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses; he healeth them, and delivereth them from destruction." Yet he intimates, that few "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Solomon observes, that they, who in their prosperity despise the reproofs and set at nought the counsels of wisdom, will call on God and seek him earnestly in times, when distress and anguish come upon them. He describes a profligate youth, as mourning at the last, when his flesh and body were consumed, and lamenting,

that in his better days he had been in almost all evil, and had hated instruction and despised reproof. The infidels and idolaters, in the days of Jeremiah the prophet, turned their back unto the true God, and would not even acknowledge him as their creator and preserver. "They said to a stock, Thou art our father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought us forth:" but in the time of their trouble, when all support failed them, they would repair to God, and say, "*Arise and save us.*"

Cases of the like nature are not unfrequent now. There are many under gospel light, who appear to live regardless of religion. If they believe its general truth, yet they feel not its particular and present importance. They devote themselves to the pleasures and interests of the world, and give the momentous concerns of eternity no place in their hearts. They make no profession of religion; and the duties of it they practise no farther than their worldly designs require. They seldom attend on the appointed worship of God's house, and perhaps as seldom address their maker in a more private manner. They are pleased with the conversation of those, who talk lightly about religion; and they readily embrace the licentious opinions which they hear, because these pacify their troubled consciences, and quiet their guilty fears, in the course which they are pursuing. If they do not openly reject religion, yet they fondly admit doubts of its truth, or, at least, of the truth of its more important doctrines, and never take the trouble to enquire, what religion really is, on what ground it stands, or what is their own character. Thus they pass carelessly along in the calm seasons of life. But if you were to visit these persons in a time of sickness, when they had the

sentence of death in them, and even despaired of life, I am confident, you would find many of them in a different state of mind. You would not hear them talk so doubtfully about the truth, or so lightly about the importance of religion, as they used to do. You would not perceive them seeking comfort in annihilation, or in promiscuous salvation. Their final destiny now appears too near, and too solemn to be trifled with. They wish for a hope, which can rest on a solid and permanent foundation. How much soever they have despised prayer in time past, they now direct their thoughts and desires to the mercy of God as their only hope. How indifferently soever they have spoken of the gospel, they now see no where else to go for the words of eternal life. How much soever they may have ridiculed the men of prayer, they now solicit a share in the intercessions of such men. How much soever they have neglected the altar of God, they now wish to lay hold on the horns of it, and, if they must die, to die there.

This, indeed, is not the case of *all* dying sinners. Some die suddenly, some in the distraction or stupor of disease, and some in habitual hardness of heart. But it is the case of many; and we rarely meet with a case which is the reverse of it; I mean the case of one, who, in the near expectation of death, will disavow all regard to religion, glory in his wickedness, or place full confidence in his licentious principles. The most daring infidels, and the most boasting universalists have been known to shudder at the gates of death, to distrust their former opinions, and seek refuge in the grace of the gospel. Even a *Voltaire*, who in the most audacious manner profaned God's altar in his life, sought to lay hold on the horns of

it at his death. Though he employed his keenest wit to wound the gospel of Christ, yet he wished to die a Christian; and, it is said, would have declared himself such, had he not been dissuaded by the atheists who attended him.

Whether Joab's flight to the altar was accompanied with a repentance, which entitled him to mercy, we cannot say; nor can we, in any case, determine the result of death-bed fears, relentings, confessions and prayers. The terrors of another world, opened to the near view of the guilty, may extort the language of repentance and faith, when there is no hatred of sin and love of truth in the heart. Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, yet desired to die the death of the righteous. The scripture often speaks of the convictions and supplications of dying sinners, as being of doubtful issue. "What is the hope of the hypocrite," says Job, "when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry, when trouble cometh upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" "Because I have called and ye refused," says wisdom, "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. They shall call, but I will not answer, because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." There is, however, more hope for such relenting sinners, than for those who die in obstinate infidelity and unfeeling stupidity. For though remorse is not repentance, yet there is no repentance without it. If the sinner repents at all, he must first be awakened to conviction of, and self-condemnation for his sins.

The case, which we have been considering, affords as some useful instructions.

1. We have here the testimony of sinners and

unbelievers to the truth and importance of religion.

Though they all deny its importance in practice, and many of them deny its truth in words, yet there are times, when, notwithstanding all their prejudices and all their enmity against it, they declare in its favour, and shew a desire to obtain a share in its hopes and comforts. This testimony is of real weight ; it deserves much credit.

It is a testimony grounded on experience. They have made trial of irreligion, and they find, that this will not give them hope and comfort in the time, when they are most needed.

It is a testimony against themselves : and surely it must be a strong conviction, which constrains them to condemn their former avowed sentiments, and their past manner of life.

It is a testimony given at a time, when they are most likely to judge rightly and to speak honestly. It is given in a time of affliction, and in the near view of another world. If ever they will think soberly and justly on such a subject, it must be now. The croud of worldly business, the distraction of earthly cares, the prospect of temporal honours and riches, the seductions of irreligious company, the fascination of sensual pleasures are now over and likely to return no more. The lusts and passions, which used to hurry them along in their favorite pursuits, and blind them to the dangers before them, have now subsided. Pride, ambition, avarice and carnality have ceased to operate ; for their objects are thrown out of sight. New scenes open to their view. They are no more to return to this world ; they are soon to enter on another. They stand between both, and look back on the one which they have passed, and forward on that which is before them. They see a mighty difference between them,

They feel, that to prepare them for the future world, other and better tempers are necessary, than those which they have indulged here. They are convinced, that the passions, which have governed them, must be inconsistent with enjoyment in a world, where these passions will find no correspondent objects. They know their destiny will soon be fixed, and this is no time to trifle. In such a situation, it may be presumed, they will judge more impartially, than in the bustle of worldly scenes.

If men, who have despised religion in health and prosperity, do generally, or at least frequently, desire and seek its comforts, when they come into the situation now described, we must believe it to be true and important. If there were comfort to be found else where, men, who have lived in opposition to religion, would not resort to it in this extremity. The controversy between Christians and infidels; between the godly and the profane concerning religion, is only in this life. It is terminated at death. The latter, in the near view of this momentous change, give up the dispute, and, in their judgment, come over to the side of the former, and wish to find comfort in that, in which others have found it already. "Death is an honest hour, and faithful to its trust."

There is, in the nature of man, a principle, which condemns his enmity to religion. Where is the man, but who would choose, that his children should be pious? Where is the man, who would prefer to put his son or his daughter under the care of an infidel or libertine for an education? Where is the man, who was ever heard to glory in the wickedness, dissipation and licentiousness of those, who were to inherit his substance, and to continue the remembrance of his name? Where

is the man, who, if he thought himself dying, would not recommend to his children a religious and blameless life? And where is the man, who, if he had lost a virtuous son, would not take comfort in the character which he sustained, and in the hopes which he left?—The consciences of men witness within them, that religion is a reality; not a fiction—a solemn truth; not a trifle.

2. We see the wisdom of an early and immediate attention to religion.

If even ungodly men desire, at least, to lay hold on the horns of the altar, and, when they see that they must die, wish to die there, then let every one fly to the altar now, and lay hold on the hope of mercy, which is there held up to him.

How much soever you despise religion now, the time is coming, when you will wish for a share in its comforts. You perhaps can *live* indifferent to religion; but do you really think, you can *die* so? If others have been convinced of its importance, when they were dying, so probably will you; therefore attend to it now. You may then feel this conviction, and yet die in your guilt. It is not every kind of conviction, that produces repentance, and ensures pardon. And no conviction, is more doubtful in its issue, than that which is awakened by the *immediate* apprehension of death. With this conviction despair often mingles to defeat its efficacy. The testimony of dying sinners to the truth and importance of religion, should call your attention to it in this calm season, when you are best able to understand the nature of it, and to prove by correspondent fruits the sincerity of your choice.

You have a better altar at which you may take refuge, than that to which Joab made his flight. That yielded no protection to the presumptuous

finner. Joab fled thither ; but still he must die. For you there is an altar, to which you can fly and find safety. The blood which Christ shed on the cross, applied by faith, will cleanse from all guilt—from the guilt of the greatest sins. “Through him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” He came to save the chief of sinners, and through him “the mercy of God is unto all and upon all that believe, and there is no difference.”

Are you convinced of your violation of God’s law ? Do you hear its threatenings ? Do you perceive them pointed against you ? Do you feel your insufficiency to expiate your guilt, and evade the divine sentence ? What will you do ?—Lift up your eyes, and behold the altar, which God has erected—behold the sacrifice which is offered there—It is the sacrifice of God’s own son, who bare your sins in his body on the cross, that you might live through him. He through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God ; and his blood can purge your conscience from dead works, and deliver your souls from the wrath to come.

Listen to the calls of the favour ; “Look unto me, and be ye saved. Come to me, and ye shall find rest to your souls.” Hear the exhortations of his messengers ; “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. Repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance ; and ye shall receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified. Attend to their argument ; “God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself not imputing their trespasses, and he hath



committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us ; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God ; for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

You see what a glorious hope is set before you. Arise now, flee to the altar of atonement, and lay hold on eternal life.

3. You are here warned not to take any encouragement in a sinful life from the confidence and security, in which some wicked men seem at present to live ; for sooner or later, these very men will condemn themselves. Other wicked men have done so ; and so will they, and so will you, if you live like them.

When you look round on the world of mankind, you see thousands pursuing a course very different from that, which the gospel prescribes ; and you can observe in them nothing, which indicates a distrust of their own safety. If you converse with them, you hear many of them justify their manner of life, and talk in terms of great indifference about a life of strict religion. Some of these appear to be men of discernment in other matters ; and you ask, " why should they not be capable of judging in matters of religion ? If *they* suspect no danger in their course, why should *we* ?" But this is a presumptuous way of reasoning and acting. Why judge you not of yourselves what is right ? Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good. Call no man your master on earth ; for you have a master in heaven. Make not wicked men your guides, for however wise they may be in worldly matters, in the concerns of religion the god of this world has blinded their minds. But if you are disposed to give

weight to their opinions, see what their opinions are, in seasons when they are most likely to judge right. Observe how they feel, and hear what they say in the near views of another world. If they then condemn their own irreligious sentiments and manners, be not you governed by them.

Perhaps you have never seen *these* men in that solemn situation. But others of the same character have been in it ; and they discovered a sense of the importance of religion. It is probable many of these will do the same. Never follow the example of those, who you think, will condemn this very example in those serious hours, when their judgment will be most impartial. Never pursue a course, which, you know, you must condemn, when you come to the end of it. The example of good men you may wisely follow, for your own conscience now approves it and they will approve it in the review. You have heard and read of many, who condemn their own ungodly life, as they were entering into another world : but you never heard or read of a man, who in that situation condemned a religious life, as what appeared foolish and vain, or as what gave him fear and anxiety. Many good men have died in fear ; but their fear arose from a distrust of their own hearts ; not from a distrust of religion. They never suspected, that religion was a vain thing ; much less that it was a dangerous thing ; their only concern was, lest they had not fully embraced it, and cordially yielded to its influence.

You see, then, where your interest and safety lie. They lie in the religion which the gospel teaches. This is not a vain thing ; it is your life.

The salvation of the soul is the one thing need-

ful. This is offered in the word of God, and the terms of it are there stated. It is by a compliance with the terms, that you are to secure the benefit. The terms are repentance of past sins, application to the mercy of God through a dying favour, and a life devoted to God in holy obedience. Thus only can you enjoy peace in life, hope in death and happiness in eternity. In favour of such a choice you have the testimony of good men, and of wicked men too ; you have the testimony of the word of God, and of your own conscience. Embrace now the pardon and salvation offered you ; and trust not in a flight to God's altar, when you see the avenger of your crimes close at your heels, lest when your guilty hands attempt to lay hold on the horns of the altar, you be taken thence, that you may die ; or if you resolve to perish there, still you perish in all your guilt.

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# SERMON IX.



*Nothing to be refused, when the Lord hath need.*



A Communion Sermon.



MARK xi. 3.

And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this ? Say ye, that the Lord hath need of him : and straitway he will send him hither.

OUR Lord, at the time of the Jewish pass-over, had determined to make his public entry into Jerufalem, in the manner predicted by the prophet Zechariah ; “ Tell ye the daughter of Zion, behold, thy king cometh unto thee meek, and sitting upon an afs, and upon a colt the foal of an afs.”—“ When therefore he was come nigh to Jerufalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying, “ Go ye into the village over against you ; and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat ; loose him and bring him to me. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this ? Ye shall say, The Lord hath need of him. And straitway he will send him.” They went and found the colt tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met ;

a place of public resort. "And as they were loosing the colt, the owner," who was standing by, "asked them, "why loose ye the colt? And they answered, The *Lord* hath need of him." The reason was sufficient: the owner let him go.

It may seem, perhaps, that our Lord, on this occasion, assumed, over people's property, a power, which he was not wont to exercise. He commanded his two disciples to "loose the colt and bring him." But it should be considered, that at this time, Jesus was about to make his public appearance as king of Zion; that in this character he was already received by the body of the people, and soon after recognized by the train which attended him, and by the citizens of Jerufalem. In this character he was obeyed by the owner of the beast, with whom the reason assigned by the disciples, *The Lord hath need of him*, carried an authority, which he felt no disposition to dispute, and pretended no right to oppose. As Jesus now exhibited himself in the character of Zion's king, all who owned him as such were bound to yield him every assistance, which the occasion required.

Besides; it is evident from the story, that the disciples were to take the colt only with the owner's consent. As Jesus knew the place where the beast was tied, so he knew that the owner would be present, would demand the reason of the disciples' loosing him, would be satisfied with their answer, and would allow them to take him. Christ's telling them, that the owner of the beast would let him go, plainly imported, that the owner's consent was their warrant to bring him.

What deserves our particular notice in this story, is the readiness with which the man resigned his beast, as soon he knew, the Lord had need of him. This was the only reason which Christ saw

fit to give, and with this the owner was perfectly satisfied.

Hence then we learn, that whatever we claim as ours, we should commit it to our Lord's disposal ; and whenever we know he has need of it, we should resign it to his service.

Jesus Christ came into the world to erect a kingdom, and then return to his father. His kingdom is not of this world, but from heaven. It consists not in temporal honour, wealth and dominion ; but in the advancement of truth, righteousness and happiness—in the recovery of sinners from ignorance and error, wickedness and guilt—in the spread and influence of his doctrines—in the increase of real converts to his religion, and in the salvation of our fallen race.

This work he began personally, when he was on earth, and has been still pursuing ever since his return to heaven. But in this work he chooses not to be alone ; he requires the concurrence and assistance of his servants. And whatever they can do in subservience to his cause, in that he has need of them. In regard to himself personally he needs nothing ; but in regard to the great and benevolent design which he is carrying on in the world, he has need of us. And in that, wherein he has need of us, we must be workers together with him.

Christ often has need of our *property* ; and with this we are to honour him.

He has instituted a church on earth, and appointed ordinances for its edification and comfort. These ordinances are to be maintained and continued, not by miraculous, but by human means. The first introduction and establishment of his gospel was in an extraordinary way ; but its *continuance*, in some measure, depends on the support

given it by those who profess to be its friends. It will not be preserved, as it was first introduced, by the power of miracles. It is now brought to us, and laid before us with evidences of its truth, and declarations of its importance; and if we will not receive it, when it is brought; or will not retain it, after we have received it, then it leaves us of course; for we put it from us, and judge ourselves unworthy of it. Even in the time of our saviour and his apostles, the continuance of the gospel among the people of any particular place, was suspended on the condition of their making some decent provision for it.

When Christ sent forth his apostles to preach the kingdom of God, he furnished them with supernatural powers, which he commanded them to employ in healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out devils, that thus the divinity of their mission, and the truth of their doctrines might be demonstrated. But it is observable, they never were instructed to supply their own wants—to procure food and raiment, by miracles, and thus to excuse their hearers from the trouble and expense of maintaining them. To have made the gospel so cheap, would have been to make it too contemptible. On the contrary, they were to go forth on their mission without purse or scrip, without gold or silver, or even change of apparel, because, as labourers in the service of mankind, they were worthy of, and entitled to their hire. Though some of them, if not all, possessed considerable property of their own, they were not to carry it with them, or to depend upon it for support in their mission, but to require their maintenance wholly from those, on whom their labours were bestowed. If in any place, whither they were sent, they were not received with the

attention, and entertained with the hospitality due to their sacred character, they were to retire with this solemn admonition and awful token of their master's displeasure; "The dust of your city, which cleaveth to us, we wipe off against you. But be ye sure of this; the kingdom of God hath come nigh to you."

It is an established law of Christ's kingdom, that "they who preach his gospel, shall live by his gospel." Whatever, therefore, is requisite to the maintenance of his preached gospel, to the accommodation of his instituted worship, and to the continuance of his appointed ordinances, that he hath need of, and that we are bound to render to him out of the goods which he has committed to us. Whatever we possess, it is the gift of providence. We receive it in trust from our Lord. And we are to apply it to such purposes as his general instructions warrant, and his particular occasions demand. Thus when our stewardship shall cease, we may give an account of it to his approbation and acceptance.

Our Lord has need of our property, not only for the maintenance of his worship, but also for the relief and comfort of his *helpless friends*.

Providence places men under different circumstances, for this, doubtless, among other reasons, that occasion and opportunity may be given for the various social virtues. While men are mutually dependent on, and reciprocally indebted to one another, the virtues of justice, fidelity, friendship, benevolence and gratitude are called into exercise, and thus the social affections and pleasures are improved and exalted.

The poor we have always with us. These, acting under the influence of religion, may be as useful in society as the rich. The latter may do good



by actions more brilliant and observable. The former do good by services no less solid and substantial. The labours of the poor contribute, as essentially as the benefactions of the rich, to the general support and happiness of human life. Neither class, without the other, could comfortably subsist. "The rich and the poor meet together : the Lord is the maker of them all."

God bestows an abundance on some, not for their sakes only, but also for the sake of the poor who are with them. Hence the rich are charged to "be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and thus to lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come"—against the time, when, in the changes of human condition, it may be their turn to become poor ; or against the time of general retribution, when every one will receive according to his works.

When we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord, who, in due time, will amply repay the loan. We are to do good to all, and especially to them, who are of the household of faith. The poor, whatever may be their character, are entitled to our charity, because they are needy : the *virtuous* poor have the first claim, because they are worthy. He who receives a righteous man, in that name and character, will receive a righteous man's reward. He who shall give to a disciple of Christ a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, and because he belongs to Christ, shall not lose his reward. Whatever is done for such, Christ accepts it as done for himself. If then we have this world's goods, and see a brother who has need, we are to consider, that the Lord hath need of a part of these goods for that needy brother. If in this case we shut up

our bowels of compassion, the love of Christ dwells not in us. We then love him indeed, and in truth, when, at his call, we relieve the distressed, help the weak, and comfort the afflicted.

Christ has need of our *abilities* and *services*, as well as of our substance, in carrying on his work on earth.

His cause requires, that we dedicate ourselves to him, and openly profess our faith in him.

If there is need, that his church should be continued and his religion maintained in the world, there is need that some should enter into his church, and profess his religion. If none should be added to the church, it must expire with the short-lived beings who now belong to it. If the church should be discontinued, the means of religion would be dropped and lost, and religion itself cease and be forgotten; or exist only here and there in the solitary breasts of a few obscure and despised mortals.

Now if Christ has need of some to honour and maintain his religion, then every one, who believes it to be divine, should consider, that the Lord hath need of *him*.

Among those who have never publicly professed their faith in the gospel, there are many, I suppose, who believe it is true, and wish it may be preserved for the general benefit of mankind. They could not, at once, reconcile themselves to the thought, that the gospel should be extinguished, and that those who enjoy it should degenerate into atheists, idolaters, pagans, or barbarians. They could not easily make themselves willing, that their posterity should grow up among such a horrible set of beings. Come forward, then, and join yourselves to the Lord—declare your faith in him, and friendship to him; for he has need of

*you.* If he needs any professors at all, why not you as much as others? You excuse yourselves on one pretence and another: but may not every man excuse himself as well? Is there, in your case, any peculiar circumstance, which exempts you from the common obligations of religion? If all should excuse themselves, as you do, where would be the church—where would be the religion of Christ?

When religion declines—when professors are few, and these few lose the ardour of their zeal and love—when churches become like societies of the world, then Christ has need of you to strengthen the interest, and restore the honour of his cause among men.

You withdraw from the church, or refuse to come into it, because you see in it so little religion, and so many unworthy members. But if its real state is such as you apprehend, and you have so much more purity and zeal than others, then you are the very persons whom the Lord needs to support his languishing cause. Forsake not his church, when it is sinking; but come forward; strengthen it by your example, advice and prayers: come; help to sustain it by your friendly concurrence with the few, who may perhaps be found as really concerned as you for its increase and glory.

Christ has need of some to preach his gospel; and they who undertake this work, should be influenced by a sense, that the Lord hath need of them. Paul was influenced by this principle. He had better worldly prospects in a secular calling; but in no other profession could he do so much service for Christ. In the prosecution of his ministry, he chose to bestow his labours, not where they would be most lucrative to himself, but where they would most conduce to the fur-

therance of the gospel. He strove to preach, not where Christ was named, lest he should build on another man's foundation ; but where the gospel had not been preached, or the ministry was not at that time enjoyed, that the word of salvation might be more extensively spread. He would not go, where the Lord had no need of him ; but where the ends of his apostleship might best be answered.

In times, when licentious opinions and corrupt manners prevail—when infidelity grows bold, and iniquity abounds, Christ has need of the active services of his faithful ministers and sincere friends, who are then to stand up with courage against evil workers, and bear testimony against those who make void his gospel. At such a time, if ministers are to stand foremost, yet they are not to stand alone. All who regard the truth are to strengthen and support them. The zealous Levites, seeing the necessity of a reformation in the church of God, said to Ezra, “ Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee : we also will be with thee : be of good courage, and do it.”

Warnings from a solitary voice have little effect ; and never less, than in those corrupt times, when the advocates for vice and error, by evil communications, and by the circulation of licentious writings, strengthen the hands of evil doers. “ Two are better than one ; for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.” Christians are to be fellow-helpers to the truth. Paul beseeches the brethren, for the Lord Jesus' sake, that they strive together with him.

Christ needs the service of those who are placed at the head of families.

The continuance and increase of his church depend on the faith and piety of the young and ris-

ing generation, and consequently on the fidelity of parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Children will not be prompted, by natural inclination, to seek after knowledge and virtue. They need instructions to inform their minds, and exhortations to awaken their attention. The Lord of the church has committed their education to the care of their parents ; he requires, and he needs their diligence and fidelity in the execution of this great charge. Ordinarily they may expect that their faithfulness will be followed with a blessing, but their negligence with a curse, on their children, as well as on themselves. They who are early trained up in the way in which they ought to go, will pursue it when they are old : but children left to themselves soon bring their souls to ruin, and their parents to shame. If there be need, that your children should seek and serve God in their early years, and pass through life with wisdom and virtue—if there be need, that they should become members of Christ's church, walk in his ordinances, and work out their own salvation—if there be need that they should take up his religion, and hand it on to a future generation, then he has need of you to instruct them in his religion, and to lead them along in the way which he has marked for them.

When family order is much neglected, he has more need of the services of the faithful to revive and restore it. If those around you treat with indifference so necessary a branch of religion, be not carried away by their example, but say to them, as Joshua said to the men of Israel, " If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye, this day, whom ye will serve : but, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

And, my young friends, let me tell you, The Lord hath need of *you*; for you may do much service to his cause. You think, that he needs your fathers, your grandfires, and other elderly people; for their advice and example will have great influence in supporting his religion; and if they should desert his cause, it would soon sink in the world, and the next generation would come forward indifferent to it, and unacquainted with it. But, my friends, you by your good example and pious conversation may have as much influence among your youthful associates, as the aged can have, and perhaps more. Besides; you should consider, that your fathers will soon be gone; and if there should be no young Christians to succeed them, where will be Christ's church then? The church, like the human race, must be continued by succession, for it consists of mortals. If none of you will join yourselves to it, it must cease when your fathers are dead. Come, then, give yourselves to the Lord, and declare yourselves for him, encourage your fellow youths to embrace and obey his religion. How much good may thus be done? Think not yourselves useless and insignificant beings. You are important in your place, and the Lord hath need of you. He never is better pleased, than when he sees the young engaged in his cause, and hears them sing, Hosanna to the son of David. Out of their mouths he ordains praise.

Christ expects of his servants a ready compliance with his commands, and a cheerful resignation of every thing, which he needs from them. When he sent his disciples to procure him a beast, on which he might make his entrance into Jerusalem, he signified, that nothing more would be necessary, than to say, "The Lord hath need of

him." And so it was. On this information, the owner straitway let him go.

We should willingly serve the Lord with all our ability, and all our substance ; for all that we are, and all that we have belong to him. When David had made a liberal offering for the honour of God's worship, he said, " Of thine own have we given thee : All this store that we have prepared cometh of thine hand : it is all thine own." " Who," says the apostle, " hath first given to the Lord ? And it shall be recompensed to him again. For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." " Know ye not," says he, " that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own ? For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are his."

If all our abilities are endowments from his creating power, and all our goods are the gifts of his bountiful providence, and all our graces are the fruits of his sanctifying spirit, then we are to employ them all in the promotion of his cause, and to the honour of his name. " By the grace of God," says saint Paul, " I am what I am, and his grace bestowed on me was not in vain ; but I laboured more abundantly than they all ; yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me."

We are to do all for Christ that he needs from us ; for he has done, and still is doing all for us, that we need from him. He has not been backward to promote our interest ; we should not be reluctant to honour his name. He has given himself a ransom for us ; in due time, when we were without strength, he died for us ; he has sent his gospel to us for our instruction ; he has opened a way for our access to the throne of God ; he makes intercession for us, when we come to God in his name ; he has procured the grace of the divine

spirit, which, on our humble application, he will vouchsafe for our seasonable help. And ought we not to give ourselves to him ; to employ our time and strength, all the powers of our body, and faculties of our mind, all our substance, every thing that we have, in his service, and to his glory ? Can we ever do enough for him, who has done and suffered so much for us ? “ The love of Christ constraineth us,” says the apostle, “ 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 who died, and rose again.”

We are to render to Christ what he needs, because we thus co-operate with him in the most friendly and benevolent design. The work which he is pursuing is of the greatest utility to us and our race. The religion which he has taught, will, so far as it prevails, banish vice and misery, and introduce virtue and happiness. There is in it nothing unkind, malevolent or unsocial, but every thing good, beneficent and useful. It relieves the sorrows, and heightens the enjoyments of this world where we now dwell ; and it prevents misery and secures happiness in that world to which we are going. What Christ requires of us is, that we obey the rules, and accept the blessings of this religion for ourselves ; and that we support the credit, and assist the influence of it among others—In a word, that we seek to be happy, and study to make others so. What can we do better ? If we ought to serve our generation, then let us serve our divine Lord in every thing which he needs from us ; for all that he requires has some respect to this benevolent end, the general good.

We should cheerfully give to him whatever he has need of, for thus we shall derive greater benefit from it, than by any other application which we can make of it.



If we cultivate the religion of Christ in our own hearts, we shall enjoy the peace and hope which spring from it here, and be entitled to the happiness, which is the reward of it hereafter. If we promote this religion among others, we shall experience the satisfaction of dwelling in the midst of just and good men—kind and friendly neighbours. If we train up our children in the knowledge and practice of this religion, we shall have the joy of seeing them wise, virtuous and useful on earth, and the superior joy of believing, that they are entitled to a rich inheritance in heaven.

Every thing which we do for our Lord, will return to us bringing a reward with it.

When we give to Christ what he has need of, we are sure it is well bestowed. Our charities to men are sometimes misapplied. But our services for Christ are not only well accepted by his goodness, but well directed by his wisdom. He will smile on our labours in his cause, and make them, in some way or other, subservient to his glory and our felicity. “Be ye therefore steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for as much as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.” This we ought to regard as a sufficient motive to cheerful diligence in the work appointed us, that *we serve the Lord Christ*. “With good will do service as to the Lord, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, for with him there is no respect of persons. His word is sure, his promise faithful, his reward glorious. None who serve him, will labour in vain.

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## SERMON X.



*The Gate of Heaven strait, and many shut out of it.*



LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

AS our Lord passed through several cities and villages of Judea, on his journey to Jerusalem, teaching by the way, there attended him a considerable number of people, who, some for one reason, and some for another, gathered around him to hear his discourses. Somewhere in his journey, a person came to him with this question, “ Lord, are there few that be saved ? ” From the question and our Lord’s answer it seems, that the man was a Jew, tinged with the common national prejudice, that the Jews, by their covenant-relation to God, were entitled to salvation ; but the gentiles, being strangers to the covenant and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, would be rejected. Often, no doubt, had he heard this doctrine asserted among his countrymen ; and he wished to know Christ’s opinion upon it. As the question related to the prevailing sentiment of the day, Christ directed his answer to the body of the people who attended him. He first rebuked this

useless curiosity concerning the number of the saved, and called their attention to a matter, which was to them of more immediate consequence. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." "Whether few or many will finally obtain salvation, take care to secure your own share in it; for this will not depend upon the number of the saved, but upon your own fervent and seasonable application."

Christ here alludes to a custom then observed in attending feasts and marriages. The guests were early invited, and the door of the house was kept open, or opened occasionally, for their reception; but when the bridegroom arrived with his attendants, or the master of the feast had waited the appointed time, the door was shut, and after this no more were admitted. Alluding to this usage, Christ, in the parable of the virgins, says, "While the foolish virgins went to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then they who were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. Afterward came those foolish virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; but he answered, I know you not."

In the words which follow our text, Christ corrects that prejudice of the Jews, which gave rise to the question proposed to him. He tells his hearers, that external privileges would intitle no man to salvation; that though the Jews enjoyed peculiar religious advantages, many of them would be excluded from the kingdom of heaven as workers of iniquity, while the gentiles, whom they despised, would come from all parts of the world, and be made the happy subjects of this kingdom. Though our Lord waves an answer to the question, as it respected the whole number of the saved, yet he answered it, as it concerned the Jews, warning them that their general impenitence would be

their destruction, while the faith of multitudes among the gentiles would be their salvation.

When a question of mere curiosity was started in our Lord's hearing, it was his usual practice, to give it a religious turn, and raise from it some profitable reflections. This he did in the case before us. Taking occasion from the question proposed to him, whether few would be saved; he exhorted his hearers to strive for their own salvation; he shewed that many would fail of this object: he pointed out the causes of their failure: he explained the necessary qualifications for heaven; and he represented the awful condition of those who should finally be shut out of it.

The discourse of our saviour on this solemn subject, which is contained in our text and the words following, I shall endeavour to illustrate and apply. It deserves the attention of all; for it is as important now, as when it was first spoken, and as interesting to us, as it was to those who heard it from the redeemer's mouth. You will observe;

First: The entrance into heaven is by a *strait gate*. So our Lord describes it in our text, and also in the VIIth chapter of Matthew, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth to life."

This metaphor is designed to express the difficulties which attend a religious course, and the opposition which may be expected in the way to heaven. It may more immediately regard the peculiar difficulties of the time when the gospel was first published. It was then eminently true, that through much tribulation the righteous entered into the kingdom of God; and they who would live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. The way to heaven was then rough and

dangerous; and they who pursued it, put their reputation, interest and life to hazard. Hence many were deterred from entering upon it; and many who had entered upon it, were discouraged and turned back.

Through the goodness of God, the path of religion is now free from those dangers, which have at some times attended it; but still strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads to life. There are, and there ever will be difficulties to encounter, and obstructions to resist; and therefore our Lord's direction is, at all times, important; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

1. The terms of eternal life are strict and indispensable. In this respect the gate of heaven is called strait.

Such is the corrupt and depraved state of mankind by nature, that nothing less than a new creation, is required to fit them for the pure and sublime enjoyments of the heavenly world. So opposite is the holiness of heaven to the corruption of nature, that this new creation, this renovation of the mind, cannot be dispensed with. Old things must pass away, and all things must become new. The whole spirit, soul and body must be sanctified. There must be a full persuasion of the truth and authority of the gospel, an influential belief of its important doctrines, and a hearty submission to its sacred precepts; there must be a deep sense of, and godly sorrow for sin, and a humble application to, and reliance upon the mercy of God for pardon; there must be a temper to hate sin in all its forms, and to love God in his complete character; there must be an actual renouncing of all known wickedness, and a deliberate choice of the service of God as the great business of life. And in this course of obedience, the great motives of

the gospel, taken from the future world, must have a principal influence. In renewed and sanctified souls, a sense of present infirmity and imperfection will excite a watchfulness over the thoughts, the passions, the language and conduct—a frequent examination of the temper and review of the life; a renewal of faith, repentance and self-dedication; fervent prayer to God; diligent attendance on religious institutions; and ardent aspirations after growth and improvement in holiness.

This is a brief view of the Christian life, as exhibited in the gospel. And it may properly be called “a strait and a narrow way.” And,

2. The way is straitened by the oppositions which usually are found in it. Though we are not called to resist unto blood striving against sin, yet we have difficulties to contend with. There are difficulties which arise from an unhappy education; from frequent examples of vice; from the influence of sensible objects; from the distractions of earthly cares; from the scoffs and mockeries of profane and wicked men; from the temptations of evil spirits; from poverty or riches, or other peculiar circumstances in life. With some or other of these difficulties every serious Christian has many conflicts. To bear up against all this opposition; to be blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; to keep the mind and manners unspotted from the world; to pass uninfected through the contagion of corrupt examples, and to resist the impression of Satan’s temptations, it requires constant vigilance and strong resolution, accompanied with the supports of divine grace.

In these respects strait is the gate, and they who enter, must strive with earnestness, and persevere with patience.

It does not become us, however, to magnify

the difficulties of religion. It has its trials, and it has its encouragements too. We must view it in its smiling, as well as in its severer aspect. An apprehension of its difficulties is necessary, that we may be awakened from indolence to activity and engagedness; that we may form our resolutions with knowledge and judgment, and that we may trust in divine grace and not in our own strength. But, on the other hand, we must contemplate it in its inviting circumstances, that we may not be weary and faint in our minds; but may embrace it with cheerfulness, and cleave to it with fixed purpose of heart.

Let it then be considered;

That whatever difficulties there are in religion, they are not so great, but that by divine grace we may overcome them. We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves: we are strong only in the grace of God; and his grace is sufficient for us—It is sufficient to renew our hearts, subdue our corruptions, fortify us against temptations, and carry us through all the difficulties which are before us. When we consider the weakness of our nature and the straitness of the gate, we may well despair in ourselves: but let us, at the same time, look to God, who can open to us an effectual door and carry us safely through. And in his power and grace let us take courage and press forward. As he has commanded us to strive, we shall thus conform to his will and act agreeably to his pleasure; and we may rely on his concurring influence.

It ought also to be considered, that the difficulties which attend religion lie chiefly within ourselves. They arise from our love of sin, our attachment to the world, and our aversion to God's commands. When, therefore, we are awakened

to a sense of the danger of sin, and the importance of religion, when our indolence is removed, and a serious solicitude for our salvation takes place, a great part of the difficulty is over. When we feel an engagedness of heart to obtain, and a full determination to strive for heaven, the difficulties are proportionably abated. Duty is always more easy, as the zeal is more warm and active.

Let it, farther, be remembered, that as every good gift is from God, so his grace is to be acknowledged in those convictions, awakenings and resolutions, with which the religious life must ordinarily begin. And if these are from God, they who feel them may conclude, that God's spirit is working in them. And doubtless he is willing to carry on the work which he has begun. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Hence the awakened and thoughtful have new encouragement from the present state of their minds, to apply to God for all necessary supplies of grace. Whatever weakness they feel, let them wait on God, and be of good courage, and he will strengthen their hearts.

Again : We should consider, that the difficulties of religion are chiefly at first. When the mind is habitually attempered to it, then its duties become pleasant and easy. If it be hard to bring our stubborn necks under Christ's yoke, yet when we have taken it upon us, we shall find it lighter than we imagined, and lighter the longer we wear it. Difficulties, therefore, far from discouraging our hearts, should rather animate our resolution and warm our zeal.

Religion ordinarily requires no self-denial greater, than what we cheerfully submit to in our common worldly pursuits. Does not the husbandman exercise more strenuous labours ; does not



the merchant maintain more constant vigilance—does not the seaman, or the soldier expose himself to far greater hardships and perils, for a little gain, than the gospel imposes on the Christian as the means of obtaining heaven? With what alacrity the former, animated by the prospect of temporal profit or honour, discharge the duties of their profession! Why may not the latter, with glory and immortality in view, as patiently and pleasantly continue in well-doing? In our worldly occupations success repays our self denials. More amply will the self-denials, watchings and strivings of the Christian be remunerated by his conquests over sin and the world, by his improvements in virtue and holiness, by the increase of his spiritual hopes, and by the happiness which awaits him in heaven.

This was our first observation, that on account of the straitness of the gate, we must strive to enter into life.

We proceed to observe;

Secondly: That many will fail of entering in at this gate. “Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

What the proportion of the saved will be, the scripture has not told us. There are some passages, which represent the number as very great. John, in his vision, saw twelve thousands sealed out of each of the tribes of Israel; and, besides these, a great multitude which no man could number, standing before the throne of God, and clothed in white robes: and yet all these were only such as came out of great tribulation. In the words following the text, our Lord says, “They shall come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.” But, on the other

hand, there are some passages, which give us a sad representation of the number of the miserable. Our saviour tells us, that among those who seek to enter in at the strait gate, there are *many* who will not be able—that *many* will go in at the broad gate, which leads to destruction—that *many*, at the last day, will seek admission into his kingdom, whom he will reject as workers of iniquity. These passages, however, express the *absolute*, rather than the comparative number of the miserable. There are other texts, which seem to represent the number of the happy as small in a comparative view. Our saviour says, “*Many* are called, but *few* are chosen.” “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and *few* there be who find it. Broad is the gate which leadeth to destruction, and *many* there be, who go in thereat.” But these expressions may be supposed rather to respect the state of mankind in particular places and at particular times, than their general state in all ages. Of the Jewish nation in the days of Christ and his apostles, it was eminently true, that few found the way to life; and though they were generally called, few obeyed. “The gentiles, who had not followed after righteousness, attained unto righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel who followed after the law of righteousness, attained not to it, because they sought it not by faith, but by the deeds of the law.” Hence the apostle applies to them what God spake of their fathers by the prophet, “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal:” “Even so also, at this present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

However, if we consider, how great a part of the world, as far as history affords us light, have

in all ages been sunk in ignorance, superstition and vice—how great a number of those who profess the true religion, have corrupted its purity—how many of those who retain the knowledge of the truth, are wholly uninfluenced by it; we shall have but a melancholly view of mankind; and shall see reason to fear, that the alarming words of our saviour already mentioned, have been applicable to most periods, and remain applicable to our own times.

Amidst our gloomy apprehensions, it is no small consolation to believe, that there is a day coming, when the gospel will have a more extensive spread in the world, and a more powerful influence on the hearts of men. And if we take into the estimate this happy period of the church, which the scripture promises, and which, it seems, will be of long duration, perhaps the whole number of the saved will far exceed the number of those who are lost.

But whether the number be comparatively great or small, let each one attend to himself, and work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. The terms of salvation are the same, whether those who comply with them be many or few. The number of the saved, be it ever so great, will be no security to those who neglect their salvation; be it ever so small, it will not endanger those who repent and obey the gospel. The duty, which alike concerns us all, our saviour has pointed out in our text; “Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many will seek to enter in and shall not be able.”

If there are many who will be lost, let each one fear for himself, lest he should be found in that unhappy number. The apostle speaks of some who could not enter into God's rest because

of unbelief. "Therefore," says he, "let us also fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into this rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." Our danger does not arise from the number which will perish, but from our own unbelief and impenitence. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation; and how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." But still the warnings which the scripture has given us, that there will be found, at the last day, many workers of iniquity, who will be cast into utter darkness, should fill every soul with a deep solicitude for himself, and awaken in him an immediate care to flee from the wrath to come. For this purpose the scripture has announced them to us: and to this purpose we should apply them.

When Christ admonished his disciples, that one of them would betray him, and prove a son of perdition, each enquired, Lord, is it I? When he also admonishes us, that many will be rejected as workers of iniquity, let us all make the same personal application—the same home-felt enquiry. To judge whether we are involved in this danger, we need not go far; we need not attempt an investigation of the secret purposes of God; we are only to search and examine ourselves. If sin reigns within us, the wrath of God abides on us. If we have renounced the dominion of sin, we are delivered from the wrath to come.

It is the decree of God, that they who do his commandments shall enter through the gates into the heavenly city; but whosoever defile themselves and work abomination shall be shut out, and cast into utter darkness. This is the only decree, in which the present enquiry is concerned—the only decree by which we can judge of our danger, or

safety. This is not a secret, but a revealed decree. By this let us govern our conduct. On this let us ground our hopes, or our fears, according as we find our character. God will not depart from it ; for he is of one mind ; none can turn him. We cannot alter it, for it is founded in the nature of God. The change must be in us. Let us by faith embrace the promise of God, and by repentance renounce the practice of sin, and thus giving all diligence, add to our faith all the virtues and works of the gospel ; in this progress we shall make our calling and election sure, and shall never fall, but an entrance will be ministred to us abundantly into the kingdom of Christ.

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# SERMON XI.

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*The Causes, why many who seek, cannot enter at the strait Gate.*



LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

THE entrance into heaven is here represented as a strait gate. It is so called, because the terms of admision are strict and indispensable ; and in the way thither much opposition is to be expected.

Our Lord warns us, that there are many, who will fail of entering in at this gate. Hence he commands us to strive for an entrance, lest we be found among the unhappy number, which shall be excluded.

These observations have, in a former discourse, been illustrated and applied.

We now proceed to observe,

Thirdly : Our favour, for our caution, points out the *causes*, why many will not enter in at the strait gate. These are *negligence*, *dilatoriness* and *false dependence*.

1. One cause, why many fail of salvation, is *negligence*. “ *Strive,*” says our Lord, “ for many

will *seek* to enter, and shall not be able. *Seeking* is a word often used to express the whole condition of salvation : but here it is used in a lower sense, and in distinction from *striving*.

The latter is a word, which imports the greatest earnestness—the most vigorous exertion, like that which combatants use, when they are contending for the mastery. There is a promise of eternal life to them who seek it ; but it is only to them who seek it first, and in preference to all earthly interests—to them who seek it diligently, and by a patient continuance in well-doing—to them who seek it betimes, and while it may be found. *This seeking* is the same as *striving*. There is a careless kind of seeking, which will not be successful. Our saviour speaks of some, who shall seek him, and yet shall die in their sins—of some who seek him, not for the spiritual blessings which he bestows, but for inferior ends. If they seek the kingdom of heaven, yet they first seek what they shall eat and drink.

Under the light of revelation, it is probable, there are few, but who have an intention to obtain heaven. Depraved as human nature is, few are so abandoned to stupidity—so lost to the sentiments of happiness and misery, as to feel no impression from the terrors of the world to come. To dwell with devouring fire, with everlasting burnings is so tremendous a thought, that even careless sinners are sometimes afraid. They wish to escape the awful scene, which the gospel opens to their view. In their serious hours they form some purposes of repentance, they make some addresses to the God of mercy, and they think of turning to a virtuous life. But their resolutions, prayers and endeavors are faint, transient and ineffectual. If they may be said to *seek* heaven ; yet they

do not *strive* for it, with that engagedness of heart, that constancy of resolution, that perseverance of application, with which combatants contend for victory, or with which men ordinarily pursue their worldly ends. If they seek, yet they seek not first the kingdom of God. If they attend at all to the care of their souls, yet they attend not to it as the one thing needful. There is no reason to think, that such a seeking as this, will avail. The gospel enjoins a different kind of seeking. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." "So run that ye may obtain." "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endures to everlasting life." "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force—they press into it." This is the seeking which God requires, and in no other way can we promise ourselves success.

The object in view is so great, that our prayers to obtain it cannot be too importunate—our labours to secure it cannot be too earnest, constant and persevering.

We need not fear, that we shall strive with too much engagedness. But we must be careful that we place not a wrong kind of dependance on our striving. We may hope for success, when we seek with earnestness and diligence, because God has required us thus to seek. But still we must remember that we are unworthy creatures—that our sins have forfeited every blessing—that whatever good we obtain, it is a gift of grace—that we have no claim on God's justice in virtue of any thing we have done, nor any claim on his promise, till we have actually complied with the terms of it; and, that as long as we remain impenitent, we are exposed to the condemnation of God's law, whatever pains to escape it we have



taken. We are to strive earnestly, but humbly ; we are to rely not on the value of what we have done to obtain salvation, but on the grace of God, who has offered salvation to us, awakened our desires to secure it, and excited our diligence in seeking it.

If we indulge the proud thought, that God would be unjust and cruel, to deny us salvation after we have done so much in the business—or that he is unkind to keep us so long in fear and suspense, when we have been so importunate for the assurance of hope—or that he is partial in withholding from us those comforts and joys, which others have obtained in a shorter time and with less pains ; we then turn our strivings into a vain and offensive self-righteousness ; we dishonour God, and defeat the otherwise hopeful success of our endeavours ; we discover the same haughty and impatient spirit, which God condemns in some ancient hypocrites. “Your words have been stout against me—Ye have said, It is vain to serve God : and what profit is it, that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts ? And now we call the proud happy ; yea, they who tempt God are even delivered.”

2. Another cause why many will not be able to enter, is *dilatoriness*. “*Strive*,” says our Lord, strive now, “for many will seek,” will seek hereafter, and “shall not be able to come in.”

But why shall they not be able ? Because the door will then be shut. Thus it is added, “when once the master of the house has risen up and has shut to the door ; and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us ; then shall he say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.” You will here observe,

for it is worthy to be observed for your encouragement, as well as for your caution, that Christ does not say, "Strive, for many who *now* strive, will fail." But "strive, for many *will*, at another day, seek to enter, and shall not be able." Here is no intimation, that your *present* striving is of doubtful success: but a solemn warning, that there will be a *future* seeking, which shall be unavailing.

There are few, I believe, who entirely give up the purposes of religion. Though they feel a present disinclination, or indifference to it, they have a secret design to engage in it by and by. They know they must die; and they cannot but suspect, at least, that there is something serious and important to follow after death. For so great and certain an event as death they wish to be prepared. They, however, see no reason to conclude, but that they may live some years longer: or, if death should come sooner than they expect, they hope it will make a gradual approach and give them some warning; so that they may at last resort to the refuge of a death-bed repentance. Thus rashly presuming on a future opportunity, they delay to secure an entrance, until the door is shut. Then they will cry for admission; but, alas! they will cry in vain. "In that day, many will say to Christ, Lord, Lord, open to us; but he will answer, I know you not."

By the day here mentioned may be intended the day of final judgment, when all must appear before Christ to receive according to the deeds done in the body; or the day of death, when conscious sinners feel themselves going to the awful presence of their judge. The latter will be an event as decisive as the former. This will terminate their probation, and fix their eternal condi-

tion. In this extremity many, who despised the voice of mercy, while it pleaded with them, will plead in vain for that mercy which they have despised. "When distress and anguish come upon them; then," says wisdom, "shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me, but shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

We will not, indeed, presume to say, what the mercy of God may do for sinners. We hope, it may arrest and deliver some in the latest period of a guilty life. But if we consider, that the death-bed confessions and prayers of the guilty usually proceed from the terrors of impending destruction, rather than from a calm and sober sense of sin; that their repentance, in such a situation, is ordinarily attended with much perplexity of mind, and confusion of thought; that there is a most criminal abuse of God's mercy and patience in delaying repentance to so late and unseasonable a time; that promising appearances made in sickness are often dissipated by returning health; that the powers of the mind, in such a condition, are very uncertain; that stupidity on the one hand, or despair on the other, may incapacitate sinners for any religious exercises, and that the suddenness of their death may prevent the application of this intended remedy; we must see that the least confidence in it is the madness of presumption. They may not have an opportunity, or a capacity to cry for mercy, when death comes, or they may cry and not be heard. Or, if *dying* prayers may be accepted; yet this is certain, death will eternally seal the guilt and fix the doom of those who die impenitent in their sins, and no entreaties will, after that, be regarded. The workers of iniquity must go away into everlasting punishment. They

who will not come to the throne of grace for pardon, will find no grace at the throne of justice.

3. *False dependences* are another cause of the destruction of sinners. "Many will stand without and knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer, I know you not, whence ye are. Then shall they begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not; depart from me."

These words of our saviour are designed to shew, how much dependance many will place on their professed relation to Christ, their enjoyment of spiritual privileges, and their attendance on instituted ordinances. Such confidence will they have in these things, that they will hardly be undeceived, when they find themselves in another world. But this confidence, strong as it is, will utterly fail them. Christ will say to them, "I know you not."

As long as men satisfy themselves with a loose, partial, careless religion, they will not strive to enter heaven by the strait gate, for they hope to enter by a wide gate—they will not submit to the strict terms of the gospel, for they have proposed to themselves easier terms. If they trust in their profession, their privileges, their observance of ordinances, their performance of external duties, their freedom from gross vices, or any thing short of the religion of the gospel, they will reject, as impertinent to *their* case, this command of Christ, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," because they imagine, they have secured an entrance by a freer passage.

Be careful, then, that you form just conceptions of the nature of religion—that you gain an acquaintance with your own hearts—and that you

build your hopes on the foundation of God's word. Be persuaded to make religion a serious business, and to strive for an entrance at the strait gate; for this is the only passage into the kingdom of heaven. Wait not until the door is shut. Delay not at all, for you know not when the door will be shut. Ask and knock, while mercy stands at the gate to invite you in, and to tell you that still there is room. Hear her voice while it is called to day, and harden not your hearts. Know the things of your peace in this your day, lest they be hidden from your eyes. Behold, now is the day of salvation. If you neglect this great salvation, how will you escape?

Fourthly. The next thing which falls under our consideration, is the *character* of those whom our Lord will reject, and of those whom he will admit, at the last day. "I tell you I know you not—depart from me all workers of iniquity." The reverse of this is the character of those whom he will receive: they are workers of righteousness. So he instructs us. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my father, who is in heaven."

You will observe, that those whom Christ excludes from his kingdom are *workers* of iniquity. Sin is their *work*, their *business*, their *delight*.

Good men often fall into particular acts of sin, but they are not *workers* of it, or servants to it to obey it in the lusts thereof. They may be overtaken with it, when they, in general, flee from it; but they do not pursue it with a desire to overtake and embrace it. In this sense John says, "He that is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." There is in him a

principle which opposes sin. He does not commit or practise sin as a servant of it; but he watches against it, shuns the known temptations to it, abstains from the appearance of it; and, whenever he is drawn into it, he reflects upon it with humiliation for it, with repentance of it, with prayers for grace to preserve him from it, and with resolutions to keep himself. Those imperfections and miscarriages, which are not allowed and indulged, but are soon followed with penitent reflections and humble resolutions, do not denominate us *workers* of iniquity, and will not exclude us from the kingdom of Christ; for these are not inconsistent with a principle of faith and holiness in the heart; but are incident to sanctified souls in this imperfect state. They are the works of that law in the members, which wars against the law of the mind.

We may farther observe, that *all* workers of iniquity will be condemned. Not one habitual sinner—not one, who knowingly lives in wickedness, and finally dies in impenitence, will be admitted into heaven. It is not merely this or that sin; but it is any and every sin indulged and allowed, which shuts the door against men. You think, perhaps, that you shall enter in at the gate, because you are not a drunkard, an extortioner, a thief, a liar. But remember, other vicious characters are excluded as well as these. If there be any one kind of iniquity, which you love and practise, and which you refuse to renounce, there is no place in heaven for you; for nothing enters there which defiles or works abomination.—“Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves,

nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." You will observe, the apostle does not say, that the man in whom *all* these vicious characters meet, but the man to whom *any one* of them belongs, will be excluded from the kingdom of glory. If there be any one sin, which you cherish and retain, your souls are guilty and defiled; and before you can enter into heaven, you must be washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of God. Saint John says, "They who do God's commandments," they who have respect to them all without reserve, "shall enter through the gates into the city; for without are dogs, and forcerers, and adulterers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whatsoever loveth and maketh a lie."

You see, then, that, whatever duties you seem to perform, and whatever qualifications, you think, you possess; if you be not new creatures— if you have not the love of God in your hearts; but still retain some known wickedness, some favorite lust; you cannot enter through the strait gate.

Though you make a good profession, yet if your hearts and lives be not conformed to it,— though you call Christ your Lord, yet if you do not the things which he says, he will disown you as none of his. "Behold, thou art called a Jew," says the apostle, "and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God—circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is become uncircumcision. For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in

the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

The highest attainments in knowledge will not avail to your acceptance, without a correspondent temper and practice. Though you hear Christ teaching in your streets, as well as in his own house, and attend upon his instructions both in season and out of season ; yet if you regard not the things which he says, he will profess unto you, that he never knew you. They who hear his sayings and do them not, are like a man, who builds his house on the sand. They only are blessed, who hear his word and keep it. Though you have all knowledge, and understand all mysteries, yet without charity, you are nothing.

Farther ; Though you should be greatly awakened in hearing the word, and should feel pungent convictions of sin and strong terrors from the representations of hell and judgment ; yet if these sensations die away, and leave your hearts unchanged, and your lives unreformed, you have no claim to heaven. When Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance and the judgment to come, Felix trembled. But he soon dismissed the solemn subject for the present ; and we do not learn, that he ever resumed it. Judas felt the anguish and horror of guilt ; but he remained a son of perdition, and is gone to his place.

Yea ; though you should not only be alarmed by the threatenings, but also comforted by the promises of the gospel ; yet if there be not an abiding conformity to its holy precepts, your guilt remains. We read of some, who not only hear the word, but receive it with joy, and yet have no root in themselves. These, in a time of temptation, fall away. They are like stony ground, in which the seed sown springs up speedily ; but because it has no root, it withers and dies.



However strict and regular you are in your attendance on the duties of devotion and the ordinances of Christ, if your hearts be not devoted to him, your claims to heaven will be rejected. There are some who eat and drink in his presence, and still remain workers of iniquity. In Christ neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but a new creature. Devotional duties are highly important as the means of holiness, but if you substitute them in the place of holiness, and make the whole of your religion to consist in them, they then become unprofitable and vain.

And, finally, whatever you do in religion, if you be not influenced by the motives which the gospel proposes to you—motives taken from the character of God, and your relation to him—from the things which he has done for you, and the glorious hopes which he has set before you—if instead of these motives, you admit only those which respect the present world; your religion is but external; it has no place in the heart, and will not be accepted of that holy being, who requires truth in the inward parts.

As we have violated the purity, and incurred the penalty of the divine law, we must know, that our present repentance and future obedience cannot be the *ground* of our pardon here, nor of our happiness hereafter. This must be the free mercy of God, which he exercises toward sinners through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are never to consider any thing which we do as having the least degree of meritorious influence in procuring our salvation; but we are to ascribe this, in every stage of its progress, to the grace of God in the redeemer.

Personal holiness, however, is a necessary qual-

ification for heaven, for without it we are incapable of the spiritual felicity there to be enjoyed.

Our works of righteousness are necessary fruits of that repentance and faith by which we become interested in the purchased and promised salvation. Whatever pretensions we may make to sorrow for sin, and reliance on the Saviour, if still we are workers of iniquity, we never have sorrowed after a godly sort, nor believed to the saving of the soul.

Besides ; as the publick process of the last day is designed to be a revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; therefore our works will be the matter of the final enquiry, and on these the judgment will proceed, for these only are visible to others. Hence it is said, that “ God will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every man according to his *works* ; and according to the *deeds* done in the body ; and every man shall receive according to that he hath *done*, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

We see, then, what is necessary to our finding admission into heaven through the strait gate. We must renounce sin with godly sorrow, repair to the saviour with humble faith in his righteousness, yield ourselves to God to serve him in new obedience, resolve, in reliance on his grace, to depart from *all* iniquity, and conform to the *whole* will of God, and in hope of eternal life which God has promised, patiently continue in well-doing, and be faithful to the death. Thus we shall receive the crown of life.

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## SERMON XII.

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*The awful Condition of those who shall be excluded  
from the kingdom of Heaven.*

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LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

**F**ROM these words we have observed,  
That our entrance into heaven is by a *strait gate*  
—that there are *many*, who will *fail* of entering  
in at this gate—that the causes of their miscarriage  
will be *negligence*, *delay*, and *false dependence*  
—That the character of such as will be excluded  
is *workers of iniquity*.

These observations have already been illustrated.

We will now,

Fifthly ; attend to the representation, which our Lord makes of the awful condition of those who shall be excluded from his heavenly kingdom.

When we attend to this representation, it would be well, that we should consider it as a serious reality, not a fanciful fiction. As it is made by the son of God himself, who came to be our teacher, and who is appointed to be our judge, we may be assured, that it was intended, not for our amusement, but for our warning.

1. He warns us, that impenitent finners at the last day, will be sorely disappointed—will meet with a doom, which they little expected, and which they did not really believe, though it had been declared to them.

When the door is shut, “they will stand without, and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us: but he shall say, I know you not, whence ye are. Then shall they begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets; but he shall answer them, I tell you, I know you not; depart from me, all workers of iniquity.” Such a bold confidence will many carry with them, that they will dare to repeat their application and urge their claim for admittance, even after denial. When they receive the repulse, they will hardly believe it is given in earnest.

It is probable, that there are few in this world, who seriously think, they are in much danger of misery in another. Can it be imagined, that, under such an apprehension, men would possess that ease and tranquillity, and pursue the pleasures and interests of the world with that avidity and constancy, which are generally to be seen? The unconcernedness with respect to things of futurity, and the engagedness with respect to things of time, every where so apparent, are strong indications, either that men in general do not believe a future state of rewards and punishments, or that they seldom think of it with any degree of attention, or that they flatter themselves with the idea of a present title to, or with the hope of a future preparation for happiness in the world to come. When therefore they arrive to that world, and find the reality of those things which once they disbelieved, and the importance of those things

which they never laid to heart ; or perceive that the hopes on which they lived were all delusive, and the presumptions which they entertained were rash and unfounded ; what astonishment and confusion will overwhelm them ? Even in the present life, nothing is more painful, than the disappointment of high wrought hopes. The loss of any temporal good is more severely felt in proportion to the confidence which we placed in it. A calamity, which we could have borne with patience, if we had foreseen its approach, is insupportable when it comes by surprize. What amazement, then, will seize—what anguish will wring the hearts of presumptuous, deluded and unthinking sinners, when they find themselves, contrary to all their expectations, shut out of heaven, and consigned to eternal darkness.

Sinners of every description will meet with an unexpected fate. Infidels, who said in their hearts, there is no God—no judgment—no future punishment, will now see, that there is a righteous and a holy God able to judge and condemn them, and a place of awful punishment prepared to receive them—they will now see, that the gospel, which they despised as a fiction, is the revelation of God ; and that the solemn doctrines, which they treated as idle tales, are words of truth and soberness. They now can be infidels no longer : they believe and tremble.

They who presuming on the mercy of God, emboldened themselves to commit iniquity, will see, that he is just and holy, as well as kind and gracious ; that as he is abundant in goodness, so he will by no means clear the guilty.

The negligent and dilatory, who grounded their hopes on future opportunities of repentance ; and, because sentence against their evil works

was not executed speedily, encouraged their hearts to continue in impenitence, these will see, that God is not to be mocked---that he will not always bear the insolence and ingratitude of those who dare to trifle with his forbearance.

The secure and thoughtless will now be awakened from their stupidity by that wrath which comes upon them suddenly, while they promised themselves peace and safety.

Confident hypocrites will now hear their claims rejected and their reasonings confounded; and while they are but beginning to urge their vain pleas, their mouths will be stopped.

How cautious should we be, that we create not to ourselves a false peace by indulging self flattery, vain pride, rash presumption, or thoughtless stupidity? We thus not only lay an obstruction in the way of our repentance, but render our condemnation more intolerable.

2. The misery of impenitent finners will be greatly aggravated by the remembrance of past opportunities to obtain salvation.

When our Lord says, "The master of the house will shut to the door," he signifies, that there is a time, when the door is open. The cries, which he puts into the mouths of the excluded, "Lord, Lord, open to us", import, how desirous they will be of admission, after it is too late.

My friends, the great king has prepared a banquet; his fatlings are killed---his wine is mingled---his table is furnished---all things are ready. You are among those who are invited. You have been, and still are called to be his guests. The door of his house is now open, and to you he repeats his calls; "Who so is simple, let him turn in hither; and who so wanteth understanding, let him come, and eat of my bread, and drink of the

wine which I have mingled. Let him forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding." It is his gracious pleasure, that his house should be filled. He commands his servants to go forth, and bid all whom they find, and even compel them to come in. You have heard the invitation. Why do you delay? What is the business, or the pleasure which detains you. Go now; the door may soon be shut. Then, while the happy guests are rejoicing, in the presence, and feasting at the table of their Lord, you will stand lamenting without in the dark and stormy night, void of comfort, void of hope.

This is the bright season of God's patience and of your hope. It is now an accepted time. Pardon and glory are offered; repentance and obedience are urged. God's providence warns you, his word invites you, his spirit strives with you, and his mercy waits on you. But this clear—this smiling day is coming to an end: with many it is far spent. If you should let it pass away neglected, you will be shut out in utter darkness. With what anguish then will you remember the past calls of mercy which you have despised, the past strivings of the spirit which you have resisted, the past forbearance of God which you have abused? Will you not mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed, and your soul and spirit are tormented? Will you not lament in the language of the despairing youth in the Proverbs; "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof? I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them who instructed me." "Look diligently," then, "lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be

any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright; for you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance," or change of purpose in his father, "though he sought the blessing carefully with tears."

3. Our Saviour warns us, that self-confident sinners, in the midst of their vain pleas, will be silenced with a sudden rebuke. "Ye shall *begin* to stand without, and to knock, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us." They will but *begin*, they will not finish their application, before the Lord will answer them, "I know you not." When they begin to *resume* their arguments, he will interrupt them, "I tell you, I know you not; depart from me."

A consciousness of their guilt, a remembrance of their iniquities, and a view of the holiness of their judge, will cause their tongues to falter, while they are urging their claims to heaven. Their knocking and crying for admittance denote their earnest desire of the mercy, which once they despised. The repulse given them when they *begin* to plead, signifies what sudden conviction will seize them—what intolerable confusion will overwhelm them. Their sins will rise to the view of their consciences, and stand in frightful array before their eyes. They will see their own deformed character, as workers of iniquity. What place in heaven can there be for such? They will suddenly be convinced of a truth, of which they seldom thought before, that in the presence of a holy, all-seeing God, external forms, however specious, avail nothing, while iniquity is regarded in the heart. What torment will be added to disappointment, when the works on which they



depended, are rejected as vain and worthless, and conscience confirms the sentence? When the Lord comes to execute judgment, he will convince all who are ungodly of all the ungodly deeds, which they have impiously committed, and of all the hard speeches, which they have presumptuously spoken; every mouth will be stopped, and all the impenitent world will feel themselves guilty before him.

4. Our Lord expresses the misery of sinners in the future world by the phrase of their *departing from him*. "I know you not whence ye are; *depart from me*, all workers of iniquity."

God is an all-perfect and most glorious being. The happiness of rational creatures consists in the enjoyment of his favour. This is their life. His favour is communicated to men through the mediation of Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person. The happiness of heaven is therefore often expressed in scripture by the phrases of *seeing God*, and being *with Christ*.

The Psalmist says, "In God's presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for ever more." Our Saviour says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Saint Paul says, "I have a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better," than to abide in the flesh. "When Christ shall appear," says the apostle John, "We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." On the other hand, the misery of the wicked in the future world is expressed by their being separated from God, and from Christ, which is to be separated unto all evil. Our Lord tells us, that, at the last day, he will say to them on his left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

“These,” faint Paul says, “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” They will be banished from the gates of heaven, excluded from the favour of God and the compassion of the redeemer, shut out from the company of all holy beings, and barred from all hope of ever gaining the sacred mansions of comfort, peace and joy.

This leads us to observe,

5. The *absolute* and *peremptory manner*, in which Christ will thrust them from his presence. “I tell you, I know you not—depart from me.” It is vain to urge your claims, or press your arguments. I tell you, you cannot be received, for you are workers of iniquity. There is no mansion prepared for you here. Depart hence to the place prepared for such as you. The absoluteness of the final sentence will cut off all hope of a revocation. Some, perhaps, flatter themselves, that the threatenings of scripture intend no more than a *temporary* punishment, and that, if they should unhappily fall under the punishment threatened, they may still be delivered; and, after a proper purgation, be admitted to happiness. But our Lord certainly knew, what this punishment would be. He has here, and in several other places, given us a description of it in language well adapted to awaken and alarm careless and guilty souls. Do you find here any intimation, that it will be short, or that it will ever come to an end? Does not the whole complexion of this discourse indicate the contrary? Is it not said of the workers of iniquity, though they will seek to enter after the door is shut, they will not be able? Is not the sentence, “Depart from me,” expressed in the most absolute and unequivocal terms? Yea; has not Christ

declared, in so many words, "These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment." Where then do you find hope, that the door will afterward be opened to you? It is open now; what would you have more? Strive to enter before it is shut. Once shut it will be opened no more.

6. To give us the stronger idea of the future misery of sinners, our Saviour describes the *bitter lamentations*, with which they will depart from him. "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Their punishment will be, not only the loss of good, but the presence of evil. Their departure from God is not an extinction of being; this would prevent all wailing; but it is going away into a state of positive misery. The greatness of this misery is expressed in scripture by a variety of metaphors taken from such things, as, in the present life, we find to be most painful and tormenting. It is said, The wicked shall be turned into hell—cast into a furnace of fire—thrust out into utter darkness—consigned to the worst company, that of the devil and his angels—tormented with the worm which never dies—and, in general, that there is a strange punishment for the workers of iniquity, a punishment, which they will not believe, though one declare it to them, and which they cannot fully apprehend, though it were described to them. No wonder that there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Are there any too stout to bend their knees in repentance before God, and implore his mercy? Are there any who dare to provoke his jealousy by scoffing at the threatenings of his word, and spurning the punishment which he has denounced? Will your hearts be able to endure? Or will your hands be strong, when he shall deal with

you? The Lord himself has spoken, and he will do it.

7. Our Saviour adds, “Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God; and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.” The rich man, in the place of torments, “saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” The wicked in a state of punishment will have a distant, but mortifying view of the righteous in the regions of bliss. Through the gloomy shades of the infernal world, they will behold the sons of virtue gathering from all quarters under heaven, and taking their seats, with songs of triumph and joy, in the realms of eternal glory. There they will see not only the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs and other distinguished saints; but many of their contemporaries and acquaintances—many whom perhaps they despised as their inferiors, or reprobated as outcasts here on earth—and multitudes from unexpected parts of the world, who never enjoyed the advantages indulged to them.

If it should be your awful doom to be sent into this place of punishment, what pungent and tormenting reflections will arise from the distant sight of that glorious world with all its blessed inhabitants. There you will see some, who were your dear companions on earth, now for ever separated from you, no more to mingle in your company—some who set out with you in the religious life, but who pressed forward with ardour, when you turned back to the ways of sin, which have led you down to destruction—some who urged and encouraged you to persevere and hold out, but whose counsels you despised and rejected—

some whom you endeavored to corrupt from truth and virtue, and seduce into error and vice ; but who, by the grace of God, delivered themselves from your snares—some, who never enjoyed your privileges, but made a far better use of those which they had—some whom you regarded with contempt for their small abilities or obscure condition ; but who now are far above you mingling with angels and shining in glory—some whom you ridiculed for imputed superstition, preciseness and hypocrisy, but who receive from God the reward of their strict unyielding virtue, and humble unaffected piety. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth, when you shall behold them in the kingdom of heaven, while you, who had equal, or superior prospects, means and opportunities, are thrust down to the regions of darkness. But, beloved, let me hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

8. Our Lord closes this solemn scene with an observation, which he often made. “Behold there are last, which shall be first ; and there are first which shall be last.” Many who enjoy the greatest privileges, and seem to stand fairest for heaven, will be excluded ; while others, who appeared to be under peculiar disadvantages, and were thought far from the kingdom of God, will be admitted into it. God’s thoughts and ways are not as ours. Christ here has a primary reference to the Jews and gentiles. The former were God’s people, and to them the gospel was first sent ; but they rejected it, and with it the salvation which it brought : but the gentiles, to whom the gospel was preached after the Jews had rejected it, embraced it, when they heard it, and entered into the kingdom of God.

The observation has a still farther intendment. Many, who stand high in the charity of men, will be cast out of God's presence, as vile and abominable; while others, whose characters seem doubtful, or who are condemned by a censorious world, will be found to glory, honour and praise at the coming of Christ. Some boasting, self-confident professors will be driven away as odious hypocrites; while diffident, doubting, trembling souls, will be received as pure and upright before God. Some who have been favored with good instructions, virtuous examples, and every advantage of a religious education, will be excluded from heaven; while others, surrounded with difficulties, opposed by temptations, and almost unaided by human means, will so strive as to press in at the strait gate. Some, who sustained a sober character, and regularly attended on the ordinances of God's house, will be found but formalists and hypocrites; while others, whose visible character was for a time far more exceptionable, will by the renewing and sanctifying grace of God be brought to glory.

Trust not then in the opinion which men may form of you, or the applause which they may bestow upon you—trust not in your external advantages, your good education, or your regular and orderly manner of life. See that the love of religion possess your hearts, and the fear of God govern your actions. Paul says, “To me it is a small thing, that I should be judged of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self; for he that judgeth me is the Lord, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart.”

It is an awful thought that any, who have enjoyed your advantages and opportunities, and

who, in addition to these, have experienced the inward awakenings and excitations of the divine spirit, as has been the case with some of you—perhaps with many, should, after all, be shut out of heaven. Some such unhappy instances, doubtless, there will be. Take heed that you add not to the number.

How you shall enter in at the strait gate, the Saviour himself has taught you. His command is, “Strive to enter in.” This striving, you have seen, is something more, than asking for admission; for some who thus seek to enter, will not be able. It is something more, than hearing Christ teach, and eating and drinking in his presence; for some who can plead this, will be shut out. What is it then? It is renouncing all iniquity with godly sorrow, devoting yourselves unreservedly to a holy life, and pursuing this life faithfully to the death. The workers of iniquity must depart from Christ. They who do the will of God, will be received into the heavenly kingdom.

Some, when they hear that they must *strive*, entertain too limited an idea of the matter, as if striving consisted in fervour of prayer, and extraordinary attention to certain devotional exercises. If these were all, why were the persons mentioned in our text repulsed? Prayer and attendance on ordinances are but a part of the business. They are means, and useful means when applied in season, and with a view to the end. But to complete the idea of striving, there must be a steady persevering engagedness in the whole work of religion, without exception against any part of it. The word rendered, *Strive*, is borrowed from the publick games then in use. It alludes to the exertions with which combatants in a race or conflict, strove for the mastery. How did racers

strive for the prize proposed to them? Was it merely by earnest intreaties to the master of the games, that he would adjudge the prize to them? No: it was by entering the lists with resolution, throwing off every weight that might impede their running the race with activity and constancy, and pursuing it to the end. "Know ye not, that they who run in a race, run all; but one" only "receiveth the prize?" In the Christian race, there is a prize for all who will run: "So run that ye may obtain." "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but you an incorruptible. Run not as uncertainly; strive not as one that beateth the air. But keep under your bodies and bring them into subjection, lest, after all your hopes and prospects, you should be castaways."



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## SERMON XIII.

*Pilate's Inscription on the Cross of Christ.*

A Communion Sermon.

JOHN xix. 19—22.

And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross; and the writing was, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" This title then read many of the Jews, for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, "the King of the Jews;" but that he said, "I am the King of the Jews." Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

**T**HE Messiah was foretold, in ancient prophecy, under the character and title of a *king*, whose government should extend to all nations, but should be exercised in a peculiar manner over the Jews. His extensive dominion is described in the second Psalm; "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession." In the ninth chapter of Isaiah, he is described as sitting on the throne of David, and reigning over the house of Israel: "Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be on

his shoulder ; his name shall be called the prince of peace ; of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order and establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.”

As the Messiah was to make his personal appearance in Judea, and there first to display the blessings of his spiritual kingdom, he is described as eminently the king of the *Jews*. But the glorious things foretold concerning this *spiritual* kingdom, the Jews understood in a temporal and worldly sense. They imagined, that he would erect his throne in Jerusalem, their capital city ; would deliver them from the oppression of the Roman government, and would reduce all nations into a state of subjection to them.

When Jesus appeared and wrought miracles among them, and proclaimed the near approach of the kingdom of God, many were in high expectation, that they should soon see him at the head of their nation, spreading his dominion over the world. And impatient at his delay, they would have taken him by force and made him a king. But when they found, that their worldly expectations were not to be answered, mortified at their disappointment, they called him a deceiver, and sought his destruction. And, among other accusations, they alledged, that he had called himself a king, and thus had spoken against the authority of Cesar.

If Jesus had actually assumed the regal power in Judea, and had begun to raise an army for the expulsion of the imperial authority, they would have been highly gratified with the design, and would have resorted by thousands to his standard. But because he disclaimed all temporal dominion,

they refused to own him as the Messiah, and studied to effect his ruin. With this view they brought him before the Roman governor, and accused him as a seditious man, who had perverted the nation, and forbidden to pay tribute to Cesar.

Jesus explains before Pilate the nature of his kingdom. He says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from hence." Pilate asks, "Art thou a king then?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest, that I am, a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one, who is of the truth, heareth my voice." "The kingdom which I claim is a kingdom of truth and reason; not of force and arms; and my subjects are they who learn and love the truth; who hear and obey my voice—not they who take up arms and fight to dethrone monarchs, subvert established governments, and gain worldly dominion for a favorite master."

The governor is now fully convinced, that Jesus is innocent, and that the charge brought against him is groundless and malicious. From this time he endeavors, in some peaceable way, to effect his release. He proposes every expedient, which he could think of, to pacify the enraged multitude, and save the unoffending prisoner. But they persist in their demand of a sentence against him; and urge their demand by this argument, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cesar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cesar." The argument prevailed. Though Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, yet he feared, that by discharging him, he should endanger himself. He was impressed with the

idea, that the Jews, in their present state of irritation, would accuse him to the emperor, of having protected a usurper; and therefore to save himself from danger he delivered Jesus to be crucified. But, at the same time, he made an open and publick declaration in favor of the prisoner. "He took water, and washed his hands in the presence of the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just man: see ye to it." And he caused to be fixed on the cross an inscription purporting the innocence and dignity of the sufferer.

Crucifixion was a kind of punishment in use among the Romans; but inflicted only on slaves. The Jews adopted it from the Romans. When a person was to suffer this kind of death, the Romans used to publish his name, and the crime for which he was punished. This was done, either by proclamation, or by an inscription fixed over his head. The inscription was made in large black characters on a whitened board nailed to the top of the cross, so as to be conspicuous and legible at a distance. In conformity to this usage, Pilate wrote a title and placed it on the cross of Jesus, in these words, **THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

Pilate seems to have written, as Caiphas prophesied, concerning Christ, "not of himself," or by the natural dictates of his own mind, but by a divine overruling influence. For surely the man, who, from a natural timidity, had just before delivered Jesus to be crucified, lest he should endanger his head to the emperor, would not now, of himself, proclaim this Jesus the king of the Jews, in his own hand writing on the cross. There must undoubtedly have been a providential interposition in the case.

His writing in this form was so remarkable, as to be noticed by all the evangelists. And no less remarkable was his peremptory adherence to the form, when the chief priests importuned him to alter it; and instead of asserting, "This is the king of the Jews, to write, "He *said*, I am the king of the Jews." Pilate's answer, "What I have written, I have written," expresses a resolution in the case, which we should not have expected from a man, who, through fear of being accused to the emperor, had so lately sentenced Jesus to be crucified, as one who had called himself the king of the Jews.

This declaration of Pilate was of great importance to vindicate the innocence, and proclaim the dignity of Christ; and it was so circumstanced, that it tended much to spread his name in the world, and to open the way for the propagation of his gospel. Christ says, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." His death on the cross, though intended by his enemies to sink his name in darkness, was the occasion of diffusing the knowledge, and establishing the credit of his religion. And the testimony of Pilate undoubtedly had great influence in this matter. For, in the first place, Pilate was a man of high eminence and distinction. He was governor of Judea under the emperor; and his testimony would be regarded, among both Jews and Romans, much more than that of a private person. The opportunities which he had, and the pains which he took to examine the character and works of Jesus, and to investigate the nature and evidence of the allegations against him, would add much to the weight and credibility of his testimony. and certainly he was under a very powerful temptation to have declared his prisoner guilty, if he had found him

fo, becaufe the general voice of the people, efpecially of the ruling and influential men among the people, was againft him. But Pilate, under all his advantages to know the truth, and under all his prejudices againft the prifoner, repeatedly declared him innocent. And when fentence of condemnation was extorted from him by the clamours and threats of the people, he washed his hands in their prefence, declaring himfelf pure from the blood of that juft man; and when he delivered him to be crucified, he fixed on the crofs his own testimony, that this man, who was now fuffering for having called himfelf the king of the Jews, was of right their king. This title of fo unufual a kind would naturally attract the attention, and excite the enquiry of the fpectators, and lead many to the knowledge of the extraordinary character of this wonderful fufferer, who otherwife might have been confidered by them merely as a common offender.

We may obferve farther, fecondly,

This testimony of Pilate was given in a moft conspicuous place, and on a moft publick occafion.

There was collected, at this time, a vaft multitude of people. It was the feafon of the paffover, when the males throughout Judea, and many Jews and Profelytes from other parts, afsembled at Jerufalem. The execution of a perfon, who had become fo famous by his doctrines and works, and by the controverfy concerning him, would naturally draw vaft numbers together. As he was put to death under the authority of the emperour, and as the Roman officers and foldiers, who were ftationed at Jerufalem, were called out to preferve order on the occafion, there muft have been many ftangers, as well as Jews, prefent at the crucifixion. And as the execution was in a place nigh to

the city, we must suppose that almost all the inhabitants of the city, and the strangers occasionally there, went out to see the transactions of the day. So that Pilate's testimony to Christ's kingly authority must have been generally known. "It was read of many." And it was of such singular tenor, that they who read it, would communicate it to others.

It is also remarked, thirdly, by the historians, That the inscription was written in *Hebrew*, *Greek* and *Latin*, the three languages then in most common use. The *Hebrew* language was understood in Judea and the parts adjacent, and by many of the Romans, who had been conversant in Judea, since it became a province of the empire. The *Latin* was the native tongue of the Romans. The *Greek* was very extensively known. It was the learned language of the day. Most men of education were acquainted with it. So that this testimony of Pilate was made as publick as possible. It was known almost as extensively, as the crucifixion itself.

This circumstance in our Lord's death will suggest to us some profitable reflections.

1. We have reason to admire the divine wisdom in giving such striking evidence of the innocence and dignity of Jesus Christ, even in the time of his greatest sufferings.

Jesus came into the world to be the Redeemer of our fallen race. "We are not redeemed with corruptible things ; but with the precious blood of Christ himself, who was ordained before the foundation of the world, and was manifested in these last times for us, who by him do believe in God." The wisdom of God did not see fit to forgive guilty mortals without some adequate sacrifice made for their sins. And to this grand purpose no fac-

rifice was adequate, but that of Jesus the son of God.

Death naturally indicates weakness; and judicially it indicates guilt. Mankind in seeing a person die, are led to view him as a poor impotent creature, and in seeing one suffer by the hand of the executioner, they are led to view him as a criminal. Now that the death of Christ might not be considered, either as the mere effect of natural weakness, or as the judicial effect of personal guilt, God was pleased at this time, to give some remarkable evidences of his innocence and dignity. Hence we are encouraged to trust in his sacrifice as sufficient to expiate our guilt, and to commit ourselves to his power as sufficient to save us from destruction.

The meekness, serenity, patience and benevolence, which he exhibited in his sufferings, were proofs of his superior virtue and holiness. The foolish and inconsistent accusations, which his enemies brought against him, and the contradictory testimonies, by which they endeavoured to support their charges, were proofs of the purity and integrity of his life. The ample, repeated and solemn testimony, which the Roman governour gave in his favour, must have gone far to establish in the minds of the spectators a high opinion of his character. Besides all this, God interposed his own awful testimony, which nothing, but the most obstinate and determined incredulity, could resist. The heavens were wrapt in darkness, the frame of nature was convulsed, the rocks were rent in pieces, the monuments of the dead were burst open, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, earth and sky were thrown into agonies, when Jesus bowed his head and gave up the ghost.



Such a concurrence of circumstances, all singular, and some stupendous, in favour of the suffering Saviour, forced conviction on many, and struck astonishment into all. One says, "Surely this was a righteous man." Another exclaims, "This was the son of God." "And all the people, who came together to that sight, seeing what was done, smote their breasts, and returned."

2. We see that there is a great inconsistency in the conduct of vicious men. They have understanding to discern, and conscience to feel their moral obligations, and yet by the interests, honours and pleasures of the world, they are drawn into actions palpably inconsistent with these obligations. They know what is right, and practise what is wrong. They see the good, and choose the evil.

This inconsistency appeared in Pilate. Though, as historians say, he was a man of great cruelty and pride, yet the innocent and amiable character of Jesus struck his mind so powerfully, that he wished to discharge him. Hearing the people importunate to have him crucified, Pilate endeavoured to save him by proposing a lighter punishment. When this proposal was rejected, the governor offered to release him in compliance with the custom of the feast, which required that one prisoner, whom the people demanded, should be set at liberty. When this offer was refused, he next, to move their compassion, exhibited Jesus, suffering under the abuses of a brutal soldiery; lacerated with thorns, mangled with stripes, besmeared with blood, bedaubed with spittle; and said, "Behold the man!" Has he not suffered enough? Finding them still pertinacious, he yielded; and rather than hazard his place, he delivered Jesus to be crucified. His conscience dictated

the release of the innocent prisoner; the love of honour urged his condemnation. The latter prevailed. Still Pilate is dissatisfied with himself. He knows, he has done wrong. And what shall he do next?—To pacify his troubled mind, he takes water and washes his hands, asserts his innocence, and casts the whole guilt of the transaction on the Jews. Then, by a singular inscription on the cross, he proclaims Jesus the king of the Jews.

See what contradiction—what inconsistency there is in his conduct—what perplexity and distraction in his feelings! He chose to do right; but the fear of losing his place, and perhaps his life, interposed. He sacrificed a man, whom he knew to be innocent, rather than expose himself to the danger of an impeachment. And when he has done, still he is restless, and contrives one expedient after another to quiet his guilty mind.

How much better it would have been to have acted right in the first instance. This would have saved him from much perplexity and embarrassment. Had he not only declared Jesus innocent, but refused also to condemn him, he would have been clear from the guilt of his blood. But by delivering him into the hands of his enemies, he stained his own hands with innocent blood; and though he washed them with soap and nitre, the stain of his guilt remained.

Known wickedness leaves a burden on the mind, which can be removed only by deep repentance, and humble application to the mercy of God. Sinners often feel a struggle between virtue and vice—between a right and a wrong conduct. In the conflict the love of pleasure, a regard to interest, or some worldly motive steps in, decides the contest and gives the victory to vice. After the action is past, there is time for cool reflection.

Now the sinner condemns himself. He regrets the evil which he has done. He would recal it ; but it is too late. He contrives to palliate it. He lays the blame on others, imputes much to temptation, and perhaps seeks relief in some superstitious rites. But after all, his iniquity, is marked before him, and can be effaced only by the tears of godly sorrow : guilt lies on his soul, and the only expedient for relief is a penitent resort to the forgiving mercy of an offended God. “ Thou desirest not sacrifice,” says David, “ else would I give it. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise.” Great peace have they who love God’s law ; but there is no peace to the wicked. They cannot rest.

3. We see, that the wisdom of God can overrule the wickedness of men to advance the designs of his grace.

The Jewish priests and rulers insulted Jesus with the mock honours of a king. They crowned him with thorns, clothed him in purple, saluted him in derision, bowed the knee before him, and said, “ Hail King of the Jews.” They brought him to Pilate and obtained sentence of death against him— they saw him nailed to the cross. Now, they imagined, his kingly dignity was come to a ridiculous end, and all his pretended glory was extinguished in eternal infamy. But here he is proclaimed a king, and declared to be the son of God, in a manner which gave an extensive spread, and a perpetual honour to his name. The very means, which they used to stop the progress of his religion, confirmed its credit, and drew multitudes to embrace it.

How blind is the policy of man ! How unsearchable are the counsels of God ! “ The wrath of

man shall praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he will restrain."

The persecution which arose about Stephen, and which was intended to extirpate, at once, the religion of Christ, was the occasion of its more rapid and extensive propagation; for the ministers of Christ, dispersed by this persecution, went every where preaching the word, and the hand of the Lord was with them.

When Paul was in bonds, his enemies imagined, that by confining so noted a preacher, they had given a mighty check to the gospel. But his bonds turned rather to the furtherance of the gospel, by warming the zeal and increasing the activity of other preachers, and by giving him leisure to commit to writing, for the benefit of succeeding ages, those glorious doctrines, which he had before taught only by his preaching.

The unbelief of the Jews was the occasion of enriching the gentiles; for it was the means of sending the apostles into all the world to disseminate the glad tidings of salvation, which, at first, were proclaimed to Jews only.

God's ways are not as our ways, nor are his thoughts as our thoughts. O the depth of his wisdom! His judgments are past finding out. Let us trust him at all times, and pour out our hearts before him. He can do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

4. How much should Christians delight to spread the favour of the Redeemer's name in the earth? Pilate, though a lover of honor more than of Christ, yet declared him a just man, and published his title as king of the Jews. Shall any of us deny to Christ that honor, which was paid him by a heathen—by Pilate? Shall we treat his gospel and his ordinances with neglect? Shall we decline the

profession of his name, and refuse to take a seat at his table? Shall we, when his enemies reproach him, sit silent, and never speak a word in his favor? Shall we be content to live and die, without giving the world to know, whether we believe in him or not? Whether we own him as our king, or reject him as a usurper?

How many are there, who treat Christ with less respect than did this heathen governor? He declared Jesus to be innocent; to be a righteous person; to be a king. And though he gave him up to death, yet he bare testimony that he did not deserve it. How many are there, who never acknowledge him at all; who make no profession of his religion; who give no testimony of regard to him? And of those, who in words profess to know him, how many in works deny him? If we call him a king, let us shew ourselves to be his subjects by obedience to his laws, attendance on his ordinances, and reliance on his promises. And as fellow subjects of the same prince, let us love one another, and be fellow workers unto his kingdom.

5. Pilate, as we have seen, was stedfast in his declaration. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.

When the governor had publicly testified, that Jesus was a king, no importunity could move him to retract, or in the least to alter his testimony. "What I have written, I have written." Let us have the same resolution. Have we made a profession of faith in, and obedience to Christ? Let us maintain it, and live in conformity to it. If any would seduce us from it, let us answer them, "We have believed, and therefore we have spoken; and what we have spoken, we have spoken. We have sworn and we will perform it, that we will walk as becomes the gospel. Jesus is always

the fame. He cannot deny himself; we will not deny him. We will pay him our vows. If it seem evil to you to serve him, choose ye this day whom ye will serve. As for us we will serve him whom we have owned as our Lord. To whom else can we go? He has the words of eternal life." This is the language in which we should answer gainsayers. We are to consider well what we engage, to sit down and count the cost. And when we have deliberately and rationally formed our resolution, in that we should abide. It does not become a Christian to use lightness; to follow every wind of doctrine; his profession should not be yea, and nay; but, like the promises of Christ, yea and amen. It is a good thing, that the heart be established with grace. Let us choose the religion of Christ; and abide in it without change.

6. We see how inclined men are to cast the blame of their sins upon other people.

Pilate, in compliance with the demand of the Jews, delivered Jesus to be crucified; and that the fault might appear to be theirs, rather than his, he wrote on the cross, *This is the King of the Jews*. They are crucifying their king. So he had said just before; "I am innocent of the blood of this just man: see ye to it."

Guilt is a heavy burden to the conscience; and every man chooses to transfer it from himself to some other. Adam, after his transgression endeavored to exculpate himself by imputing the fault to the woman; and she palliated her crime by ascribing it to the guileful temptation of the serpent. It is better, however, for every one honestly to see, and ingenuously to confess his own faults, and, instead of pacifying his conscience by vain excuses, to remove his guilt by real repentance.

Jesus has borne our sins in his own body on the cross. Let us by faith repair to him, who has been made a sin-offering for us, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him. "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from the law of sin and death."

Under a sense of our guilt, let us apply to the blood of Christ, for "this will cleanse us from all sin." "If we say, we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive them."

Let us sit down at the table of our Lord, with hearts relying on him, who on the cross made himself an offering for our guilt; and with resolutions of obedience to him, who on the cross was proclaimed our king. It is not eating at his table, but doing his will, that entitles us to his approbation. "Not every one," says he, "that calls me his Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven."

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# SERMON XIV.



*The Disciples gazing after their ascending Lord.*



A Communion Sermon.



ACTS i. 10, 11.

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up ; behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

**A**FTER our Lord had risen from the dead, he tarried on earth about the space of forty days ; during which time he had several interviews with his disciples, conversed with them familiarly on things relating to his kingdom ; gave them such instructions and encouragements, as were necessary to guide and animate them in their future work ; and, on a day prefixed, he led them out to Bethany, a village nigh to Jerusalem, where, in consequence of previous notice a large number of believers had assembled to be witnesses of his ascension. When he was come to the place, he stood—he lifted up his hands and blessed his chos-



en disciples—he fervently implored the divine blessing to attend them, and renewed the gracious promises which had before been made to them : and while he was blessing them, praying for them, and commending them to God ; and while their eyes were intently fixed upon him, “ he was parted from them ;” he rose into the air, ascended toward heaven, “ and a cloud received him out of their sight.” Here they stood with their eyes fixed on that spot in the sky, where they lost the sight of him ; and here they would longer have stood, had not the voice of an angel summoned them away. “ While they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as Jesus went up two men,”—men in form, but by the splendor of their appearance known to be angels, “ stood by them, and said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing into heaven ? This same Jesus, who is now taken from you into heaven, shall so come, as ye have seen him go into heaven.” On this advice they returned to Jerusalem ; and there assembling with other devout persons, they spent their time in such religious exercises, as were adapted to comfort them in present trials, and to prepare them for future labours.

In the words, which have been read, there are two things to be remarked.

First ; The *posture* in which the disciples stood, after they had lost sight of their ascending Lord. And, Secondly, The *expostulation* of the angels with them on this occasion.

First ; The *posture*, in which the disciples stood, after the ascending Saviour had disappeared from their eyes, is worthy to be remarked. “ They looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up ;” and in this attitude they seem to have continued, after the cloud had received him out of their sight. In this fixed and gazing posture we might

expect to find them after such a scene, as had just past ; For,

1. This posture was naturally expressive of the *disappointment* which they felt.

They had all along, while their master was with them, expected, that he would erect a temporal kingdom, and advance his countrymen to a superiority over other nations, and his particular friends to a superiority over other Jews ; nor could they, by all his premonitions, be persuaded to give up this flattering hope. His death, indeed, gave it a painful shock but did not destroy it. After this event, some of them say, “ We had hoped, that he should have redeemed Israel,” intimating, that their hope was staggered by his unexpected death. But when they saw him risen from the dead, their languishing hope was revived ; and they asked him, “ Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?” He answered them in a manner, which rebuked their enquiry, but did not wholly extinguish their hope. “ It is not for you to know the times and seasons, which the father hath put in his own power ; but ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusaleum, in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” “ When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up from them, and translated beyond their sight.” Their worldly expectations were now at an end. Their Lord was gone—He was gone ; and they were to see him no more. Their hope, so long entertained, and now so suddenly and totally disappointed, fixed their attention to the spot, where they last had seen him, and where he had vanished from their sight. Their gazing attitude expressed those ardent wishes which suc-

ceeded to their late flattering expectations. So if your most valuable treasure should be irrecoverably lost in the deep, disappointment and despair would, for a time, fix your eyes on the spot, where you saw it sink.

2. This attitude was expressive of *affection*.

When we take leave of a dear friend, who is going from us to return no more, we follow him with our eyes, and strive to catch the last distant sight of him; and after he disappears, still we look—and look—and still we long to recover one glimpse more of the parting object. When a friend is dead, we inspect and handle his cold remains; we follow him to the grave; we open his coffin to take one view more. When he is deposited in the earth, we look again. We sigh, we weep when the falling dust covers him forever from our sight. We take a mournful pleasure in visiting the ground where he lies, and in reading over and over the dear name inscribed on his monument.

Similar were the sensations of the disciples, when they looked at their ascending Lord, and gazed up into heaven after his disappearance. They had, for years been his constant attendants; often had they been charmed with his conversation, and enraptured with his devotion; often had they received from him favors, which no other friend could give, and had seen him perform such works, as convinced them, that God was with him. He was now parted from them. No more should they hear from his lips those divine instructions which had been so pleasing; those sweet consolations which had been so refreshing; those ardent prayers which had been so enlivening. They remembered, how their hearts had burned within them, when they heard him speak as never man spake, and pray as never man prayed. No wonder, that they looked at him stedfastly as he

ascended ; and that they still stood gazing after he was gone from their sight.

3. This attitude expressed *amazement*.

Never had they witnessed such a scene as they now beheld in Bethany. Here were assembled more than five hundred brethren to see Jesus for the last time. Hither the Lord had called his particular disciples, whom he designed to be his apostles and witnesses. Here he talked with them, renewed former promises, gave fresh assurances of his presence, prayed over them, blessed them, and took an affectionate leave of them. While he was speaking, he rose from the earth. As he rose, words of kindness and love dropped from his lips, and melted into their ears. His body, which had been like other human bodies, was now suddenly changed into a glorious body, like that which had before appeared on the mount at the transfiguration ; or like that which John afterward saw in vision, and which he thus describes : “ His countenance was as the sun, his eyes as flames of fire, his head white as snow, and his feet as burning brass.” In this wonderful form they saw him gently ascending, like a dove, toward heaven, until a cloud intervened—the same cloud which overshadowed the mount, and which Peter calls the excellent glory. This bright and glorious cloud received him and ascended with him ; and they beheld, until the wonderful scene was by distance lost to their admiring eyes. If the scene exhibited on the mount was so overwhelming, that the disciples fell on their faces, and were sore afraid ; no wonder that this more grand and glorious scene in Bethany should so amaze them, that they stood, for a time gazing up into heaven, unable to recover themselves, or to know where they were, or what they were looking after, until they were brought to their recollection by the speech of the

angels, addressing them in human voice. "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus whom ye have seen go up into heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven."

This *expostulation* of the angels, we are now, secondly, to consider.

The angels here remind the disciples, that though Jesus was gone from their sight, yet he still lived in heaven to carry on that gracious work, which he had begun on earth; and that from this time, they were to see him, not with the bodily eyes, which were now gazing after him, but with the eyes of their faith, which, through the medium of his promises, might still discern him in his invisible state, with the same organ, and through the same medium *we* are to view him. We have not the privilege, which they had, to see him in the flesh; but we may see him by faith, as easily as they could. It was but for a short time, that they enjoyed personal intercourse with him; and the chief benefit of this intercourse was to lay a foundation for their faith. What they saw and heard, while he was with them was the ground of that faith by which they held a correspondence with him, after he was gone. And it is also the ground of *our* faith in him, and communion with him now. St. John says, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The sight which the disciples had of their Lord ascending in his glory, was a suitable mean to confirm and enliven their faith. But if in gazing at this wonderful scene, they had been so long detained and so wholly absorbed, as to loose their *spiritual* views of Christ, its end would have been defeated. The word and ordinances of Christ are means to

lead our thoughts to him, and assist our converse with him. But we must remember, that hearing his word, and attending on his ordinances, are no farther acceptable to him, and useful to us, than they awaken in us those exercises of faith and love, which will excite us to the active discharge of all religious duties.

It will be proper for us particularly to consider, what views of Christ we should have in the contemplation of his ascension into heaven.

1. Christ warned his disciples, that he would go to him who sent him. Because he said this, their hearts were filled with sorrow. To console them in their sorrow, he assured them, that when he went to the father, he should be glorified with the glory which he had before the world was. Hence he says, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the father." "I go away, but my peace I leave with you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

At the ascension they saw his glory begun; and hence might conclude, that the glory foretold would be completed. "Because Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the death of the cross, therefore God highly exalted him, and gave him a name above every name." And if the Saviour has been honoured and rewarded for all that he has done and suffered in our behalf, we may rest in the full assurance, that through him our works of faith, and labours of love will be graciously accepted. And in his name we may come to God with all confidence for present pardon and future salvation. Had Christ been left in the grave, our faith and hope must have been buried with him. But because he lives, we shall live also. Our life is hidden with Christ in God, and when he shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory.

2. Christ told his disciples, that he was going to prepare a place for them in his father's house; and that he would come again and receive them to himself. When they saw him taken up into heaven, they were naturally reminded of the glorious mansions in God's house, into which they might, one day, be received. And it became them not to stand gazing into heaven, but rather to seek a practical preparation for it, and to ascertain their title to it. "*We are begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And if we be risen with Christ, let us seek the things, which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Let us set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth.*" To gaze at heaven is one thing; to prepare for heaven is another. The contemplation of heavenly glory is useful only as a mean to draw our affection to it, and quicken our preparation for it. When we think of heaven, let us think of the qualifications necessary for admission into it. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*" Nothing can enter thither, which defiles, or works abomination." Let us examine ourselves, whether we possess the temper requisite for entering into so pure a place, and for associating with such holy company, as will be found there. Let us call up our resolutions against all sin, and fix our purposes for a humble walk with God, that we may now enjoy heaven in hope, and may hereafter possess it in reality.

3. Before Christ went away, he taught his disciples, what they might expect from him after he was gone. "*I go to the Father; and whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it for you, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*"

When they saw their Lord ascend, sorrow filled their hearts ; but the recollection of this promise, that he would be their advocate with the Father, might reasonably turn their sorrow into joy. It was, on this account, expedient for them, that he should go away.

It is a comfort to humble christians, in all their approaches to God, that Jesus, who is the propitiation for their sins, lives in heaven to make intercession for them. We think it a privilege to have pious intercessors on earth ; for the prayers of the righteous avail much. But a much greater privilege is it to have an advocate in heaven, especially such an advocate as Christ. He is near to us—near *in relation* ; for he has taken part of our flesh and blood, and is not ashamed to call us brethren—near *in affection* ; for he has been tempted as we are, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He can therefore pray for us with the earnestness of an experienced friend. He can pray with success ; for he is near to God. He, as God's beloved son, dwells in his bosom, and God hears him always. He has powerful arguments to urge in our behalf. He can plead his own purchase ; and God's approbation of him in his work, and promise to him grounded on his fulfilling this work. This is the Father's promise to the son, " That he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied ; by the knowledge of him shall many be justified, because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and made intercession for transgressors." In consideration of Christ's continual and prevailing intercession, the apostle exhorts us to " come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."



4. When Christ dwelt on earth, he promised his disciples, that, "if he went away, he would send them the comforter, even the spirit of truth, who should abide with them forever." His glorious ascent to heaven ought to have reminded them, and now to remind us, of that precious promise, by which the comforts and assistances of the spirit are secured to the faithful.

The humble christian feels his insufficiency to the duties and trials to which he is called. But he is strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He lives on this promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee." When his faith follows Jesus to heaven, it looks earnestly and steadfastly to him for the supply of the spirit. Conscious of his own weakness, he adopts for himself Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, that "God would grant them according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man; that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; and that, being rooted and grounded in love, they might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and might be filled with all the fullness of God."

5. The angels expressly direct the disciples to regard the ascension of Christ, as an evidence of his second coming. "This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so in like manner come, as ye have seen him go into heaven."

"As Jesus was once offered to bear the sin of many, so to them who look for him he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation."

Jesus taught his disciples, that as God had appointed a time for the general judgment of the world, so he had committed the administration

of this judgment to him who was the *son of man*. This great and solemn doctrine now received new confirmation by Christ's resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven. The apostle says, "God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

When the disciples saw their Lord ascending in his glory, how naturally might his former declarations relative to his coming to judgment, fill their minds?

The angels say, "This *same* Jesus shall come." Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. He ascended in the same body in which he appeared on earth. And in the same body will he come to judgment. The judgment is committed to him, because he is *the son of man*. The general resurrection will precede the judgment, that the dead may be judged as men in the flesh; and Jesus will descend from heaven with his real body, that he may sit to judge them as a man in the flesh. "When he shall come in the clouds of heaven, every eye shall see him." The judgment, of which Christ so often speaks, is not a figurative and imaginary scene; it will be a real, sensible transaction.

If we are to be judged by Christ, certainly we need not fear any undue rigor or unreasonable severity. The Judge is a partaker of our nature; he was made, though without sin, yet in the likeness of our sinful flesh; he has experienced our infirmities, and been tempted as we are. He will know what allowance to make for our temptations and infirmities. He will feel no prejudice against us. He will accept the sincerity of the heart and the willingness of the spirit, even though

there have been great failings through the weakness of the flesh. We have nothing to fear from the stern sovereignty of the Judge ; our only danger is from the intractable perverseness of our own hearts. If our hearts condemn us not, we may have confidence in the day of judgment ; for every man will be accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not. More or less will be required of every one, according as more or less has been committed to him. The judgment will be such a full revelation of God's righteousness in the distribution of rewards and punishments, that every mouth will be stopped, and all who are condemned will see themselves guilty before God. If our hearts now condemn us, let us remember, "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

The angels say, "This Jesus will *come*," signifying, that the judgment will be held near the confines of this world. This the apostle more explicitly teaches. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven ; the dead in Christ shall be raised, and at the same moment they who are alive shall be changed ; and they shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." This world, which has been the place of human probation, will be the scene of the final judgment. When the trial shall be finished, and the sentence passed, then the opposite characters shall go away, the one to everlasting punishment, the other to life eternal.

The angels farther say, "Jesus shall so come, in *like manner* as ye have seen him go into heaven." He went up to heaven in a glorious manner ; his body was changed to a spiritual body ; he was attended with ministering angels ; a bright cloud received him, and carried him beyond the sight

of gazing mortals. When he descends to judgment, he will come in a cloud, surrounded with the glory of his Father, and attended with an innumerable host of angels ; he will seat himself on his throne, and call the nations before him ; he will separate the righteous from the wicked with as much exactness, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats ; the former he will admit to the kingdom prepared for them, and will doom the latter to the place of punishment originally designed for the devil and his angels.

The final judgment of the world is the most solemn and momentous event, that we have ever heard of, as past, or to come. Nothing has yet occurred since the world began, and nothing ever will occur, while time shall last, which can in any measure equal this, in grandeur or importance. The reality of such an event the scripture has affirmed on divine authority, and proved by un-gain-sayable arguments. The majesty of the scene it has described, not with the studied figures of rhetoric, but with the most natural and affecting simplicity of plain language. Description can borrow no images from nature to exalt the scene ; for in all nature there is nothing so grand and solemn, as the scene itself. The plainest and simplest description is the most impressive ; and it is this kind of description, which the scripture has chosen.

If you would raise in your minds the most affecting and influential apprehensions, of the judgment, go, read your bible ; and attend to what you read. When you have closed the book and laid it by, compose your minds to contemplate and apply what you have read. Think on the majesty of the judge from heaven, the splendor of his throne in the sky, the myriads of at-

tending angels, the opening of the graves on every side, and the rising of the dead all around you—Think on the amazing assembly which will be gathered before the throne—an assembly consisting of all who have ever lived, and shall have lived on earth, from the first to the last step in the human succession. Conceive in your minds the serene pleasure, which will smile in the faces of some ; and the horror and astonishment, which will be depicted in the countenances of others. Contemplate the strictness and equity with which the characters of men will be examined, and the justice and impartiality with which the different issues will be decided. Attend to the solemn sentence by which some will be called up to eternal glory, and others doomed to blackness of darkness for ever. Hear the triumphant songs of the former, and the hideous lamentations of the latter. View the heavens passing away with dreadful noise, the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth all in flames, and nature rushing to final dissolution. And will you not be amazed at the scene?—But after all that you can imagine, the most affecting circumstance still remains to be suggested ; you yourselves will be personally present, and deeply concerned in the judgment ; and you will then hear your everlasting condition determined.

“ Seeing, then, we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord? Let us be diligent, that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.”

Our subject teaches us with what meditations and affections we should approach the table of the Lord, which is now spread before us.”

Here is exhibited to us that wonderful Saviour, who once dwelt on earth—suffered death for our sins—was laid in the grave—rose from thence and ascended to glory—lives to make intercession for us, and to dispense supplies of grace to us—and will hereafter come to judge the world in righteousness, to punish the wicked with everlasting destruction from his presence, but to be glorified in the saints, and to be admired in all them who believe.

When we come to this table, we are not merely to gaze at the scene exhibited before us, or to partake of the elements presented to us. This will be no better, than if the disciples had stood gazing up into heaven, without thinking of the ends, for which their Lord had ascended thither. While we sit at the table, we are to exercise faith and love toward the Saviour, who is here represented to us. His death must impress us with a sense of the evil of our sins, and awaken in us new resolutions against them. His ascension must raise our affections to that world whither he is gone. His intercession must encourage us to draw near to God in his name. His promises of the spirit must animate us in all the labours and conflicts of the christian life. His coming to judgment must excite our diligence in every good work, that we may be found to honour and glory, when he comes.

What benefit could the disciples derive from gazing into heaven, unless by faith they looked to Jesus, who was there? As little benefit shall we derive from sitting at this table, unless we here behold by faith a dying, rising, ascending, and interceding Saviour. Looking at the table and eating the bread and drinking the wine upon it, without any spiritual views of Christ, and friendly affect-

tions to one another, is no better than gazing at the sky. Let us therefore, in the ordinance before us, draw near to Christ with true hearts in the full assurance of faith, keep the feast with sincerity and truth, eat and drink together with brotherly love, and walk worthy of him, who has called us to his kingdom and glory.

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# SERMON XV.



*The Rainbow around the Throne.*



A Communion Sermon.



REVELATION iv. 3.

And there was a Rainbow round about the Throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

**G**OD is a spirit pure and immense, invisible to human eye, and incomprehensible to human thought. But he condescends to exhibit himself to us by such figurative expressions and sensible emblems, as may give us some faint apprehensions of his perfections and glories, and awaken in us such sentiments and regards, as are correspondent to his character. To denote his knowledge, wisdom, power and goodness, the scripture ascribes to him human faculties and affections. To denote his sovereign dominion, it represents him as seated on a throne, and there attended by his ministers of state. To denote the glory of his dominion, it describes this throne as placed in the heavens, and encompassed with a



rainbow. John says, "I was in the spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat upon the throne. And he that sat upon it was to look upon like a jasper, and a sardine stone, and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." In these names there is an allusion to the precious stones, which the eastern princes wore in their crowns and garments, when they appeared in their highest grandeur and magnificence. The rainbow about the throne is an allusion to the token of God's covenant with Noah, and with all flesh, that the world should not be drowned by a second deluge. After the patriarch's deliverance from the flood, God said to him and to his sons, "I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall there be any more a flood to destroy the earth. And this shall be a token of my covenant, I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a token of my covenant between me and the earth; and it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant." John, in a vision, sees the throne of God surrounded with the rainbow, the ancient token of his mercy to a guilty world. This figurative representation denotes, that God's government is still a government of grace and mercy, as well as of majesty and power.

The emblem here exhibited may usefully employ our present meditations.

1. God's being seated on a throne in the heavens denotes his supreme and universal government over his creatures, and his perfect knowledge of all things, which are done by them, or take place among them.

"The Lord is in the heavens, he hath done

whatsoever he pleased. The Lord is in his holy temple, his throne is in heaven. His eyes behold, and his eyelids try the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous, but the wicked his soul hateth. On the wicked he will rain an horrible tempest, but his countenance beholdeth the upright."

As God made the world, and all creatures in it, so he continually upholds them by the word of his power. A creature can no more preserve, than it could originate its own existence. God's government is universal; for every particular being is as dependent on him, as the creation in general.

His government extends to *moral*, as well as to animate and inanimate creatures. He treats all beings agreeably to the natures, which he has given them. He has made men capable of a moral conduct, and he exercises over them a moral government, and will finally judge them, as moral beings, according to their works. Innocent beings, that they may be entitled to his acceptance, must persevere in their innocence. Such was originally the character of man. "He was made upright." Such was originally the condition of his acceptance. "If he obeyed God's law, he was to live by it."

But for fallen and guilty man, there is graciously introduced a new constitution adapted to his lapsed and impotent condition. Pardon, immortality and glory, through the intervention of a mediator, are procured for, and offered to this guilty creature. The terms on which he becomes entitled to these blessings, are repentance of past sins, faith in the appointed redeemer, and a life devoted to God in new obedience. We are to be judged according to this constitution. "God

will judge the secrets of men according to the gospel—according to the law of liberty.” Not perfect innocence and sinless obedience, but sincere repentance and heart-purifying faith are now the terms of our admission to God’s eternal favour.

God, who sits on his throne, knows the hearts of all men, and he will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing. To them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, he will render eternal life. To them who obey not the truth, he will recompense indignation and wrath.

The moral government of God is just and perfect. Whatever complaints men may now make against it, the time is coming when every mouth will be stopped. God will reveal his righteousness to the full satisfaction of the saints, and to the utter confusion of the ungodly. The former will admire his wisdom and grace; the latter will be silenced under a conviction of his holiness and justice.

2. John, in his vision, had a view of the glory of God’s character, exhibited in the *rainbow*, which surrounds his throne.

The rainbow, which is one of the most beautiful and majestic phenomena in the heavens, is aptly chosen to represent the glory of God. The beauty of the rainbow is the assemblage of all the colours in nature, in a soft, but splendid lustre. The glory of God is the union of all conceivable perfections in one character; such as power, wisdom, goodness, justice, truth and faithfulness. These perfections, like the colours in the bow, blend and mingle with one another.

We consider the perfections of God separately, for our narrow minds cannot view them compre-

hensively. But as they exist in his nature, they unite ; and as they are exercised in his government, they co-operate. His power is directed by wisdom, and his wisdom is combined with goodness. His goodness consults the happiness of his creatures, but in ways consistent with justice. He never injures one of his creatures to promote the interest of another, or to increase the happiness of a multitude. To many he gives more than they could claim ; but from none does he withhold the good, to which they are entitled. He never perverts his justice, violates his promise, or departs from the settled laws of his moral government in prejudice to some, or in partial favour to others. He inflicts punishment on irreclaimable offenders ; but never lays on them more than is right. And in punishing these, he has kind and benevolent ends towards his subjects in general. The misery to which the incorrigible are doomed in the future world is doubtless intended for the greater happiness of his moral system. In the severest dispensations of his providence in this world, goodness operates, and happiness is promoted. The wicked are afflicted, that they may awake to repentance, and escape the misery of the world to come. The godly are chastised for their profit, that they may be made partakers of God's holiness in a larger measure. As many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens, that they may be zealous and repent.

No one single attribute, if taken by itself, would be glorious. The glory of his character consists in the union of them all. Power without wisdom would be blind casual force. Wisdom without justice and goodness would be artifice and craft. Justice without goodness would be rigour and severity. Goodness without justice would be tame-

ness. But all these attributes united form a complete, an amiable, a glorious character. This character is the beauty of holiness—the beauty of the Lord, which angels admire, which saints love to contemplate, and in which they will ever rejoice.

It was the desire of the Psalmist, that he might dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold his beauty, to see his power and glory, and to enquire at his temple.

In this union of all perfections, God appears to be a worthy object of prayer and praise, of hope and love, of submission and obedience. On him we depend for all that we want, and to him we may go with all our requests. We are indebted to him for all that we enjoy, and to him we should offer the sacrifice of praise continually. His commands, like his nature, are holy, just and good, requiring nothing, but what tends to happiness, and forbidding nothing, but what tends to misery; and to them we may safely yield an implicit and unreserved obedience. His eye beholds us in all our dangers; his mercy pities us in all our afflictions; his presence surrounds us wherever we dwell; and in him we may confidently trust in all our fears.

How happy is the good man, interested in the favour of such a being? Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous. Let all the upright in heart shout for joy. No evil shall eventually happen to the just; no real good will be withheld from them, who walk uprightly.

But let sinners tremble before him. The God who is able to save, is able also to destroy. He who is merciful, is also holy. He who loves the righteous, is angry with the wicked. He who forgives the penitent, will punish the bold trans-

gressors. Let the guilty consider their danger, and consider also their hope. Let them hear the voice, and accept the call of mercy, lest justice arrest them, and there be none to deliver.

Some may perhaps imagine, that God's character would be more glorious, if no punishment were denounced against the ungodly, but happiness ensured to all.

But would his kingdom appear more honorable now, if there were in it nothing but vice? Or would heaven seem a more excellent place, if they who love and practise vice were admitted into it? Does not God appear more amiable as a holy being, than in an opposite character? If no punishment were threatened to sinners, would not wickedness more abound among men, and fewer be fit to enter into that world, where nothing enters that defiles?

If moral impurity be inconsistent with human felicity, and with the glory of God's kingdom, then the threatenings denounced against the finally impenitent, and the judgments executed now on a guilty world, are wise and just; for they display the beauty of God's character, and conduce to the general happiness of his moral subjects. Do you think, that if God's character were all goodness and mercy, without holiness to reject, or justice to condemn the sinner, or truth to execute his threatenings, it would be more lovely and beautiful? You greatly err. Its whole beauty would be blotted out, like the beauty of the rainbow, if but a single colour remained.

Who are they, that wish for a God all mercy, without holiness and truth? They are the same, who wish for a life all sin, without repentance and virtue. It is corruption of heart and consciousness of guilt, which make men wish to

place God's whole glory in mercy to the exclusion of every other attribute. But let God be true, though man be condemned as a sinner.

3. The rainbow around God's throne is an emblem of the *grace* of the gospel dispensation.

The bow was anciently a sign, that God would often send showers to refresh the earth, but would no more send floods to drown the world. The appearance of it in heaven denotes, that the throne of God is a throne of *grace*. Such the apostle calls it. "Let us come boldly to the *throne of grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

When God brought in a flood on the world of the ungodly, he saved the family of righteous Noah. It hence appears, that he knows how to deliver the godly of temptation, and how to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished.

Though the waters of Noah will never return to cover the earth, yet judgments of different kinds are still executed on guilty nations, and a day is appointed in which the world shall be judged in righteousness, and retribution made to every man according to his works. In the mean time, God has placed us under a dispensation of grace, which offers pardon to the penitent, the holy spirit to the humble, and eternal life to them, who patiently seek it. He exhibits himself on a throne with an emblem of mercy to invite us to him, and encourage our reliance upon him. Thither we may go in the name of Jesus the mediator; there we may confess before him our guilt and corruption, and may supplicate his pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace; there we may plead our impotence and misery, and his allsufficiency, and boundless goodness; there we may fill our

mouths with arguments drawn from his love in sending his son to be our Saviour—from the sacrifice which this Saviour has offered, and the intercession which he is still making in heaven—from the promises contained in his word, the mercy he has shewn to others, the calls he has sent to us, and the desires he has awakened in us. We may go to him under our doubts and fears, and pray for light to guide us and strength to support us. We may go to him under our temptations and dangers, and seek grace for our succour and defence. We may go to him in seasons of affliction; and tell him all our pains and sorrows, and may plead his promises to the afflicted, and the consolation given to his children in trials like ours.

How delightful must be a view of this throne to humble, and believing souls? They behold it, not as a throne of judgment surrounded with lightnings and flaming swords to punish the guilty, but as a throne of grace, encompassed with the soft and charming colours of the rainbow, which betoken mercy to pardon the guilty, help the impotent, comfort the afflicted, succour the tempted, and save the humble. There is nothing to terrify and affright them from it; but every thing to invite and allure them to it.

Yea, even sinners, awakened to a sense of guilt, may there see hope of deliverance from the wrath to come. Thither they may resort, and lay hold on offered pardon. From this nothing will exclude them but their own impenitence. Let them turn to God, and, however great is their guilt, he will have mercy on them, and abundantly pardon them. But if they hold fast their iniquities and refuse to return, soon the throne of mercy will to them be a throne of judgment; the rainbow will disappear from their eyes, and an horri-



ble tempest will be rained on their heads. Go, then, ye sinners, repair with penitent heart and suppliant voice to the throne of God, while the inviting emblem of mercy furrounds it.

4. The rainbow is a token of God's *faithfulness* to his covenant. In allusion to its appointment as a sign of God's covenant with Noah, John says, he saw it around God's throne in heaven.

From the beginning of the world God has dealt with men in the way of a covenant. He has promised them blessings, to be bestowed on their performance of certain conditions. To this covenant he has always annexed some visible symbol of his faithfulness. To our first parents there was an implied promise of immortality on condition of abstinence from the interdicted fruit. As a token of this immortality stood the tree of life in the midst of the garden in which they were placed. Alluding to this John says, "Blessed are they who do God's commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

After the apostacy there was the promise of a Saviour, who by his own death should redeem men from the death brought into the world by the first transgression, and who should procure for the faithful a resurrection to a glorious immortality. As a token of this covenant, sacrifice was instituted. The coats of skin, with which our progenitors, after their lapse, were clothed, were doubtless taken from beasts slain for sacrifice; for, as flesh was not then permitted for food, there could be no purpose, but sacrifice, for which beasts should be slain. And we find, that the sons of Adam brought, one the fruit of his field, and the other the firstling of his flock, an offering to the Lord.

The covenant with Noah and his sons, and with all flesh, that the earth should not again be depopulated by a flood, was confirmed by the sign of the bow in the cloud.

When God renewed the covenant of grace with Abraham and his seed, he appointed circumcision as its seal. To this, under the Mosaic dispensation, the passover was added. In the place of those seals, baptism and the Lord's supper are instituted under the Christian dispensation. These refer to the blood of Christ, called "the blood of the covenant;" and to the sanctifying grace of the spirit, called "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the holy ghost, which is shed on us through Christ." The design of these institutions is, that we may remember God's gracious promise, and his faithfulness to perform it.

God says to Noah, "when I bring a cloud over the earth, I will set my bow in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant." This was an intimation to the patriarch and his sons, that, when they saw the bow, they should remember God's promise, and believe the fulfilment of it.

Sensible symbols are intended, not to remind God, but to remind *us*, of his holy covenant. When John says, he saw a rainbow round about God's throne, he signifies, that God is faithful to his word, and remembers the mercy which he has promised.

The covenant of God with men is founded in the blood of Christ. This has procured all the blessings, which the covenant contains. The instituted symbols are to lead our minds to this blood. Accordingly the elders, who sat around the heavenly throne, beholding the grace and glory there displayed, are said to fall down before the Lamb, and to sing a new song, saying, "Thou

wast slain and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, and hast made us kings and priests unto him."

David speaks of God's covenant as ordered in all things and sure. The prophet calls it "the sure mercies of David;" or the mercies promised in Christ the son of David. This stability of the covenant is indicated in the rainbow around God's throne.

The same mercy, which constituted the covenant, will make it good. "The promise is by grace, to the end that it may be sure to all the seed, even to them, who are of the faith of Abraham."

"The Lord is a God of truth." Men make promises, and fail of performing them; but "he is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent." "He is faithful; he cannot deny himself."

"He is the only *wise* God." All his counsels are formed in wisdom, and none of them will miscarry, like human counsels, through ignorance, incaution or want of foresight.

"What he has promised, he is able to perform." Yea, "he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

"With him is no variableness or shadow of turning." "His gifts and calling are without repentance;" or without change of purpose.

To make his *promise* sure, "he has confirmed it by an *oath*, that by *two* immutable things," a *promise* and an *oath*, "in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us."

The death of Christ confirms the covenant; for "it is a remembrance of the holy promise, the oath sworn to Abraham."

Christ's blood has purchased the blessings, and ratified the promises of the covenant. Hence this is called the blood of the New Testament. Hence all God's promises are said to be yea and amen in Christ.

For the stronger confirmation of the covenant, God has set his own seal upon it. Of old there were types prefiguring, now there are ordinances representing the Saviour's death, in which the covenant is founded. In our observance of these we are to remember the faithfulness, and trust the promises of God.

#### Reflections.

1. How wonderful is God's condescension in treating with us by a covenant? He not only lays us under obligations to him by his commands, but himself under obligations to *us* by his promises. If, in his absolute sovereignty, he had given us a law, required our obedience, and left us in a state of uncertainty, whether he would forgive our sins, help our infirmities, and remunerate our services, still there would be great reason why we should study to approve ourselves in his sight. But he has not placed us in such a doubtful and anxious situation. He has dealt with us, rather as a father, than as a sovereign. He has not only instructed us what is his acceptable will, but stated to us the different consequences of obeying, and of opposing it. While he enjoins duty, he promises favour. Though we are unworthy of the smallest, he gives us a claim to the richest reward.

2. How happy is the condition of those who by faith are interested in God's covenant.

They are entitled to every blessing, which they can desire, for every blessing is promised by a faithful God. Though they may seem to have

nothing, yet they have all things either in possession, or in promise. They are now in peace with God, free from condemnation, led by the Spirit, and entitled to heaven. Afflictions work for their good, death will be their gain, glory their reward, God is, and ever will be their portion. They inherit all things.

3. We see how we are to judge, whether the blessings promised are ours. We must enquire, whether we have consented to the conditions of them. God is faithful to his promises; but his faithfulness is no security to those, who reject the terms on which the promises are made. Have we repented of our sins? Have we put ourselves under the law to Christ? Do we bring forth the fruits of repentance, and perform the works of faith? Then pardon and life are ours. Thus we are to seek for glory; thus we may appropriate the comforts of hope. But if under conscious guilt we seek relief by applying the promises without attending to the conditions, we heal our hurt slightly, and the wound will break out again with enraged pain and augmented danger.

4. The mercy displayed in the gospel teaches us to put on humbleness of mind.

Between the conditions and the promises of the covenant there is a sure connection; but this is founded, not in the merit of the conditions, but in the gracious constitution of God. He forgives our sins on repentance, not because repentance deserves forgiveness, but because he is abundant in goodness. He gives his spirit to them who ask it, not because prayer deserves the favour, but because he pities unworthy and helpless creatures. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. Let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord.

Come then, let us repair to the throne of God,

which we behold encompassed with tokens of grace and mercy, faithfulness and truth. Let us fall down before it in deep repentance of sin, and receive the offered pardon with all the energies of fervent desire, active faith and flowing gratitude. "Let the wicked forfake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn to the Lord, who will have mercy on him, and abundantly pardon him."

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# SERMON XVI.

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*No Temple in Heaven.*

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*A Sermon preached on the first Lord's Day after the  
Dedication of a New Meeting-House.*

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REVELATION xxi. 22.

And I saw no Temple therein ; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb  
are the Temple of it.

**S**AINTE JOHN, in the preceding verses, describes the heavenly state as a spacious city, in some respects, resembling the ancient *Jerusalem*, but far more glorious, so that it may be called the *new Jerusalem*.

As heaven cannot, at present, be made visible to us, it is represented by images taken from things which are visible. That our conceptions of it may be raised as high as imagination can ascend, the images are borrowed from objects the most magnificent of any, with which mortals are acquainted ; and in the figurative representations such circumstances of splendor and majesty are com-

bined, as never have been known to exist together on earth.

John had a prospect of this city from a great and high mountain, to which he was carried in the Spirit. The city was illuminated, not by the beams of the natural sun, but by the immediate presence of God. It had a wall great and high for security and defence. It had twelve gates, with angels for their guards, three gates on each side, so that it was accessible to qualified subjects from all nations, and from all quarters of the globe. On the gates were written the names of the twelve *tribes* of the *children of Israel*, to signify, that those, who were to be admitted as citizens, were only the true worshippers of God; not idolaters and infidels. On the foundations were inscribed the names of the twelve *apostles* of the *Lamb*, denoting, that the *Jewish* and *Christian* churches were united in one, and builded together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." To express the beauty and proportion of the city, it is said to lie four square, and its walls and buildings to be every where of the same magnificence and symmetry. It was ornamented with all manner of precious stones, resembling those in the breastplate of the high priest. This circumstance teaches us, that in heaven the oracles of God will be communicated in the clearest light and in full perfection.

After such a glorious description of the city, we should naturally expect, that the writer would next proceed to exhibit the elegance and grandeur of the *Temple*. But, instead of describing the temple, he says, "He saw none there." But why? Could there be such a large, opulent, and populous city, and no temple in it for the worship



of God? How came this important appendage of a city to be omitted? John assigns the reason. "The Lord God Almighty, and Jesus Christ the Lamb of God are its Temple." The whole city is the temple of God, for he is every where present; he every where manifests his glory; he is every where worshipped and adored. "It hath no need of the sun or moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." All who are saved walk continually in this light. The city is the centre of all glory and honour. The wicked and ungodly are excluded from it. None are admitted, but such as are pure and holy; such as follow the Lamb, and are written in his book of life.

When John says, "He saw no temple in the heavenly city," he signifies, that usually there are, and always there ought to be temples in *earthly* cities. For he mentions this as a circumstance of peculiarity, by which the city in heaven is remarkably distinguished from cities on earth.

The perfection of God's character entitles him to the love, reverence and homage of all his intelligent creatures. As we are dependent upon him for all that we need, and indebted to him for all that we enjoy, it becomes us to direct our desires and our gratitude to him, and to express these inward sentiments by outward acts of prayer and praise. Wherever men are collected together in a state of society, they are bound to unite in the worship of their common creator and benefactor. Social worship cements their union, strengthens their reciprocal affection, and gives action and energy to those virtues, which are the life and felicity of all communities.

General happiness is the end of society. Men associate, because it is not good to be alone. The

happiness of *this* world is with many ; but the happiness of the *future* world ought to be with all, the grand object of the social union. In a state of society, by mutual communication and assistance, each one can make those scientific, moral and spiritual improvements, which would be unattainable in a state of solitude. It is not merely for our temporal convenience, but especially for our future happiness, that God has appointed us to live in society.

The foundation of religion is a belief of the existence, and a reverence for the character of God. We may see evidence of his being, power and goodness in his works. But this evidence few would regard, without some special means to call their attention to it. He has therefore given us the word of revelation, which exhibits his character in a clear, but gentle light, states our various duties with perspicuity, and urges them with impressive arguments ; and he has instituted social worship as a standing mean of religious knowledge, internal piety, and social virtue.

There is the same reason, why communities should worship God in their social connexion, as why particular persons should worship him in their individual capacity. If each man ought to have a closet, to which he may retire and pray to his Father who sees in secret, the society ought to have a temple, in which all the members may assemble to call on their common protector and benefactor.

Even the heathens had temples in their cities for the worship of their imaginary divinities. It was a common sentiment, that there were invisible powers, on which they were dependent, and to which they were indebted ; and it was a natural inference, that joint adoration should be paid to these powers, and temples erected for the purpose.

The great Jehovah, when he revealed himself to men, as the supreme and the only true God, instituted social worship, and required the erection of temples, in which his votaries might assemble to pay homage and adoration to him, and to receive instructions and blessings from him. It is his command, "Build me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among you." And this is the promise which accompanies it; "In every place, where I record my name, I will come unto you, and bless you."

In our present imperfect state, while we dwell in material bodies, are surrounded with sensible objects and receive our knowledge through corporeal organs, such external means are necessary. Those holy tempers and spiritual affections, which are the essence of religion, must be founded in knowledge; and religious, as well as natural knowledge, must be communicated to us through the bodily senses. Hence God has instituted certain forms of worship adapted to the sight and hearing; and has directed us to sequester certain places, where these instituted forms may be observed, that, by means of them, our minds may be enlightened, our knowledge improved, and pious and holy dispositions brought into action.

But in heaven the case will be otherwise. There we shall subsist in a different manner—without these gross bodies, and without these sensitive organs; and consequently we shall not need these visible and sensible forms of worship, which we find so necessary here. Hence John says, "In heaven he saw no temple;" for heaven was all temple, and the glory of God filled it every where alike.

We will attend to this thought. "Social worship is an employment in heaven; but no temple is there."

1. There is no *material* temple in heaven.

The angels are spirits, pure and active as flames of fire. The saints, in the separate state, will dwell there without bodies. After the resurrection, they will have bodies; but these will be fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. What kind of bodies they will be, we have no exact conception; but we know, they will be exceedingly diverse from these which we now possess. The apostle tells us, "They are sown in corruption, dishonour and weakness; but will be raised in incorruption, glory and power. They are sown natural; but will be raised spiritual bodies." The present organs of sensation they will not need; for they will have faculties of perception and communication, more refined, exalted and comprehensive. They will be all eye—all ear—all intellect.

Our senses of sight and hearing must be inconceivable to persons born blind and deaf. The faculties of saints in glory are inconceivable to us, who have no inlets of knowledge, but the avenues of the senses. But to suppose, that they can have no faculties more perfect than ours, would be as absurd, as if a man born blind should judge, that there was no way to acquire the knowledge of sensible objects, but by feeling; or one born deaf should conclude, that there could be no intercourse between man and man, but by signs.

In the heavenly world, where the worshippers are all spiritual beings, without any such gross bodies as these, in which we dwell, there will be no need of temples constructed of timber, stone and earthly materials, like these, in which we assemble for worship. We are struck with the grandeur, and pleased with the beauty of a magnificent and elegant temple. The sight of it elevates the thoughts, and assists the spirit of devo-

tion. But it bears no comparison with, and no real resemblance to that glorious place called heaven, where saints and angels pay their devotions. Every thing there is adapted, not to please the eyes, but to gratify the refined taste of pure and holy minds.

2. In heaven there are no *local* temples.

Here on earth we erect one temple in this place, and another in that, to accommodate such a number of people, as can conveniently assemble to worship in it.

The Jews had only one temple for the whole nation. In this they assembled three times a year to celebrate the principal festivals instituted in the law. The attendance of those, who lived in the remote parts of the country, was tedious and laborious. But yet pious people cheerfully submitted to the fatigue, that they might enjoy the sublime pleasure of appearing before God. Alluding to the national attendance at the temple in Jerusalem, the Psalmist says, "Blessed are they who dwell in thine house; blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them, who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion."

Beside the three annual festivals, there were daily sacrifices offered at certain hours, both morning and evening, at the temple. At these hours, which were hours of prayer, they, who lived near to the temple, attended there; such as lived remote, prayed with their faces toward the temple.

For the weekly worship of the sabbath, there were synagogues built in every considerable city, town and village; and here the people met to hear the law, and to unite in prayer. In the

Christian world the case is similar. There must be churches erected in various places, at suitable distances, for the accommodation of all, who wish to unite in social devotion.

In heaven there will be no occasion for these local sanctuaries ; all heaven may be one temple. The worshippers are not confined to particular places, nor in their motions from place to place are they retarded by cumbrous bodies. When they move, they fly ; when they fly, they fly swiftly. They are like flames of fire ; like a flash of lightning. They are not obliged to gather around, and attend to particular teachers for instruction. As all are learners, so all are teachers, all priests, all ministering spirits. The heavenly city is one spacious temple, and the heavenly inhabitants are one vast congregation, and in the worship of God they spend one eternal sabbath. In the mount Zion above, the innumerable company of angels and spirits of just men made perfect are one general assembly ; one universal church. When John, in vision, had a view of the heavenly worship, " he heard the voice of many saints and angels round about the throne of God, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousands, and thousands of thousands. Yea, every creature in heaven and earth heard he, saying, Blessing and honour and glory be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

3. In heaven there are no *separate* and no *party* temples. The inhabitants of populous towns and cities on earth divide into different assemblies, and build different temples, because they are too numerous to be accommodated in one. But the inhabitants of the heavenly city, though vastly more numerous and more zealous than mortals on earth, can meet in one assembly, and all worship together, without confusion or interruption.

Christians, in this imperfect state, often form themselves into distinct societies, not because they are too numerous, but because they are too uncharitable to worship in the same house. Differing, perhaps immaterially, in doctrinal sentiments, or ceremonial usages, they call themselves by different names, and attend on the ordinances of God in different places. In heaven there can be no such causes of separation. All are of one mind ; of one accord. Charity never fails. Selfishness never predominates. There is no jealousy or distrust ; no pride or envy ; no self-will or contempt of others ; no disposition to withdraw from, or to exclude one another. Angels disdain not to worship in the same assembly with men. The highest saints think not themselves too great or too good to be fellow members with the lowest of their brethren. All are one in affection. All mind the same things.

4. Heaven is all one temple, because the glory of God fills it every where. John says, He saw no temple ; no distinct temple ; for God and the Lamb are the temple.

In the temple of Solomon there was a visible glory, which rested on the mercy-seat between the Cherubims. This is sometimes called the bright cloud, the pillar of fire, the glory of God, the excellent glory. It was an emblem of God's presence. From this glory, when God was consulted in behalf of his people, oracles were given by an audible voice. God is said to dwell between the Cherubims, because between them, on the mercy-seat in the temple, was the residence of that glorious lustre, which betokened his presence. This seems to have been a prefiguration of the personal appearance of Jesus Christ, the brightness of God's glory, in the second temple. In this respect, the

glory of the latter temple, was greater than the glory of the former.

To the visible glory, which was in Solomon's temple, John alludes in our text. He saw no such temple in heaven ; no temple illuminated, as that was, by an emblem of God's presence in one particular place ; nothing, which should give one spot a pre-eminence above all others ; for God himself and the Lamb were the temple. The glory of God, and the loveliness of the Redeemer appeared every where, throughout all heaven. There was no spot, but what was all lovely ; all glorious ; full of God and goodness ; full of Christ and grace. Every thing displayed, every heart admired, every tongue praised the Great Jehovah and the Divine Redeemer. All was devotion ; all was gratitude ; all was admiration and love.

Hence John adds, " The city had no need of the sun or moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof, and the nations of them that are saved, walk in the light of it." All the numerous inhabitants of heaven continually behold the light of that glory, which God and the Redeemer spread through the place.

Christian temples have not in them that visible emblem of divine glory, which was exhibited in the ancient temple ; nor does God, now, as he did formerly, answer the prayers and enquiries of his people with an audible voice from the excellent glory. But in Christian temples he displays his glory more clearly, instructs us in his will more fully, and communicates his grace more plentifully, and yet in a more easy and gentle manner, than he did in his ancient temple. In these last days, he speaks to us by his son in the preaching of the gospel ; through him he sheds forth



the Spirit abundantly ; and through him with confidence we may come and obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. In his sanctuary he makes those manifestations of himself, which we can meet no where else. But in heaven we shall no more need to resort to particular temples, that we may behold God's glory, learn his will, and enjoy his presence ; for through all heaven he will manifest himself in a manner adapted, and in a measure proportioned to the capacities of all holy beings. " Here we see through a glass darkly ; there we shall see face to face. Here we know but in part ; there we shall know as we are known."

In scripture the happiness of the heavenly state is expressed by our seeing God—seeing him as he is—beholding his face—dwelling in his presence. These phrases import such a clear knowledge of his character, strong perception of his glory, and full enjoyment of his favour, as our present capacity, can neither admit nor sustain. No man can see his face and live. That view of his glory, which the saints in heaven enjoy, would have overwhelmed them in their feeble state of mortality. The glory of Christ's transfiguration on the mount Moses and Elias could bear ; but the three disciples sank under it. God now holds back the face of his throne, lest his glory, bursting upon us in a flood of light, should confound and destroy us. But that glory, which would be too mighty for us here, will be our felicity and joy hereafter. " In God's presence is fulness of joy ; at his right hand are pleasures for evermore." When we shall hereafter awake in his likeness, then we may behold his face in righteousness. When he shall raise us to glory, he will be the strength of our heart, and our portion forever.

Let us now attend to the reflections, which arise from our subject.

1. We see what use we should make of God's temple below. Here we are to acquire a preparation for that city, in which is no temple.

Heaven is a holy place ; and without holiness none can enter into it. God's presence is the glory of heaven ; without a conformity to his character, we cannot come into his presence, nor behold his glory. By men of corrupt and vicious minds—by men who are enemies to God and holiness—by men who covet nothing but earthly glory, and relish nothing but sensual pleasure, what beauty can be seen, and what happiness enjoyed, in that holy place, and in that glorious presence ? God has instituted the worship of his temple here below, that by our attendance upon it we may be formed to a capacity of beholding the glory and enjoying the felicity of the world above. Here his law is pronounced, that we may see our corruption and guilt. Here his character is exhibited, that we may be convinced of our enmity to him and demerit from him. Here his grace is proclaimed, that we may be encouraged to seek pardon by repentance, and to implore his Spirit for our renovation. Here the glories and the terrors of the future world are displayed, that we may be awakened to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life. Here we are called to the exercises of holy devotion, that we may be habituated to, and qualified for the sublime employments of heaven. When we come to God's house, we are to banish all sinful passions, and invite into our souls spiritual and benevolent affections, that we may be meet to enter into that holy city, where all is goodness and love, and nothing which disturbs or defiles.

2. We see how Christian societies on earth may best resemble the heavenly city.

In that city, it is said, there is no temple, because the city itself is all one temple. God is regarded and worshipped every where, and his glory is every where displayed. Such, in some measure, should be the church of God on earth.

As we cannot spend our whole time, in social worship, nor associate for worship, unless there be some *known* time and place, in which we may meet together, God has been pleased to institute in his word a particular day, and to point out in his providence particular places, for this sacred purpose. But still a Christian society may, like the heavenly city, be all temple. The apostle says to the Ephesians, "Ye are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord, in whom also ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Let religion be maintained in every family; let the scriptures be stately read, and prayer and praise daily offered in every dwelling; let there be piety and benevolence in every heart; let there be justice, peace and charity in all social intercourse; let the holiness which becomes God's house be carried into the concerns of the world; let the fear of God influence the common business of life; and then the society is all temple; the church itself is a sanctuary; for God's name is glorified every where, the good and holy effects of the temple worship are every where spread and diffused, and the society below resembles the society above.

The reason why God calls us to worship him in

his temple, is that at all times, and in all places, we may maintain a sense of his presence, and act as seeing him who is invisible. If we are devout only on the sabbath, and profane at other times ; if we are grave and serious only in the house of God ; and light and vain in our own houses ; if we are peaceable and orderly in religious assemblies only ; and unjust, passionate and contentious in our ordinary intercourse with men ; if we assume airs of piety when we meet for divine worship ; but are artful and intriguing, when we meet for civil purposes ; we bely our profession and contradict our assumed character ; and our attendance in the house of God brings to him no honour, and to our souls no benefit. “ Trust not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord are these ; but amend your ways and doings.” If ye stand before God in his house, and indulge iniquity elsewhere, you make his worship an abomination. The reason why you are to worship God in his temple, to suppress evil passions and to cultivate holy and benevolent tempers there, is that you may do the same every where, and at all times.

When a people, by united attendance in the temple acquire the true spirit of the gospel, and carry this spirit with them into their families, into their private conduct and into their social intercourse, then the society is like heaven. It is all one holy temple in the Lord.

3. Our subject teaches us, how to form an opinion of our meetness for heaven. We must examine ourselves whether we have the temper, in which the happiness of heaven consists.

Though there be no particular or local temple there, yet there is social worship, and this worship is conducted with devotion, humility and

love. There is deep reverence of God's majesty, rapturous admiration of his perfections and works, delightful adoration and praise, and mutual condescension and benevolence among the worshippers. Do we in any degree find these tempers here? These are the marks and characters of those, whom God approves on earth, and whom he will admit to his presence above. "Blessed are they that do his commandments; they have a right to the tree of life, and shall enter through the gates into the city. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable shall be cast out, and shall have their part in the lake, which burns with fire and brimstone. This is the second death.

4. We learn, that in all our approaches to God, we must regard Christ Jesus as the mediator through whom we obtain admission and find acceptance. John says, "God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of heaven."

Christ is honored in heaven as the Lamb of God, who by his sacrifice has expiated the guilt of a sinful world. He appears there as a Lamb, that has been slain. Praises are there sung by the saints, not only to him who sits on the throne, but also to the Lamb, who has redeemed them, and made them kings and priests unto God. "He is there glorified in the saints, and admired in all them who believe." They remember, that to him they are indebted for all the felicity which they enjoy, and for all the glory to which they are exalted. "He is glorified in them, and they in him." That our worship may resemble the heavenly worship, we must pay honour to this glorious mediator; we must remember his dying love, embrace him by humble faith, rejoice in the salvation which he has purchased, and ascribe to the virtue of his blood all that we enjoy, and all that we hope to

enjoy. If he is honoured in heaven, let us honour him on earth. If angels adore him for his benevolence to men, let men adore him for his benevolence to them. No forms of worship are of any value in the sight of God, if the Redeemer, whom he has sent, be forgotten and disregarded. If we believe in God, let us believe also in Christ. If we honour the Father, let us likewise honour the son. "For we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who was manifested in these last times for us, who by him believe in God, that raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

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# SERMON XVII.



*Universal Praise for Redemption.*



A Communion Sermon.



ISAIAH xliv. 23.

Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it : Shout, ye lower parts of the earth : Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein ; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

**T**HE deliverance of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, which is often a subject of Isaiah's predictions, so nearly resembled, in several circumstances, the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ, that the prophet seldom mentions the former, without feeling his mind enlivened with a view of the latter ; and he rarely dismisses the one without giving a rapturous display of the other. In his predictions of that deliverance he usually mingles some elevated expressions, which can properly be applied only to the great redemption. Hence the writers of the New Testament so often borrow *his* language as descriptive of their own times,

That the words of our text respect the gospel dispensation, is probable from the prophet's calling on *all* creatures in heaven and earth to join in songs of praise for God's wonderful mercy. The deliverance of the Jews from Babylon by Cyrus was an event, which peculiarly concerned *them*. The redemption of mankind from sin by Jesus Christ is a work, in which *all nations* are concerned, and in which *angels* feel themselves interested. From this they learn the manifold wisdom of God.

The prophet invites the heavens, the earth, the mountains, the forests, and every tree, to break forth into singing, because the Lord hath redeemed Jacob. It is usual with the prophets thus to awaken the attention of rational beings by addresses to inanimate nature.

We may observe,

I. The benefit here celebrated is *Redemption*.

This supposes a state of guilt and bondage.

Redemption is often applied to *temporal* deliverances. But here it intends a *spiritual* deliverance, or salvation from the dominion and demerit of sin by the grace of God through the atonement of Christ. So the meaning of it is stated in the preceding verse. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

Redemption includes the forgiveness of sins in this world, and eternal life in the other. The apostle speaks of a redemption, which consists in the remission of sins; and of a redemption of the body from the bondage of corruption. These two privileges are connected. Forgiveness, which is a discharge from our obligation to punishment, is accompanied with a title to future happiness. "Whom God justifies, them he also glorifies."



The law of God condemns those, who continue not in all things written in it. As we have all transgressed this law, we are all condemned by it. Forgiveness frees us from condemnation, and brings us into a state of favour with God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Forgiveness, in the nature of it, implies a title to glory. Man was made to exist forever. The death threatened to disobedience intends, not a cessation of being, but positive punishment. The remission of this punishment imports an opposite state; not exemption from misery by annihilation, but a title to a happy immortality. "As sin has reigned unto death, so grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life."

This redemption comes to men through the blood of Christ. "We have redemption through his blood."

The mercy of God is inclined to forgive sinners. But the wisdom of God saw fit to bestow forgiveness in a way, which should display his righteousness. "He set forth his son a propitiation for sin, to declare his righteousness for the forgiveness of sins, that he might be just, and the justifier of them who believe."

"Christ was manifested to bear our sins; and *in him was no sin.*" This character of Christ shews the excellency of his sacrifice. "Such an high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless and undefiled, and made higher than the heavens; and who needed not, as the ancient priests, to offer sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people; for this he did once, when he offered up himself."

Our redemption is ascribed to Christ's *blood*—to

his death on the cross. But to accomplish our redemption the holiness of his life was necessary ; for without this, there could be no atoning efficacy in his death.

The redemption purchased by Christ, though offered without distinction, is actually bestowed only on penitent and believing souls. Hence the call in the words preceding the text, “ *Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.*” “The Redeemer comes to those, who turn from ungodliness in Jacob.” It is by sin, that we have fallen under condemnation. It is by repentance, that we obtain redemption. “Christ bare our sins, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness.” He came to redeem us from iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” The apostles proclaimed a free and gracious salvation ; but they stated the terms of it to be “repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.”

To our compliance with these terms, the operation of the divine Spirit on our hearts is necessary. Hence believers and penitents are said, to be “born of the Spirit”—“renewed by the holy Ghost”—“created in Christ Jesus to good works.” But still sinners are required to repent and turn to God, to make them a new heart, and to walk in God’s statutes, as if all this were their own work.

Wherever God sends the gospel, he sends his Spirit to accompany it. Hence it is called a ministration of the Spirit, and they who oppose it are said to resist the Spirit. They, who attend on the ministration of the word, actually receive the Spirit in his convincing and awakening influence. The Galatians are said to have “received the Spirit in the hearing of faith.”

An attendance on appointed means, and an improvement of divine excitements are required in order to the obtaining of that grace, which will be effectual to repentance and conversion. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find. God gives his Spirit to them who ask him. To him who hath shall more be given." It is not pretended, that there is any certain connexion between the endeavours of sinners, and renovating grace; for who can say, He has not often abused and forfeited the grace of God already? But yet it is plain, that God ordinarily bestows his renewing grace on sinners, only when they are found in the diligent observance of his appointments. Hence Christians are said to be begotten and born of the *word*, as well as of the Spirit. As the grace of God usually works in men's hearts by means of the word, so they are most likely to receive this grace, when they are in the diligent use, not when they are in the contemptuous neglect of these means.

Hence we may observe,

II. Our redemption is a *Divine Work*. The LORD hath redeemed Jacob.

It was God, who, in his unsearchable wisdom, laid the *plan* of our salvation. It originated, not with us, but with him. It was the effect, not of our solicitation, but of his selfmoving goodness. As God is the Being dishonoured by our revolt, so to him only it belongs to determine, whether we may be received to his favour. This important question no created intelligence could answer. God has a right to punish offenders; whether he will recede from this right, he only can tell. The knowledge, which *angels* have on this subject, comes to them by divine discovery; not by their own sagacity. They desire to look into this glo-

rious scheme, and hence they learn the manifold wisdom of God.

As the plan, so the *purchase* of salvation is from God. It was he, who sent a Saviour into the world, sealed his heavenly mission, appointed him to be a sacrifice, raised him from the dead, and gave him glory. Christ says, "He came from God ; and came to do the will of God who sent him." It was this mission, which gave efficacy to Christ's sacrifice, and which is the ground of our faith in his atonement. "We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who was *ordained* before the foundation of the world, and was manifested in these last times for us, who *by him* do believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our *faith and hope* might be *in God.*"

The *terms* of our acceptance are from God. Had it been declared in general, that salvation is attainable, yet none could thence ascertain the *condition* of it—whether repentance be sufficient, or some harder condition be required. Hence heathens, who had no direct information on the subject, have anxiously enquired, wherewith they should come before the Lord ; whether they should bring flocks of sacrifice, floods of oil, or the blood of their offspring. But God has shewed us what is good. He has required that we repent of sins which are past, and that we walk humbly and righteously with him in future.

The *means* of salvation are from God. It is not owing to the will of man, but to the grace of God, that a revelation is vouchsafed to the world. It is not owing to our previous choice, but to his sovereign pleasure, that we are placed under the advantages of this revelation.

The Spirit, who is an agent in our salvation, by renewing us to repentance, and by preserving us to eternal life, is wholly a divine gift. "By grace we are saved through faith; not of ourselves; it is the gift of God: for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works."

We proceed to observe,

III. The plan of redemption, which God has laid, will ultimately redound to his glory. "The Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and *glorified himself* in Israel."

In this scheme God has made a glorious display of his *grace* and *mercy*. "He hath predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." That God is good, we learn from his works of providence; but that he is gracious and merciful to pardon offenders, we learn only from his word, and especially from the gospel dispensation. Here we see the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to us by Jesus Christ. Here we see him contriving the redemption of fallen men, and for this purpose adopting a method, which fills heaven with astonishment. Here we see him sending down from the realms of glory his own divine son, to assume our nature—to dwell among mortals—to work wonders before their eyes—to proclaim the offers, and state the terms of pardon and life—to walk before them in the path of truth and righteousness, and return back to heaven by the way of the grave, there to act as an advocate for humble souls, and there to prepare mansions for their reception, that they may dwell with him forever.

Good God; what condescension is here? Why

didst thou take so singular a method for the salvation of so unworthy a creature? Why this preference of apostate man to the fallen angels? It is so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

What confidence, my fellow sinners, we may place in God's mercy. What assurance we have of his pardon on our humble submission to his Son. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that he might die for us, and that we might live through him. "Kiss ye the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way."

In this great work God has glorified his *holiness*, *truth* and *justice*. He delights not in the death of the wicked: but he will not violate his truth, tarnish his holiness, nor bend the rectitude of his government for their salvation. When he shews mercy, he will act like himself. He will not pardon sinners without a public testimony of the perfection of his law, the equity of his government, and the purity of his nature, lest his subjects, presuming on his lenity, be tempted to rebel. He will display his own glorious character, that pardoned offenders may fear to offend again, and that all intelligent beings may behold, adore and revere him. When his beloved Son put himself in our place to bear our iniquities and expiate our guilt, it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief. Thus all may see, how offensive sin is to God; and how incompatible with the happiness of the creature. If God spared not his own son, when he made his soul an offering for our sins, surely he will not spare those contemptuous sinners, who, rejecting this wonderful sacrifice, are doomed to suffer for their own sins. "If such things were done in a green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

In this dispensation God has abounded to us in all *wisdom* and *prudence*. No wisdom, but the divine, could devise a way, in which sin should be condemned, and the sinner pardoned—in which God's justice and holiness should be displayed, and his grace and mercy exercised toward the guilty. Here we see righteousness and grace united, and acting in concert. "Mercy and truth are met together ; justice and peace have kissed each other. Truth springs from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The Lord gives grace and glory. His salvation is nigh to them that fear him, and glory dwells on the earth. He speaks peace to his people ; but let them not turn again to folly."

God glorifies himself in true *believers*. His grace is displayed in arresting their once guilty progress ; in awakening their attention to their salvation ; in renewing them to repentance ; in forgiving their sins ; in sanctifying them to his service, and in preserving them amidst a thousand dangers unto eternal life. In them the sovereignty of his grace, the riches of his mercy, the power of his Spirit, the truth of his word, the faithfulness of his promises, and the divine excellency of religion are clearly manifested. They glorify him by works of holiness, by faith in his promises, by a profession of his name, by constancy in his service, and by zeal to promote his cause, and to spread the influence of his religion. He will be glorified in them, and they in him, when they shall appear before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Then the wonders of his grace, and the mysteries of his providence toward them will be unfolded. Then it will be seen, how all things have been working for their good, and the things which seemed to be against them, were in-

VOL. V. H h

tended for their salvation. Then it will be known, how immutable has been God's covenant with them, and how rich is his munificence in rewarding their poor service with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

God will finally be glorified in them, who *reject* the gospel. These, when Christ shall be revealed from heaven, will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Then the guilt of the impenitent, and the equity of the judgment will be manifested, every vain excuse will be silenced, and every mouth will be stopped. Then it will appear, to the conviction of all, that God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, bountiful in the rewards which he bestows, and just in the punishments which he executes.

We may observe, once more, fourthly,

IV. That the prophet, contemplating the glorious work of redemption, calls for a general chorus of praise from the creation of God. "Sing, O heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein, for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob."

What if we understand this apostrophe to earth and skies, as an intimation, that they owe all their beauty and glory, all their benignity and usefulness to the work of redemption?

When man sinned, he fell under a curse, and the earth was cursed for his sake. It is the redemption, which has in any degree removed the curse. Had not the Redeemer interposed, the earth would have been desolate and barren, and the heavens would have withheld their friendly influence; either the human succession would have ceased from the earth, or have been continu-



ed in it under an unqualified curse ; and the world would have been a comfortless and inhospitable waste. The enchanting scenes and charming prospects of the summer season ; the smiling aspect and enlivening influence of the skies ; the winds which temper our atmosphere, the clouds which waft the showers, and the rains which refresh the earth ; the spreading lawns, the verdant meads and the joyous herds ; the stately mountains and the cheerful vales ; the fruitful trees, and the golden harvests ; all the riches and beauties of nature—all that is the reverse of the dreary state of winter, owe their existence to this marvellous work. To this we are indebted for the joys of sense, and the pleasures of imagination ; for the continuance of our race, or its continuance in so agreeable a condition ; for the happiness of children in the parent, and the hopes of the parent in the children ; for the sweets of relative connexions, the delights of friendly intercourse, and all the blessings of society. Sing then, ye heavens ; sun, moon and stars ; shout ye valleys of the earth ; break forth into singing, ye mountains, forests and trees, ye meadows, fields and groves ; join in the song, ye sons of Adam ; for the Lord hath done great things for you : he hath redeemed a ruined world from the curse ; an apostate race from destruction. Amidst this chorus of praise for redemption, are any found, who would banish from society the Redeemer's religion, as if it were a nuisance ; not a blessing ? Be astonished, O ye heavens at this : O earth, be thou horribly afraid.

This apostrophe to heaven and earth strongly expresses the vast importance of redemption. So great and glorious is the work, that if men should censure it, or should even be silent, inanimate na-

ture would rise with astonishment to shout in their stead the high praises of God.

Let finners, conscious of guilt, rejoice and give thanks for the glorious hopes, which are set before them in the gospel.

Reason teaches you, that there is a God, a just and holy Being, to whom you owe obedience, and on whom you depend for happiness—that, having sinned against this God, you deserve his wrath, and that it would be a righteous thing to recompense tribulation to you. Thus far reason leads you; and here it deserts you. It plunges you into darkness; but affords no light to cheer you there, and lends no hand to extricate you thence. The gospel teaches you, that a Saviour has died, and that there is redemption through his blood. “It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” Whatever anxiety you may feel under a deep conviction of your guilt, you will find consolation in resorting to this doctrine. When Peter proclaimed to the awakened Jews the promise of remission on repentance, they gladly received the word. When Philip preached, in Samaria, salvation by Christ, there was great joy in that city. When Paul taught the gentiles in Antioch, that Christ was given for salvation to the ends of the earth, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord.

True *believers* have *special* reason to rejoice in the redemption, for they are already partakers of it: it is actually made over to them. When, in a consciousness of their compliance with the terms of salvation, they can appropriate their personal interest in it, with what gratitude and joy may they contemplate the happy change in their condition? They have passed from bondage to free-

dom—from guilt to pardon—from death to life. Once they were dead in sin ; under condemnation ; exposed to the wrath of God ; insensible of danger ; going on in their trespasses ; accumulating guilt ; and liable every moment to be lost in hopeless misery. Now their sins are pardoned and their souls renewed ; they are under the care of God's grace, and the security of his promise ; they have a title to heaven ; and the divine Spirit, dwelling in them, will preserve them unto salvation. Happy change : they may review, with admiration, the grace of God, which has redeemed them from sin, and prepared them unto glory. They may adopt the language of Paul ; “ I thank Christ Jesus my Lord, that I have obtained mercy—The grace of my Lord is exceedingly abundant.”

The *angels* above join in the general song of praise for the redemption. “ The heavens sing, for the Lord hath done it.” When the Saviour was born, a multitude of the heavenly host praised God, and said, “ Glory to God in the highest ; peace on earth ; good will to men.” There is *new* joy in their presence, when a sinner repents. Every conversion among guilty men ; every accession to the church of Christ becomes the theme of a new song among those benevolent beings. When there is a general revival of pure religion, a large extension and increase of Christ's church, they shout forth their joy in loftier and louder strains : then the whole hierarchy join in the praise : “ All the angels fall before God's throne on their faces, and worship him, saying, Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power and might, be unto our God forever and ever.”

Angels rejoice in the redemption as a blessing

to *mankind*. Their benevolence interests them in the happiness of our race. They rejoice, when they see sinners redeemed from guilt, and brought to participate with them in the felicity of the world above.

They rejoice in the benefits which result to *themselves* from the redemption. Though, having never fallen, they are not *subjects* of this redemption, yet they derive unspeakable advantages from it. Their knowledge of God's character and works, their admiration of his wisdom and grace, their love to him, and benevolence to his creatures, and consequently their real happiness, are increased by this dispensation. Hence the apostle says, "He was sent to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ, not only that men might see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which had been hidden in the purpose of God; but also to the intent, that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus." Hence they join with the saints above in this new song unto Christ, "Thou art worthy to receive honour and power, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed *us* to God by thy blood, and hast made *us* kings and priests unto him."

To the words of our text John alludes, when speaking of the redemption, he says, "Every creature in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever."

How glorious is this redemption, which awakens the praises of all holy intelligences? Great must be the work, which thus interests the benevolence, excites the joy, and tunes the songs

of angels, as well as saints. The joy, which it inspires in heaven, demonstrates, how important it is to our fallen race. Let guilty mortals repair to the mercy of that God, who hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.


How awful is the demerit of sin, which could not be expiated without so costly a sacrifice? How awfully is this demerit augmented in those, who reject the benefit of such a sacrifice? If disobedience to God's law could not be pardoned without the atonement of Christ's blood; what atonement will be found for those who trample this blood under foot? Their sin will remain; it will cleave more closely to their souls; for them there is no more sacrifice; wrath will come on them to the uttermost.

How happy is the security of true believers? "They are made accepted in the beloved." They are redeemed, not with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ. Their redemption is sure. A competent price has been paid. Through grace they have complied with the terms of their acceptance. Nothing shall separate them from the love of God in Christ. Rejoice in that which God has done for your souls, and is doing in them—done to procure salvation for you, and to prepare you for salvation, and is doing to preserve you to it, and to qualify you more and more for it. Rejoice in all opportunities to celebrate his works of grace.


Come, my brethren, to this table of the Lord, with a thankful recollection of the mercies displayed in your redemption; and here learn the songs, cultivate the tempers, and seek the blessings of those who are redeemed from the earth. Sing, for the Lord hath done it. Break forth into singing—shout, for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

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# SERMON XVIII.



## *The Wheels of Providence.*



A Fast Sermon, April 1806.

EZEKIEL i. 16.

— Their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

**T**HE prophet Ezekiel was carried to Babylon among some of the first of the captive Jews. Before his captivity he saw many changes; and afterward by a spirit of prophecy he foresaw many more, which are recorded in this book.

The great events in providence, which awaited his own, and some other countries, are represented to him in an emblematic vision. He saw “a whirlwind rising out of the north,” or out of *Babylon*, which lay northward of Judea. This betokened new calamities coming on his country from that quarter. “There was a great cloud and fire infolding itself;” or rolling in wreaths of smoke, as when clouds are blown by a whirlwind. This denoted the terrible majesty and irresistible power of God’s judgments executed on a guilty land. From the midst of the fiery cloud

“ he saw four living creatures come forth,” representing the angels of God, who were the ministers of his providence and the executioners of his wrath on guilty nations. These living creatures, in all their movements, were under the direction of one governing Spirit. All the angels are “ ministers of God, hearkening to his voice, obeying his commands, and doing his pleasure.” They “ had each four wings,” with two of which they covered their bodies in token of their profound reverence, and with two they flew to perform the divine behests. “ Their wings were stretched out, and the wings of one touched those of another,” to signify that they moved in concert. “ Whither the Spirit was to go they went, and they turned not, when they went ;” but proceeded with steadiness in their work, till it was accomplished. To express the alacrity and rapidity of their motions, the prophet says, “ Their appearance was as a flash of lightening.”

In describing the scenery of the vision, Ezekiel further adds, that “ by each of the living creatures there was a *wheel*.” As there were four living creatures, so there were four wheels. “ And their appearance and their work were as the colour of Beryl, and they four had one likeness, and there was, as it were, *a wheel in the middle of a wheel*.” This description is designed to represent the mysterious, but regular manner, in which God guides and orders events in relation to the nations of the earth.

To illustrate and improve this figurative representation of God’s providence, is what we now design.

I. The providence of God is represented by a *wheel*, to signify, that it is always *in motion*—always operating, to effectuate its various designs.

The Being, who made the world at first, “works hitherto,” and will continue forever to work. He upholds and governs the world, and superintends all events, great and small, which take place in it. If he should suspend his influence and withdraw his hand, the system of nature would be dissolved, the stars would start from their orbs, planets run lawless through the void, and creation return to chaos.

The same providence which sustains the universe, overrules all events in our world. Not only the armies of heaven, but also the inhabitants of the earth, are subject to its power. The revolutions of states and kingdoms are under its controul. “There are many devices in the hearts of men; but the counsel of the Lord shall stand.” They have neither wisdom to guide, nor power to effect their purposes without his support and permission. He raises up one, and casts down another; whatsoever he pleases, that he does, and none can stay his hand. He weakens the strength of the mighty, and turns to foolishness the devices of the crafty. He gives power to the faint, and to them who have no might he increases strength. The great events, which are often brought about by disproportionate means, are proofs of an almighty, superintending providence.

The prophet, describing the *wheel* of providence, says, “It was on the earth, and its rings were so high, that it was dreadful.” All things were comprehended within its vast circumference, and moved with its motions. There is a similar representation in the book of Job. “Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the almighty to *perfection*? It is high as heaven; what can we do? Deeper than hell; what can we know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and



broader than the sea." The majesty of providence is described in the like elevated language by the prophet Isaiah. "God sits on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. He weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. All nations before him are as a drop in a bucket, or a small dust in a balance. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts, and his ways above ours."

II. Providence is compared to a wheel, to signify the *mutability* of all things on earth.

As the condition of particular persons, so the state of nations and kingdoms is always changing. They are all on this mighty, stupendous wheel. All are in motion. None are stationary. Some are rising; others falling. They who rise, exult in their ascending progress, and forget that their motion will soon be reversed, and that the nations, which now seem to lie under them in the dust, will, at a future time, change places with them.

There was a time, when the Jews were high above all nations. In Ezekiel's day they had sunk to the lowest degradation. They were at the bottom of the wheel. They had lost their power, their government, their liberty. Many were carried captive to a distant land; those who remained at home, were slaves there. But they were to rise again, and their enemies were to fall. The Assyrians, now their masters, were afterward conquered by the Persians. At that time the Jews were released from bondage, and allowed to return to their own country. The Persians soon sunk from their elevated position on the wheel and the Grecians rose over them. These, in their turn, rolled down, and the Romans ascended. Thus

the nations of the earth have been, still are, and, for a time, will be in continual rotation.

These changes are the immediate effects of the pride, ambition and avarice of men; but they are all under the superintendency of a wise and righteous providence. "The rings of its wheels are full of eyes." Their motions are not casual, but intelligent; the effects, not of blind impulse, but of rational design. "The Spirit of life is in the wheels, and whithersoever the Spirit goes, they go."

God has some great and benevolent design in all his works. Men have designs, too, but they are often very different from his. The end, which divine wisdom has in view, is the protection and enlargement of the church, the diffusion of knowledge, and the eventual establishment of virtue and righteousness. The objects, which earthly powers are pursuing, are the enlargement of territory, the extension of dominion, the accumulation of wealth. But all their purposes God overrules to the furtherance of his own holy and benevolent ends. "The wrath of men he makes to praise him, and the remainder of their wrath he restrains." Powerful kings are often "the rods of his anger to chastise the people of his wrath; howbeit they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so, but it is in their heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." And when they have accomplished God's righteous design in the punishment of guilty nations, then "he will punish the fruit of their stout heart, and the glory of their high looks."

III. The text suggests to us, that there is a wonderful *order* and *connexion* in the works of providence.

The wheels in Ezekiel's vision were so nicely framed and adjusted, that they moved in concert,

and without interference. "There was a wheel in the middle of a wheel." Their motions were all harmonious; they were all directed to the same point, and guided in the same course by the Spirit, which was in them.

In a complex machine, there is a number of wheels, all which have a relation to, and dependence upon one another. One wheel, put in motion, moves the next, and this another through the whole system, till the main figure is exhibited, and the final object is accomplished. The scheme of providence is more complex, than any human design. It is carried on by a greater number of movements. It is framed together by more exquisite wisdom. It is conducted with more exact regularity, and accomplishes its end with more infallible certainty.

We can see a part only of God's immense plan. We cannot discern his work from the beginning to the end. But we can see enough to convince us, that there is a wheel within a wheel, and that one movement is produced by another. There is often in the scheme of providence, an obvious connexion, which we can trace through a long series.

The act of Jacob's sons in selling their brother Joseph into Egypt, led, by various steps, to the preservation of that country, and of the patriarchal family in a time of extreme famine. It brought down this family into Egypt. The increase of the Hebrews awakened the jealousy of the Egyptians who, to check the growth of these foreigners, reduced them to cruel servitude. The oppressions which they suffered were the occasion of their seeking and obtaining deliverance from this land of idolatry. In consequence of their deliverance, a church was planted in Canaan,

which had been long overspread with ignorance, superstition and vice. From hence the knowledge of true religion was afterward communicated to other nations. The Jews often departed from the purity of divine institutions, and corrupted the religion, which had been taught them from heaven. For their defection they were punished with various calamities. For their impenitence under milder punishments they were given up to the power of their enemies, and scattered among surrounding nations. By means of their captivities and dispersions the knowledge of the sacred scriptures and of the ancient prophecies was diffused in the world ; notices of the future appearance of a wonderful Redeemer were conveyed to many nations ; the Old Testament became so far known and regarded among the learned, that it was translated into the Greek, which was the most common language of the day. Thus the world was, in some measure, prepared to receive the gospel, when it was preached by the apostles.

When the Saviour appeared, the Jews rejected him. For their unbelief they were delivered into the hands of the Romans, and scattered into all parts of the empire. Their dispersion was the occasion of many visits and epistles from the apostles to them, and to the gentiles among whom they dwelt. Thus the gospel was more speedily and more extensively propagated. Things are now working, in the course of providence, for the recovery of that people, who have long seemed to be reprobated for their unbelief. "Have they stumbled, that they should fall? By no means ; but rather through their fall is salvation come to the gentiles. And if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them be the riches of the gentiles, how much more their ful-

ness? And what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead ?”

Within our own times we have seen something of this connexion in the wheels of providence. The late revolution in America awakened a revolutionary spirit in France. The successive changes in that nation have placed at the head of government a man of deep policy, boundless ambition, daring enterprize, and distinguished military talents, who has effected astonishing changes in Europe. The mighty convulsions, which have there been felt, are easily retraced to our own country. Here was a wheel in the midst of a wheel. When this was moved, others moved after it in succession, till a great part of the world was seen in motion. Great events have already appeared ; greater are still to follow.

However unhappy the wars and changes in Europe may have been in their immediate effects, some consequences have followed, which good men desired. The credit and influence of popery in France, Italy, and other states, are much diminished. It does not indeed appear, that the nations are reformed ; but the way is more open than formerly, to apply the means of reformation. The protestant religion is now allowed, where once it was punishable by law ; and the preachers of pure Christianity are tolerated and encouraged, where, not long since, they would have suffered persecution. Infidelity has indeed risen on the declensions of popery, as prophecy has warned us to expect ; but its triumph cannot be long, because it is, in its nature, inconsistent with the freedom, if not with the subsistence of civil society.

In a considerable part of Germany the established religion is popery, and in that empire there will undoubtedly be great changes. The emperor

of the Gauls may probably be an instrument, in the hand of providence, to weaken the political power of the papal religion in other nations, as he has done in France ; and when this instrument shall have accomplished its end, it will be laid aside.

IV. The text farther teaches us, that the ways of providence are often *secret* and *mysterious*. One wheel is hidden within another. We cannot discern in what manner, and to what end, they are moved, until their motions are manifested in the events produced.

“ Clouds and darkness are round about God’s throne. His judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. His way is in the sea, his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.” When he works, there is “ a hiding of his power.”

God himself is invisible. We see the operations, but not the hand, that performs and directs them. As Job says, “ We go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but we cannot perceive him ; on the left hand, where he doth work, but we cannot behold him ; he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.”

The events, which we observe, often have an undiscerned connexion with other events, which we never expected nor imagined. Great calamities, and great deliverances, important changes and mighty revolutions are frequently the effects of causes, which seemed indifferent, or tending to quite contrary results. Men are sometimes raised from obscurity and brought into publick life, to accomplish works, which we should not suppose they could ever have intended, or even imagined, and to which their wisdom, ability and education appeared utterly unequal. The

fairest means, by some unforeseen occurrence, fail of their end; and measures the most unpromising, by some secret influence, or by some strange coincidence of circumstances, prove wonderfully successful. Many of the great events, which take place in the political world, are brought about in an astonishing manner, which mortals could not have contrived beforehand, nor can investigate afterward. Hence Solomon says, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding; nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." Little incidents may lead to mighty consequences. Disappointments may be the occasion of great successes. A defeat in battle may operate to a future victory, or victory to a total defeat. The cautious counsels of wise politicians may terminate in perplexity and confusion; the rash adventures of the bold and daring may, in the most complicated dangers, effect surprising deliverances. The prophet, trusting in God's promised protection, bids defiance to the powers of the world. "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; give ear, all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us."

Our subject suggests to us some useful reflections.

1. It is matter of high consolation, that all things are under the government and superintendency of a perfect Being. "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice."

There are many events, which give us anxiety. As we cannot foresee their consequences, we fear

the worst. But the very events, which seem to bode evil, may, in the unseen connexion of things, tend to good. If, in their first operation, they should seem disastrous, they may, in a series of motions, exhibit occasions of joy.

In some powerful nations we see great avarice, ambition and pride. These passions virtue will condemn, and against them prudence will guard. But the things, which unrighteous men intend for evil, may, in the wonderful workings of providence, be turned to good.

Many instances of such an overruling providence are recorded in scripture, and some we ourselves have seen. The claims, which the British government made upon us, filled us with concern ; their attempts to enforce their claims roused us to arms. The result has been the establishment of our national independence, and a season of unparalleled prosperity. Our independence was one movement in the grand scheme of providence. This movement has touched other wheels, and has brought forward other movements ; and these, whatever their present appearance may be, will sooner or later result in happy and glorious events. Ezekiel's wheels, in their various turnings, rolled back the Jews from the land of their captivity to their own country. The same wheels are still rolling under the direction of the same eyes, which guided them in the prophet's vision, and will by and by present to the world grand and important events, in which all wise and good men will rejoice.

We often complain of the measures of human governments, as unwise or unrighteous. Such they may be, for earthly rulers are but men ; and even we ourselves, wise as we seem, may misjudge, for we also are men. But there is one great-



er than all. He rules univerfally. Juftice and judgment furround his throne. To his laws let us fubmit ; in his government let us rejoice.

2. Our fubject urges us to approve ourfelves to God by a wife and virtuous conduct, that we may be fafe under his government.

Though we cannot very accurately judge what will be the confequence of the political meafures purfued by our own, or other governments, yet we can judge infallibly concerning the tendency and effect of general virtue, and of prevailing wickednefs, under the divine government ; for “righteoufnefs exalteth a nation ; but fin is a reproach to any people.”

We all wifh the happinefs of our country.— However incompetent we may be to prefcribe the political means of national felicity, we are all competent to judge of the moral means, for thefe are made manifef in the courfe of God’s providence, and in the inftructions of his word.

Let each one, then, fearch his own heart, review his paf life, renounce his iniquities, do juftly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Let every one receive and revere the holy fcriptures, as the oracles of God, and place them before him for the direction of his life, and hide them in his heart, that by their influence he may be reftained from fin, and quickened to every good work.

Let all, in their refpective places, encourage and promote virtue and righteoufnefs among others, and confider one another to provoke unto love and good works.

Let all cheerfully contribute to the fupport of divine intitutions in the fociety of which they are members, and to the diffufion of Chriftian knowledge among them who fit in darknefs.

Let the sabbath be honoured by a pious recess from the labours of the world, and by a devout attendance on the worship of God, which is to be stately solemnized on that day.

Let children be early formed to sentiments of piety and to the practice of virtue, that they may be useful members of society on earth, and become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Cordially uniting in such measures as these, we shall enjoy the sure protection of an almighty providence, and have little to fear from hostile nations. "When our ways please the Lord, he will make our enemies to be at peace with us."

3. Our subject warns us against a thoughtless confidence of continued prosperity.

The prophet compares the work of providence to a moving wheel, to signify, that the world is in continual change—that no condition of persons or nations is stable and permanent.

While Europe has been in agitations and convulsions, we have, for more than twenty years, enjoyed great prosperity and uninterrupted peace. There have been some molestations from the savages, and some spoliations on our commerce; but no invasion; no such hostile attack, as has required a national exertion for defence. While some of the governments of Europe have been subverted, and others convulsed, ours has remained, and still remains unshaken. While many parts of the ancient continent have felt the dire scourge of scarcity, and even famine, the consequence of wasting war and inclement seasons, we have enjoyed such a redundancy of the fruits of the earth, as to be able, on advantageous terms, to supply the wants of our suffering fellow mortals.

But shall we promise ourselves the long, uninterrupted continuance of such prosperity? No:

The wheel is rolling ; and soon it may be our turn to feel its descending motion. The changes in other nations are warnings to us. There are circumstances attending our present situation, which carry a threatening aspect. It is a period, in which, according to the general interpretations of prophecy, great events are to be expected. Our prosperity has continued much longer, than we, or almost any nation have experienced at one period. Our moral state does not appear to be mended ; but iniquities of some kinds have observably increased. If an accumulated weight of national guilt shall fall on the descending part of the wheel of providence, this will awfully accelerate its downward motion. Let us not be highminded but fear. God seems to be coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities. The earth discloses her blood, and scarcely covers her slain. Let us enter into our chambers, and shut our doors about us ; there let us hide ourselves until the indignation be overpast.

The chambers to which we must resort, for security from impending storms, are the promises and providence of God. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower ; the righteous run into it, and are safe." Into this we must enter by repentance and prayer, and here we must continue by humble obedience.

The scripture foretels a time, when the religion of the gospel shall generally prevail, and by its benign influence spread peace and happiness among the human race. But previous to this glorious period, there will be terrible judgments, violent convulsions, and mighty revolutions. These will be the dire effects of men's inveterate corruptions, which will have sunk so deep, that they can be

purged away only by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. To secure ourselves from a share in these calamities all human power and policy are utterly insufficient. Our security will depend on the governing influence of religious principles, and the general practice of virtue and righteousness. If we would escape the plagues, which are coming on other nations, we must so far separate ourselves from them, as not to partake of their sins.

The judgments foretold in prophecy, as nearly preceding the grand reformation in religion, seem chiefly to be pointed against the nations embracing the papal superstition. But if we, who profess a purer religion, imitate those nations in vice and immorality, on what ground shall we expect an exemption from their calamities? National safety depends on virtuous manners, not on nominal professions. Christ says to the church in Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful therefore and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know, what hour I will come upon thee. He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life; but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

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# SERMON XIX.



*The Temper of a Christian with regard to Moral  
Good and Evil.*



ROMANS xii. 9.

Abhor that which is evil : cleave to that which is good.

THE difference between good and evil is here supposed to be already understood and acknowledged. These Romans, even in their gentile state, had known God, though they had not glorified him ; and they had received the inscription of the great rules of morality on their hearts, though they had not obeyed them. By the gospel there had been made to them a more full discovery of the divine law and of moral obligation ; and, at the same time, a way had been opened for the pardon of their past transgressions. They must therefore now have been capable of judging what was right.

The wickedness of the world, before of the Christian part of it, is owing far more to the want of an honest disposition, than to the want of necessary information. Though various speculative opinions are adopted among Christians, yet con-

cerning right and wrong in practice there is a general agreement, except where the judgment is perverted by the habits of vice. The main point is to abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. With this temper governing our hearts, we shall be secured from dangerous errors ; or at least from their dangerous influence.

We will consider the two branches of our text distinctly.

First. We will explain and illustrate the *abhorrence of evil*.

On a careless, superficial view of themselves, some may imagine, they abhor evil, when they really cleave to it. To prevent misapprehensions, we must examine our hearts with attention.

1. There is a great difference between a *real abhorrence* of evil, and an *external forbearance* of it.

Men do not always pursue the course of life, which, under other circumstances, their hearts would really choose. A regard to worldly interest, the want of means or opportunity, the apprehension of detection and disgrace, the power of education and example, may be a temporary restraint from the iniquity to which they are strongly inclined, and which, as soon as the restraint ceases, they will pursue with avidity. King Joash did right, while he was under the influence of Jehoiada the priest ; but when the good priest was dead, the king fell away to idolatry ; and even murdered Jehoiada's son, who had the boldness to reprove his apostacy. He who loves iniquity is, in the judgment of God, deemed guilty of it, though he should not *actually* practice it ; for, in this case, the practice is prevented, not by voluntary choice, but by external restraint.

The divine law forbids covetousness, as well as

oppression ; lust, as well as adultery ; envy and malice, as well as cruelty and revenge. It requires us to put off the old man, not only with his deeds, but with his lusts too. The thought of foolishness it pronounces to be sin. Wrath and hatred indulged, it condemns as murder conceived in the heart. The outward conduct forms the character in the sight of men ; but in the sight of God the character is determined by the habitual temper : for he seeth not as man seeth.

To know ourselves then, we must observe the current of our thoughts, the tendency of our desires, and the general run of our wishes and intentions.

We forbear some iniquities, which we see in others. So far it is well. But what restrains us ? —Is it a settled principle of opposition to evil ? Is it a sense of God's holy presence and a regard to the glory of his name ? Is it a fear of his displeasure and an apprehension of the judgment to come ? Or is it only some inferior motive arising from considerations of temporal convenience ? The man, who avoids evil from the latter motive, may be called *prudent*. It is only the influence of the former, which denominates him *virtuous*.

2. There is a great difference between an *habitual*, and an *occasional* abhorrence of evil.

One who, in the general course of his life, is devoted to a particular vice, may, at times, feel an abhorrence of it. Excess of indulgence will often produce a temporary disgust, without eradicating the habit. Nature, clogged and enfeebled by a debauch, loathes the pleasures with which it is overloaded ; but as soon as it rises from the depression, the desire of gratification returns with its former violence. Sickness or affliction may, for the present, deaden the relish for particular

sins, or awaken such conviction and remorse, as will produce a temporary abhorrence of them; and yet, when health and prosperity are restored, the love of these very sins operates as usual. There is no alteration in the temper of the mind; the only difference is in the state of the body, or in the outward condition.

There are few wicked men, but who have their serious and thoughtful frames. The admonition of a friend, or their own reflections may awaken sentiments of opposition to vice, and resolutions to forsake it; and yet these sentiments and resolutions may never be carried into effect.

This occasional indifference, or disrelish to evil, is not a real abhorrence of it. The mind still is bent toward it: there is only an accidental suspension of the habitual desire.

3. There is a material difference between our abhorrence of evil in *other people*, and our abhorrence of it in *ourselves*.

The man addicted to vice condemns in others every vice, but his own; and *this* too, when he happens to suffer by it in his interest or reputation.

There are those, who take great freedom with the characters of their neighbours, and seem to think it perfectly innocent for them to divert themselves at the expense of any man's peace and honour. But none are more severe to condemn this liberty, when they are the objects of the slander. The most dishonest man, that you meet with, if he happens to be cheated in a bargain, or injured in his property, will express great abhorrence of fraud and oppression. And even in indifferent cases, men usually censure in others the vices, of which they think themselves to be clear. The knave abhors the drunkard, the prodigal def-



pises the miser, and the profane scoffer detests the dissembler in religion.

A forwardness then to condemn sin in others, is no proof of a real abhorrence of it ; for this may proceed from partiality, selfishness, pride, ill nature, or a disposition to justify ourselves. The main question is, In what light we view *our own* sins? *These* we may most clearly discern ; and from *these* we have most to fear. *These* we should contemplate with peculiar abhorrence, and condemn with greatest severity. David says, “ I was upright before God, and I kept myself from *mine* iniquity.

4. There is an essential difference between the abhorrence of evil *itself*, and the abhorrence of its *consequences*.

All sin, by the divine constitution, tends to misery. Even in the present life, we see this to be, in some degree, its usual effect.

Nature perverted loves sin ; but nature cannot be so changed as to love misery. The sin may be pleasing, but the proper fruits of it never can be so.

The wicked man, while he loves his vices, abhors their tendency. When he has destroyed his health by excess, and his substance by prodigality, he may wish he had been more temperate and frugal. He may lament the painful consequences of his irregularity. But he would have felt the same uneasiness and disquietude, if he had lost his substance by fire, or his health by a fever. He is not displeased with his own conduct, but with the divine government, which has established a connexion between vice and misery. “ The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” If he resolves to refrain from his former vices ; still it is his wish,

that he might indulge them with safety, and that the consequences of them might be prevented by some more easy and agreeable means, than forsaking them.

To judge, then, whether we abhor evil, we must enquire, whether it be sin itself, or only the consequence of it, that offends us—whether we be grieved for our sins in the instances, in which we feel no present inconveniences from them; for our *secret* sins; for *every* known act of wickedness; for the guilty *thoughts* and *inclinations*, which have never risen into external acts—what is the principle within us which is crossed; whether it be the love of virtue and righteousness, or only our pride and covetousness. By such enquiries we are to learn, whether we abhor moral evil, or only abhor poverty, infamy and pain.

5. We must remember, that there is a mighty difference between an abhorrence of *evil*, and an abhorrence of the *persons*, who have done it.

This distinction is not sufficiently regarded. If from any cause you have conceived a prejudice against a man, you readily condemn in him every action in the least degree exceptionable; not always because you hate the action, but often merely because you hate the man. The same things, which in others would pass unnoticed, are reprobated in him, because you wish to destroy his reputation, and sink him as low in the opinion of the world, as he has already fallen in yours. This is so far from being a hatred of evil, that it is really a rejoicing in it. It is nothing different from malice. The same temper, which prompts you to scandalize an enemy, and to say all manner of evil against him, would take pleasure in his real iniquities, because these might enable you to attack his reputation with better hopes of success. Let

no man then conclude that he abhors evil, unless this abhorrence extend farther than to the evil which he sees in his enemies. It must come home to himself, and operate with peculiar warmth against his own iniquities.

Nothing is more common, than for opposite parties in religion, or in politicks, to vilify one another. The same conduct, which a zealot would overlook, or even vindicate in his own party, or sect, he will, with great severity, reprehend, and, on all occasions, expose in a rival one. *This* he wishes to weaken and discredit; but to exalt and establish his own. For this reason you often see religious partisans far more zealous to make profelytes to their sect, than to make saints of their profelytes. It was said of the Pharisees, "They compassed sea and land to make one profelyte, and when they had gained him, they rendered him twofold more a child of hell than themselves." Hence it is, that they who pretend to form a pure church, consisting wholly of saints, usually bring faintship down to so low a standard, that few will want proof. They have men's persons in admiration, not because of their virtue, but for the sake of advantage: and the only indispensable qualification is a zealous attachment to *their* party.

When we feel in ourselves a zeal against iniquity, let us stand and enquire, whose iniquity it is, that warms our zeal. Is it our own, or some other man's? Is it that of a friend, or of an enemy? That of the sect to which we belong, or only that of a sect which we hate and wish to depress? If only the latter awakens our displeasure, it is not the *evil* of the person, but the *person himself*, that is the object of our abhorrence. And let us beware, lest the zeal in which we glory as a virtue, be finally imputed as a vice. If we have

bitter envy and strife in our hearts, this wisdom descendeth not from above.

6. We must distinguish between an abhorrence of *particular* evils, and an abhorrence of evil *at large*.

There may be some vices, from which men are secured by their constitution of body, or condition in life. There are also vices, which, in some men's character, are excluded by opposite vices. A *profuse*, and a *miserly* disposition are both vicious; but they cannot meet in the same person, because they are in their nature, inconsistent. The same may be said of *indolence* and *passionateness*—of *carelessness* and *anxiety*; and many other vicious tempers, in their extreme. If you hate a particular vice only because it stands in the way of your pursuing another; and if you abstain from one evil, that you may practice a different one with greater freedom; you are no better than your neighbor, who abstains from your vices, that he may follow his own. Your supposed abhorrence of evil, is only a love of evil. You reject one, because you love another more.

The question then must be, whether you esteem God's commands concerning *all* things to be right, and hate *every* false way.

These observations may sufficiently illustrate the temper under consideration. Before we dismiss this branch of our subject, it will be proper to call up in our minds some arguments adapted to awaken an abhorrence of evil.

1. All moral evil is contrary to the nature of God.

That great and dreadful Being, who fills the universe with his presence, and comprehends all creation within the circuit of his inspection, is ever represented, in scripture, as loving righteous-

ness and hating wickedness; as looking on the virtuous with approbation and favor, and beholding with abhorrence the workers of iniquity. Reason consents to the truth of this representation; for a being of perfect knowledge and rectitude can never confound things so opposite in their nature, as virtue and vice.

The dignity of man consists in a conformity to the character, and the happiness of man depends on the enjoyment of the favour, of this all-perfect, Almighty Being. He who loves what God hates, and he who abhors what God approves, is the object of his displeasure, and therefore must be miserable.

Do we believe, that there is such a Being? And can we think it indifferent what choice we make, and what course we pursue? Do we imagine, that he who made and upholds us, is an unconcerned spectator of our conduct? Can our hearts be reconciled to the idea of living under his disapprobation? Can we contemplate the purity of his nature, and the defilement of our own, and not abhor ourselves? Even angels, those holy beings, veil their faces in his presence. What humility then should cover the face of guilty man? With what self-abasement should he contemplate his own fallen condition? With what heart-felt penitence should he reflect on his numerous transgressions? With what fervent desires should he seek the grace of God to purify his soul and make him meet for heavenly joys?

2. Moral evil is contrary to the design, for which we were created.

When we contemplate our nature as formed by the Deity, we see that we were made for a higher purpose than to obey the calls of appetite and lust. We have within us the faculty of reason to dis-

tinguish between good and evil, and the principle of conscience to urge our choice of the one, and rejection of the other. While we regard iniquity in our hearts, there is a sense of guilt, an involuntary self-condemnation which attends us. By experience we find, that without the love of God and of virtue governing our conduct, there can be no rational happiness. Ought we not to abhor that, which in its very nature, sinks, degrades and ruins us? Ought we not, in our hearts, to detest, and in our practice, to avoid that, which in our reason we condemn? Shall rational beings act in such contradiction to themselves, as to pursue what they know to be miserable, and choose what they see to be fatal? We call ourselves rational; and we shew ourselves such, when we abhor evil, and cleave to that which is good.

3. The revelation, which God has given us, is designed to make us see the reality, and regard the importance of the matter, which we are now contemplating.

He has spoken to us from heaven, and demonstrated the voice to be divine. He has sent prophets, apostles, angels, and one greater than them all, to instruct, warn and persuade us, to point out the path which leads to glory, and fence up the fatal track which goes down to the chambers of destruction: and shall we, with blind infatuation and headlong obstinacy, leap over all barriers, and plunge down the dreadful precipice?

4. Consider what the Saviour of men has suffered to deliver us from evil, and you will be convinced, that you ought to fly from it.

Our salvation from sin and its consequences, was the design of his coming into this world. To accomplish this benevolent design, he bare our sins in his own body on the cross. Great was the

burden, which he sustained, when God laid on him the iniquities of us all. View him in all the trying scenes of his life; especially view him bleeding and dying on the accursed tree. Recollect, that our sins were the cause, and deliverance from them was the end of all his sufferings; and then say, whether every sin ought not to be your abhorrence? Will you choose that which he abhorred? Will you indulge that which caused his death? Will you retain that, from which he died to deliver you? Is there in man such perverseness of soul, such ingratitude to a benefactor, and such disregard to himself? One would abhor the sight of an enemy, who had slain a child, a brother or a friend. He would never choose for his companion the truculent ruffian, who had thus wounded and distressed him. Much rather should we abhor our own sins. These have shed the Redeemer's blood—These, if embraced in our bosom, will destroy our souls.

Remember farther,

5. All evil is opposite to the holy Spirit. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He calls them to turn and live. To the calls of his word he adds the secret motions of his own Spirit. The Spirit of God is holy in his nature and in his operations. His nature is opposite to evil, and his operations are to recover us from it.

His awakening and convincing influences on the minds of sinners, are called *striving with them*.

Their continuance in sin, is called *resisting him*. And will you not abhor that which is contrary to the Spirit of God—that which opposes his friendly operations—that which is so hateful to him, and fatal to you, that he is striving to deliver you from it? Will you resist such kindly motions and grieve this heavenly visitant?

Contemplate evil in any point of view, as contrary to the nature of God—to the design of revelation—to the end of your creation—to the purpose of Christ's death, and to the influence of the holy Spirit, and you will see, that it ought to be your abhorrence. And when you find that these views of sin bring you to a real, habitual, universal abhorrence of it; and that this abhorrence, while it extends to all sin, is more immediately pointed at your own, you may then conclude, that religion has place in your hearts.

We proceed now to illustrate,

Secondly, The other branch of our subject.  
*Cleave to that which is good.*

Religion begins in the renovation of the inward man; but it ends not there: it discovers itself in the works of righteousness. The pure in heart will be holy in all manner of conversation. It is not now and then a good action, or a temporary appearance of goodness, which will prove the heart to be sincere: there must be an *adherence* to that which is good.

1. We must cleave to *all* that is good, *without exception.*

In the new man,—“old things are past away, and all things are become new.” He glorifies God in body and spirit. He yields himself a servant to God, and his members instruments of righteousness to him.

We must be ready to every good work. If, in our resolutions of obedience, we make exceptions and reservations, it is not the will of God, but our own will, which governs us. The question with us must be, not so much what will serve our worldly designs, as what will be acceptable in the sight of God.



2. We must cleave to that which is good *with constancy*.

A variable goodness will not meet the divine approbation. Religion is "a patient continuance in well-doing." Of Judah and Ephraim God complains, "What shall I do unto you? Your goodness is a morning cloud; as the early dew it goeth away." Transient resolutions and temporary reformati<sup>o</sup>ns are not cleaving to, but trifling with, that which is good. There is a peculiar guilt attending the case of these short-lived conversions. The man, who forms a resolution in favour of religion, is convinced of its truth and importance; otherwise there would be no ground for the resolution. Now if, after this, he abandon the serious purpose which he had made, and return to his sinful course, he discovers greater strength of lust, greater opposition of heart to goodness, greater contempt of God, than if he never had been the subject of these convictions. Hence the apostle to the Hebrews represents it as peculiarly difficult "to renew those again to repentance, who fall away, after they have been once enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God." The apostle Peter also says, "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."

There are some doubleminded men, who are unstable in all their ways. They have so much sense of the obligations of religion, that they dare not wholly disregard them. They form good resolutions, but never pursue them to effect. They feel inward convictions of sin, but never carry them to a real repentance. Their lusts prevail, and smother their half-conceived purposes of vir-

tue. Their purposes again revive, and are again suppressed. Let not such a man think, that he shall receive any thing of God. For though he should never run to the same excess in vice as many others have done, being at times under stronger restraints from his own conviction, yet he goes more abreast against light, does greater violence to his conscience, and more directly opposes the Spirit of grace, and consequently may be more criminal in the sight of God, than some who seem to sin with a higher hand.

This thought deserves the attention of those, who have had frequent convictions and awakenings from the providence and Spirit of God, and yet never have really cleaved to that which is good. They ought to remember, that “for all these things God will bring them into judgment;” for in proportion as they have been favoured with more powerful excitements to religion, they are, while they neglect it, involving themselves in more awful guilt, and filling up the measure of their sins with more awful rapidity. If opposition to an awakened conscience, and resistance of a striving Spirit, are aggravations of guilt, then we must conclude, that as sinners have experienced these more frequently, and more powerfully, their guilt is on this account more dreadfully increasing, as long as they continue impenitent and unreformed. Nor can they know how soon these favourable motions will cease, and be succeeded by unfeeling hardness of heart.

3. We must cleave to that which is good, even when it is attended with *difficulty* and *danger*.

Though wisdom's paths are paths of peace, yet we shall find many rough places, in which we must tread with caution, and walk with circumspection, lest we stumble, or be turned out of the

way. Our Saviour has warned us, that narrow is the way which leads to life, and strait the gate by which we enter ; and he directs us to strive with earnestness—to press on with resolution.

Difficulties and oppositions will arise from the corruptions of the heart, the examples of the ungodly, the temptations of evil spirits, and the objects of the world. But we must go on our way, and, “ laying aside every weight, run with patience the race set before us.”

4. We must choose that which is good, though we be *singular* in our choice.

The man, who cleaves to God with purpose of heart, rises superior to the examples and enticements of the world. He walks, not as pleasing men, but God who searcheth the heart. He desires, indeed, the concurrence and assistance of others ; he wishes that all around him were zealously engaged in religion : thus his hands would be strengthened, his resolution animated, and his temptations weakened. But still he resolves, whatever choice others make, and whatever course they pursue, he will walk with God. Though he does not affect singularity, he had rather be singular, than wicked. He had rather stand alone in virtue, than join a multitude in vice. Though others think it strange that he runs not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of him, yet he knows how to justify his own conduct. He will not be ridiculed out of his virtue, nor bring on himself the wrath of God, to escape the scoffs of men. He is gentle toward all men, but a servant to none in matters of religion. He is easy to be intreated in a reasonable case, but he will not be persuaded to violate his conscience. “ He will have no fellow-

ship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will rather reprove them."

We have seen what it is, to cleave to that which is good. We will close the subject with some arguments to confirm our resolutions in well doing.

"Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" This will always be safe. There can be no real danger attending it? Whatever dangers you may apprehend, they are but imaginary. They are the suggestions of lust, not of wisdom. Can there be danger in daily prayer to God, in a pious regard to his providence, and in a reverence of his name? Can there be danger in righteousness, benevolence and integrity toward men? Can there be danger in sobriety, temperance, purity and meekness? Do these virtues expose you to any mischiefs, from which the contrary vices would secure you?

The wicked man is often perplexed, what course to pursue, and what turns and shifts to make, that he may shun the evils which threaten him; and, after all his artifice, he runs into the very mischief which he aims to avoid, or plunges himself into a greater by declining a less. The upright man needs no artifice. The way of safety lies plain before him. It is only to follow that which is good. "He who walks uprightly walks surely; his integrity will preserve him."

"Great peace have they who love God's law, and nothing shall offend them." Whatever afflictions befall them, they have joy in the reflection, that their steady aim has been to approve themselves to God.

"Jesus," the great pattern of virtue, "went about doing good. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." No dangers ever diverted him from the work which God gave him

to do. The more constantly we cleave to that which is good, the nearer we approach to his character.

The way of goodness leads to happiness. The pleasure which the good man finds in religion here, is an earnest of superior happiness hereafter. By experience he daily learns the tendency of virtue, and is persuaded that there awaits him, in God's presence, fulness of joy. Amidst the changes of this mortal state, he looks up to God with cheerful hope and confidence, that under the direction of perfect wisdom, all things are working for his good; that, in the hands of infinite power, his future felicity is secure; and that these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will prepare him for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Conscious that he has cleaved to that which is good, he contemplates, with a serene and cheerful mind, the gloomy change of death, viewing it as the happy period of all his painful labours, and his introduction to a world, where he shall receive an abundant reward.


That we may cleave to that which is good, let us make it our full and deliberate choice. Let us seek the spiritual renovation of the heart, a mind enlightened to the clear discernment of truth, and a temper moulded into a conformity to the character of God. Let us ever guard against the first departure from goodness; for one devious step leads to another. When we begin to wander, we can prescribe no bounds to transgression. Let us entertain no sentiments, which contradict moral rectitude. Such sentiments, whatever arguments may be urged in their support, must be false. Nothing can be true, which is contrary to moral goodness. Great familiarity with ourselves

is necessary to constancy in religion. It is by the examination of our hearts, and the review of our actions, that we learn whether they are conformed to the will of God. It is thus that we make a seasonable discovery of our errors, and correct them before we are led dangerously astray. Remembering our dependence on God, we must repair often to his throne for light to guide us, and grace to preserve us in the way of goodness and truth.


Happy is the man who with the Psalmist can say, "I have chosen the way of truth, thy judgments I have laid before me, I have stuck unto thy testimonies. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

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# SERMON XX.



## *Moral Reflections on Floods.*



A Sermon delivered February 22, 1807.



AMOS ix. 5.

The Lord of hosts is he that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn, and it shall rise up wholly like a flood, and shall be drowned as by the flood of Egypt.

**G**REAT and important events are, in the sacred writings, often described by allusions to the sudden rise and extensive spread of waters. This metaphor is sometimes used to express *happy* events; but more frequently those which are *calamitous*. To the latter it is applied in our text.

The prophet foretels a desolation soon to come on the land of Israel by the invasion of their enemies. The sudden manner and irresistible force of the invasion, and the clean riddance which it should make of people and property he illustrates by a flood; particularly by a flood of Egypt,

when the river Nile, overflowing the lower country, compelled the inhabitants to retire with their substance to the higher grounds. "The Lord toucheth the land, and it shall melt;" shall seem to be at once dissolved into water. "It shall rise up wholly as a flood, and shall be drowned as by the flood of Egypt."

Floods of water naturally suggest to us many useful meditations, some of which may properly employ our minds this afternoon.

The winter hitherto has been most remarkable. A long course of intense cold has covered the streams with prodigious masses of the firmest ice. The streams, thus bridged over, have, thrice within three weeks, been suddenly swelled by copious rains to such a height, as to sweep off by the force of water and weight of ice, a great part of the mills, and most of the bridges, which stood upon them.

By reason of the increase of people, wealth, business and travelling, works of this kind have been greatly multiplied within a few years; the loss sustained therefore by individuals and by communities has been incalculable; and the embarrassments, to which many travellers and some families are subjected, in consequence of these devastations, is inconceivable.

These floods, though disastrous to property, may be conducive to the promotion of piety. With this view we will now contemplate them.

1. They lead us to realize the majesty and supremacy of God.

Grand and striking is the descriptive language of the prophet in our text. "The Lord of hosts is he, that toucheth the earth, and it shall melt." The touch of his finger covers the earth with a flood, as suddenly, as if the solid ground were melt-



ed into a fluid mass. The land riseth into a flood. The prophet adds, "It is he that buildeth his storied in the heavens, and hath founded his troop in the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out on the earth; the Lord of hosts is his name." We have a similar description of God's power in the book of Micah. "The Lord cometh forth from his place; he will come down and tread on the high places of the earth, and the mountains shall be molten under him, and the vallies shall be cleft; they shall be as wax before the fire, and as waters poured down a steep place." The same allusions we find in the book of Psalms. "The Lord is very great; he is clothed with honour and majesty. He covereth himself with light, as with a garment; he stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain; he layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; he maketh the clouds his chariot; he walketh on the wings of the wind. He laid the foundations of the earth; he covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At his rebuke they fled; at the voice of his thunder they hasted away." God's sovereign and absolute disposal of the mighty waters is adduced in the book of Job, as a demonstration of his supreme and universal dominion. Thus speaks the Almighty to his servant; "Who shut up the sea with doors?—I made the cloud its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band. I brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." God's controuling power over floods and mountains was manifested in a peculiar manner to the Jews, in their deliverance from Egypt, and introduction into Canaan. This is grandly described in one of the Psalms. "When

Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of a strange language, Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it and fled; Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O sea, that thou fleddest; and thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams, and ye little hills like lambs! Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turneth the rock into standing water, and the flint into a fountain of water." The prophet Jeremiah alledges, as a proof of the infidelity, and even brutality of the Jews, that they revered not God's presence, when they had before them the most striking evidences of it in the mighty swellings of the waters, and the effectual restraints under which they were held. "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding, who have eyes, but see not; and ears, but hear not: fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence? who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over."

Floods exhibit to us a grand and astonishing spectacle. They swell the mind with the idea of awful and irresistible power. They shew us the vanity and impotence of man. They demonstrate the presence of an invisible Being, who alone maintains a dominion over them. They admonish us to revere his supreme majesty, and trust his continual care.

We see evidences of God's providence every where, and every day, but common and daily occurrences, being familiar to us, are easily over-

looked, or soon forgotten. Floods which are more rare appearances, unite their novelty with their grandeur, to attract the attention, affect the imagination and solemnize the mind.

2. Floods call our attention to the *wisdom* and *goodness*, as well as to the power and majesty of God.

Settlements bordering on seas, or contiguous to large rivers, are subject to inundations, which sometimes spread wide devastations. Ordinarily, however, the tides of the sea, and the swellings of rivers are so disposed, as to be beneficial, not injurious to mankind.

The land of Egypt, where rains seldom fall, depends on the annual flowings of its river for the fertility of its soil. Low lands, bordering on large streams, are enriched by floods. These may sometimes "wash away the things, which grow out of the earth;" but usually they render the earth more productive. And it is happy that, though they are absolutely beyond *our* controul, they are always under the direction of the great governour of nature.

If the vast quantities of snow, which fall in the winter on the mountainous parts of the country, should be dissolved by copious rains and a steady warmth, the rise of floods, and the impetuosity of streams would spread extensive ruin; and the erection of bridges, mills and water works would be a fruitless labour. To prevent this calamity, the snow waters are usually drained off in a gentle manner; vernal rains are short; warm days are followed with cool nights; the rising flood is checked by a change of weather. Thus the snows are taken off without imminent danger to man or material injury to property, and with sensible benefit to the soil.

It is a kindness in providence, that high floods seldom come in that season of the year, when our fruits are in the field. Such repeated inundations, as we have seen of late, coming in midsummer, or in early autumn, would sweep off the fruits of our fields and meadows, and be followed with extensive scarcity. And if such unseasonable floods were frequent, the rich intervals contiguous to rivers would be deserted, and our best lands lie uncultivated.

It is an instance of divine goodness, that floods are attended with some degree of regularity, so that ordinarily we know when to expect them, and what precautions to take for security against them.

Let us learn to trust that benevolent Being, who orders snows and rains, storms and floods for the benefit of the human kind.

3. Floods remind us of our own *impotence*, and of our *dependence on God*.

We see, that it is not in *our* power to order the time when they shall come, or when they shall retire ; to prescribe the height to which they shall rise, or the extent to which they shall spread ; to divert their course, or repress their impetuosity. All these circumstances are directed by a superior power—by him who gathers the winds in his fists, and measures the waters in the hollow of his hand. Equally dependent are we in every thing—equally impotent in every condition. But such scenes are now and then presented to us, that impressed with a sense of our weakness, and of God's governing providence, we may never trust in ourselves, but in all our ways may acknowledge him.

4. Floods, coming in an unusual time and manner, teach us the *uncertainty* of human designs and the *precariousness* of worldly property.

Floods though ordinarily disposed in mercy, may sometimes come for correction. So Elihu observes ; “ God by watering wearieth the thick cloud, which is turned about by his counsels to do whatsoever he commandeth on the face of the world ; and he causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for the land, or for mercy.”

A general deluge was the judgment, by which God punished the wickedness of the old world. Partial inundations have often spread desolation to a wide extent on lands adjacent to seas and rivers. The swelling tide urged by violent winds has rushed in far upon the land, laid towns and cities waste, driven ships from their moorings far upon the solid ground, where houses and stores have stood ; and, at the same time, has swept houses and stores with their treasures and owners into the ocean, where ships were moored. Rivers, raised by mighty rains or the sudden dissolution of snows, have borne away with impetuous force the works and labours of men, their flocks and herds, their habitations and riches.

Such floods are to be regarded as calamities, not only to the immediate sufferers, but also to communities. They may, however, like other calamities, be useful in a moral view, to admonish us of the vanity and instability of earthly things, and to direct our thoughts to better objects. The late floods, coming in an unusual season, rising one after another in quick succession, and bearing on with them immense quantities of heavy and solid ice, have produced disastrous effects never before known, to such an extent, since our country was inhabited.

We see how easily the hand of God can blast the expectations, frustrate the designs, and destroy the works of men. Let us seek a city which

hath foundations, and there lay up treasures, which floods and storms cannot annoy.

5. Unusual floods remind us of God's power to *punish*, or *protect* us, according as we *offend* or *obey* him.

He who can swell the waters to overflow us, can let loose enemies to invade us. He who can repress the angry floods, can restrain the rage of men.

The inroads of enemies are often compared to the irruption of waters. Their defeat and disappointment to the stilling of waves and the drying up of rivers. The prophet foretels a time, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, but the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." The Psalmist uses the same similitude; "The God of our salvation is the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off on the seas; he by his strength setteth fast the mountains, and stilleth the noise of the sea, the noise of the waves, and the tumult of the people." "The sorrows of death compassed me; the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. In my distress I called upon the Lord. He sent forth his arrows and scattered them. Then the channels of waters were seen, the foundations of the world were discovered. He sent from above, and drew me out of many waters."

Men, when their passions are calm and undisturbed, like natural streams of water, move harmless within their bounds, and glide gently along in their proper channels. But if pride, ambition, avarice, wrath and revenge once take the command of them, then like the sea agitated with storms, or like rivers swelled to floods, they rush on impetuous and carry destruction with them. Observe the same man guided by sober reason, and

urged by blind passion, and you will see him as different from himself, as is the gentle rill from the headlong torrent.

There was no evil on earth which David so much deprecated, as subjection to the power of a mortal enemy. When the choice was offered him of seven years famine, three days pestilence, or three months flight before his enemies, he answered, "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for great are his mercies; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

It is happy for us, that he who rules the seas and restrains the floods, can repress the passions and controul the designs of men. "The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he will restrain."

6. Floods remind us of our *mutable* and *mortal* condition. Under a general sentence of mortality on the nation of Israel, Moses said, "Thou carriest them away as with a flood."

Time, like a stream, is rolling on, nor stops its course by day nor by night. Yea, it rushes forward with rapidity like a river swelled to a flood.

Streams bend their course in various directions; but all, whatever direction they take, tend to the ocean, where their waters are swallowed up and lost. Men have their different objects and pursuits; but all are alike hastening to the grave; all are pressing forward to the world of eternal retribution.

All the rivers run into the sea, and would soon cease, were they not continued by a succession of waters. The human race is preserved by a succession of mortals. One generation passes away, and another comes. Thus the inhabitants of the earth abide from age to age. The race is called the same, but the mortals, which compose it,

like the waters which constitute a river, are changing every day and every hour.

It would be wise for us often to reflect on our transient condition. We are passing away like the floods; we have no abiding place on earth. Let us not set our affection on things below, but look forward to that world, to which we are going. Would a man hurried down a rapid stream, exult in his riches, because he passed along in sight of meadows, fields, groves, and houses? Would he call these his own, because he beheld them, and only just beheld them with his eyes? Why should we, who are hurried through life, and carried away as with a flood, glory in the worldly objects, which we see, as we pass along, but scarcely have time to possess?

We are changing our condition, and our relation to things around us. We are passing from place to place, from object to object, from scene to scene, like men floating down a stream. This moment flies, the next succeeds, and goes off like the former, giving place to a successor. One enjoyment, or amusement departs, and another comes. One design, or employment is defeated or laid aside, and another taken up. Here we hope for better success. Here, again disappointed, we change our purpose. We walk in a vain show; we are disquieted in vain. Like men thrown out on a flood, we struggle for shore; we pant for rest; we seize the twig; it breaks; we are driven with the stream; we grasp the leaf; we sink; we pass from human sight, and are soon forgotten.

There is nothing stable here below; no firm object by which we can hold, no solid ground on which we can stand. The anchor of our hope must be fixed in the grace and goodness, the promise and faithfulness of God.



A flood is not only rapid, but violent in its progress. No works of art can restrain it. And no man hath power over death. As well may we invert the downward stream and remand it back to its source; as well may we repress the rising flood or scoop it from its channel, as finally prevent the approach, or repel the attack of death. There is an appointed time to man upon earth, and the bounds appointed him he cannot pass. It is God who holds our souls in life, and whose visitation preserves our spirits. When he takes away our breath, we die. When he brings down to the dust, who can raise himself up? When he smites, who can deliver out of his hands?

A flood is a metaphor used in scripture to denote *sudden* destruction. The prophet says, "The Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a destroying storm, and a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth." Job says of the hypocrite, "He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth which the keeper maketh. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a storm hurleth him out of his place."

Various are the means by which, and the ways in which, men are removed out of life. Concerning the manner of our own death we can form no certain judgment. But since many of our fellow mortals are removed in a sudden manner, we should all act on the supposition, that our removal may be as sudden. Our Saviour admonishes us, that, as we know not at what hour he will come, we ought always to watch, lest coming suddenly he find us sleeping.

We all, like a flood, which rolls on and returns not again, are going the way, whence we shall not return. We are passing, as the wind, which cometh not again; the place which has known us,

will know us no more. How indifferent should we be to these worldly interests, which soon we must relinquish, and never repossess ! How diligently should we improve the season, which soon must end, and never be renewed ? “ What our hands find to do, let us do it with our might ; there is no work in the grave.”

To a time of prevailing mortality the metaphor is peculiarly applicable. In reference to such a time Moses says, “ Thou carriest them away as with a flood.” But at all times men are mortal ; are doomed to dust ; are hastening to the grave. Time, like a rising flood, sweeps them all away without distinction.

The swelling river takes up all objects within its reach, and drives them down its current. Death makes no difference ; it bears away the small and the great, the poor and the rich, the old and the young, the worthless and the useful. They are all swimming down the stream of time together, like the various materials which cover the surface of a flood. If at one time, they crowd thicker, and roll faster, than at another, yet they are all constantly hurried downward, and will soon be thrown into the boundless ocean.

We see, then, the true end and use of life. It is to prepare for death, and the eternity which will follow. How unaccountable is the folly of mortals ! They know that death is before them ; and how seldom they think of it ? They see others swept away with the flood, and hardly consider themselves as within the stream. What multitudes perish “ without any regarding it ?”

The uncertainty of the time of death, our Lord urges as an argument for watchfulness. Foolish man makes it an argument for carelessness. If the certainty of death be a reason for preparation, the

uncertainty of the time is a reason for immediate preparation. The event is too important to be neglected finally. It may be too near to be neglected at all. The least delay is presumption, for none knows, but it may be fatal.

Floods teach us to make firm those works, which may be exposed to their violence. And they remind us of the wisdom of laying well the foundation of our religion, that it may stand safe against the most trying storms.

In erecting works on streams we calculate for floods, not merely for calm waters. In the works of religion we are to take similar precautions. We must expect in our Christian course some rough and tempestuous weather ; not continual serenity and sunshine. We must look to consequences ; count the cost ; lay out for crosses and trials, and form our resolutions accordingly. A hasty, superficial religion, like other slender and careless works, will yield to winds and floods.

If the necessary works, which we construct on streams, are injured, or borne away by floods, we do not abandon them as untenable, or unworthy the hazard. We endeavor to profit by experience. We enquire, where was the defect, and in a new construction rectify the error, and guard against the danger, which before was unthought of. And if we meet with difficulties in our religious work, we must not renounce it as impracticable, but proceed with more watchful prudence, and more firm resolution. We must grow wiser by conviction of past follies, and stronger by experience of former weakness.

Our religion must be built on the foundation of God's word ; it must be united to the foundation by love of the truth ; it must be strengthened and supported by faith in God's promise and grace ;

it must be kept in good repair by the steady practice of the various duties, of which it consists. Thus it will abide in the day of trial. This is the instruction given by our Saviour. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father, who is in heaven. Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, him will I liken unto a wise man, who built his house on a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth my sayings, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Take heed therefore how you build; for every man's work will be tried, of what sort it is. Not only lay well the foundation, but rear the structure with firm materials, well compacted together, that they may resist the flood, and weather the storm. If your building perish, you will suffer loss; if it abide you will receive a rich reward.

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## SERMON XXI.



*The Impiety of alledging God's Promise, as a reason  
for the neglect of Duty.*



MATTHEW iv. 5, 6, 7.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

**T**HE devil from the beginning of the world, has been an enemy to mankind. On our first parents he brought death by seducing them from their obedience to God. The design of our redemption he endeavored to defeat by tempting the Redeemer to destroy himself. In both cases he used the same artifice, a perversion of the word of God. In the former case he perverted the divine *threatening*; in the latter, the divine *promise*. He told our first parents, that though they should eat of the forbidden fruit, they would not surely die: he told our Redeemer, that though he should cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, he would surely live. The tree of knowledge God had guarded by a threatening of death. Satan

alleged, that this threatening did not really intend what it seemed to import. God had promised the Redeemer, that, during the time of his ministry, he should be under the protection of angels, who would keep him in all his ways. Satan interpreted this promise, as containing more than was really intended; and in proof of his interpretation, he urged, that if Jesus should cast himself down from the temple, no hurt would ensue.

The promise, which he adduced, is in the 91st Psalm. "There shall no evil befall thee—for he shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." That this promise had a respect, as to good men in general, so to the Son of God in particular, is evident from the words, which follow; "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." The devil, in his temptation of Eve, presented himself in the *form* of a *serpent*. Hence, both in the Old Testament and the New, he is called by the name of a *serpent*, an *adder*, and a *dragon*. The conquest of the seed of the woman over Satan the tempter, is expressed by his bruising the *serpent's* head. In this passage quoted from the 91st Psalm, there is an evident allusion to the sentence on the serpent. Hence it is natural to conclude, that the whole promise had a peculiar respect to him, who was to tread Satan under his feet; and ensured to him the special protection of divine providence, until this work should be accomplished. The devil justly applies this promise to Christ; but he wickedly leaves out a part of it, and perverts the meaning of the whole. He insinuates, that as Jesus was under a promise of divine protection, he had no occasion to take care of

himself ; and whatever he might do, the promise would secure him. “ If thou be the Son of God ;” If thou be the promised seed of the woman, who was to be born without the intervention of man, and therefore eminently to be called *the Son of God* ; if thou be that person, as, by a voice from heaven thou wast just now declared to be, then, to make it manifest to the multitude assembled below, “ cast thyself down from this pinnacle ; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

The devil here leaves out a material clause. The promise was, that the Messiah should be kept, *in all his ways*. The devil, omitting these last words, insinuates, that Jesus, if he was the Son of God, would be kept, even though he went *out of his way*, and cast himself down from the pinnacle. Thus the emissaries of satan often mutilate the scripture, when they pretend to quote it. To prove that religion consists, not at all in piety to God, but wholly in the social virtues, justice and mercy, the authority of the prophet has been adduced ; “ What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but *to do justly and to love mercy* ?”—The words immediately following, “ *and to walk humbly with thy God,*” are omitted, because these injoin piety. This is quoting scripture, as the devil quoted the passage in the Psalms.

And as satan mutilates, so he perverts the passage. He argues from it, on this false principle, that where God has promised an event ; there is no occasion for human means—that the event promised will take place, let men do what they can, or omit what they will. Christ answers, “ It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” His words import, That to plead God’s

promise as a reason for the neglect of plain duty, is not to trust, but to abuse his promise—not to secure, but forfeit his care.

The devil, in his attempt on the Saviour, failed of success : but among the wicked and unbelieving part of mankind he finds this artifice to have great effect. In Christ there was nothing, but in men there is much, to favour his temptations.

Our Lord always acted, and he taught his disciples to act on this principle, “ That the providence of God over men is exercised in concurrence with human means, and that, where the proper means are neglected, the care of providence is forfeited.” Jesus had a promise of God’s protection ; but “ he did not commit himself to men, for he knew what was in men.” And, until the time of his death was come, he took the same precautions to shun dangers, and to preserve his life, as if no such promise had ever been made. He assured his disciples, that during their ministry, the hand of providence would be employed in their defence ; but yet he instructed them to consult their own safety by all prudent and honest means. “ If they persecute you in this city, flee to another.” “ I send you forth as sheep among wolves ; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” He promised them, that “ if they should take up serpents, or drink any deadly thing, they should not be hurt.” This promise was a great security, while they adhered to their duty ; but no longer. If their enemies should attempt to destroy them by serpents, or by poison, God’s providence would preserve them. But if they themselves, in pride, vanity and ostentation, should handle serpents, or drink deadly poison, the promise would be no defence.



There is, in the divine government, a connexion between means and ends—between conditions and promises. If we attempt to break this connexion, we rebel against that order, which is a supreme law of heaven, and yield ourselves to the dominion of the devil. He would persuade men to disregard this connexion, and to rely on promises without performing conditions.

After Noah's egress from the ark, God promised him, that "while the earth remained, seed time and harvest should not cease." What if every man, relying on the promise of a harvest, should neglect seed time? Would there be a harvest? Or, if there were none, would God violate his promise? By no means. The promise evidently intends this, and no more than this; that generally the course of the seasons should be regular and favorable, and where seed time was improved, a harvest would follow. But still, "if the sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold, he shall beg in harvest and have nothing." God fulfils his promise in giving the times of sowing and gathering, and in causing his sun to shine and his rains to fall upon our fields. His blessing does not fail. But if we neglect the necessary means of obtaining a harvest, we cast away the blessing, and can claim no benefit from the promise.

There is, perhaps, no promise in the bible expressed more absolutely, than this of a harvest; and yet every man knows, how to understand it. I presume, no man, on the foot of this promise, ever refused to sow his seed, or, when he had sown it, left it to be devoured by beasts; for every man knows, that though harvest in general do not cease, yet *he* shall have none, unless he take the necessary steps to obtain one. The sluggard, who will not sow, never thinks of charging the

barrenness of his field to the unfaithfulness of God. For in matters, which relate to the necessary business of life, men usually reason and judge right. It is in things, which respect religion, that they most frequently abuse and pervert the promises of God, and admit the doctrine of the devil, that where God has declared his intention of an end, we need not do any thing to obtain the end, or avoid any thing through fear of defeating it.

We will consider some cases, in which men reason with themselves, and with one another, just as Satan reasoned with our Saviour.

I. Some say, "The scripture declares, that God would have all men to be saved, and none to perish, and that he gave his Son to be a ransom for all." "Now," say they, "if it be God's will that *all* should be saved, and the Son of God have ransomed *all*, then all *will* be saved; for who can resist God's will, or defeat his purpose? His power is equal to his benevolence; both are infinite, and the end is certain. It is then of no importance, what men believe, or what they do. The vicious and impenitent are as safe, as the penitent and virtuous, and infidels are as safe as believers."

But all this reasoning is founded in a perversion of scripture, and of nature.

1. It is founded in a perversion of scripture.

This, indeed, says, "God would not that any should perish." But it adds, "He would that all should come to repentance." It says, "He would have all men be saved." And it subjoins, "He would have them come to the knowledge of the truth." The passages therefore teach us, that unless sinners and unbelievers do repent and embrace the truth, they cannot be saved, but must perish. The gospel, indeed, asserts, that "Christ gave himself a ransom for all." But how for all?—

Not that all might be saved in their sins ; but “ that the mercy of God might be unto all them, who believe.” “ The grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared to all, teaching them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly, and thus to look for the hope of salvation through Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from iniquity, and purify us unto himself.”

2. The reasoning under consideration is as contrary to nature, as it is to scripture. For habitual wickedness is, in itself, inconsistent with rational happiness. If the impenitent sinner is to be happy in his impenitence, the whole system of nature must be inverted. The gospel scheme was introduced, not to prescribe to men arbitrary terms of happiness, but to propose to them such terms as are essential to their happiness. They are not in danger from the gospel, but from their disobedience to the gospel. It is not this, which has made sin the cause of misery. It is the nature of sin to produce misery. Grace has interposed for our deliverance. If we will not accept this deliverance, we must take the consequence of our perverseness.

II. The same abuse is often made of the doctrine of *Election*.

That there is a divine election of persons to eternal life, the scripture tells us ; and serious people, though they may differ in their manner of stating it, yet generally admit it in substance. To explain this doctrine is not our present intention, but to correct the abuse of it.

There are some licentious people, who, either foolishly mistaking, or wickedly perverting the doctrine, plead it in excuse for the neglect of plain duty, and for the indulgence of palpable iniquity.

They say, "If there be a certain number chosen to salvation, and all the rest be reprobated to destruction, why need we concern ourselves about the matter? We cannot alter the decree of God. If we be elected to salvation, our impenitence will not deprive us of it; and if we be reprobated to misery, our repentance will not save us from it. We may resign ourselves to our fate, for the purpose of God will stand."

But where do you find in scripture such a kind of election as this? We are told, that God hath chosen us to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; but not that any are appointed to salvation without faith and holiness. We are directed to make our election sure by adding to our faith all the virtues of the Christian character; and we are told, that if we do thus, we shall never fall: but we are no where taught, that election is made sure to men, whether they have in them these virtues or not. Whatever may be our different conceptions of God's decrees, so much is plain, that the scripture teaches no decrees, but such as ascertain the end in a course of means, and ensure benefits on certain qualifications and conditions. Our business is with the means and conditions. By the observance of these we are to secure the blessings—not to expect the blessings in the neglect of these. To argue from election, that there is no need of our attending to our own salvation, is to adopt the reasoning of Satan, who would have Christ plunge himself headlong from a pinnacle of the temple, relying on God's promise, that angels should bear him up in their hands, and his foot should not be dashed against a stone.

The gospel makes the offer, describes the nature, and states the terms of salvation. The

terms are repentance of sin, and faith in the Redeemer. On our compliance with these terms, salvation is secured to us by promise. While we reject them we are under condemnation. Thus far our duty is plain, and the way of salvation is obvious. It is also certain, that there is no hidden purpose, which will set aside God's express word. He is of one mind; none can turn him. "Secret things belong to God; things which are revealed belong to us, that we may do the words of his law."

Though many from the decree of God argue themselves into licentiousness in their moral conduct, yet none of them will allow the same argument to influence their worldly conduct. No man will throw himself down a precipice, depending for security on a decree, which has fixed the bounds of life. No man will say, that if his term of life be not run out, a fall cannot hurt him. No man, in a dangerous sickness, will neglect the means of his recovery, presuming, that the decree of God will save him without means. No man lets seed time pass unimproved on presumption that the decree of God will bring him a harvest, without seeding or cultivating his ground. Here most men argue rationally, and act prudently. They believe, that there is a regular providence, on which they are dependent for every thing, and that, in order to receive the blessing of providence, they must occupy the powers, and apply the means, which they possess. Here the government of providence is an argument for industry. Whence is it, that so many argue differently in matters of religion?—The reason is obvious. The duties of religion are disagreeable to them, and they wish to be excused from them. The interests of the world are pleasing to them, and these they pursue

with ardour ; and hence the same doctrine, which is an argument for negligence in the former case, is an argument for diligence in this.

III. In much the same manner some abuse the doctrine of God's grace in the *conversion* of sinners.

The scripture often tells us, that we are saved by grace—that our renovation is a work of God—that faith is his gift. Hence serious and humble souls take encouragement to work out their salvation ; for if the grace of God works in them, there is hope, that they may work with success. But the negligent and careless argue differently. They reason with themselves, as the devil reasoned with our Saviour. They say, “ If conversion be the work of God, then it is not our work, and we need not concern ourselves about it. God needs not our help to accomplish the purpose of his grace. If he is pleased to effect a saving change in us, we shall be saved ; if not, we must suffer the consequence, and we cannot prevent it.”

Now this same argument you may just as well use in your secular business. You at once see the absurdity of it in this case : it is equally absurd in the other. It is not pretended, that you can renew your own souls, and prepare them for heaven, independently of God. But repentance and faith must be your own acts and exercises. And you are to consider, that God, of his free and sovereign grace, has put into your hands the means of faith and repentance, and affords the influence of his good Spirit to accompany them. While, therefore, you are in the use of these means, you are in the way, in which God ordinarily grants his blessing. Attend on the means and trust God's grace, as you attend on your secular business and trust his providence, for success.

“ But is it not dishonoring the grace of God to

think, that we must do any thing for our salvation?" Let me ask, Is it not dishonouring the providence of God to think, that you must do any thing for your daily bread? It is not dishonouring God to seek his blessing in the way, which he has prescribed. If you presume on his grace in any other way, you do not magnify, but mock it—you do not trust, but tempt the Lord.

IV. The doctrine of the final *perseverance* of the saints has often been perverted, in the same manner, as other doctrines of grace.

The gospel teaches us that true believers "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."—That "they who are born of God, do not commit sin," or yield themselves to it to obey it, for in the language of scripture, "He that committeth sin, is a servant of sin." They who are born of God, "do not thus commit sin; for their seed remaineth in them, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God."

Some will say, "This certain perseverance of saints we fully believe, and we trust we have been born of God. Our salvation therefore is sure, for God's promise will never fail. We may live as we list; we may return to our sins, and be safe; for they will never separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."

But do you call this perseverance?—It is apostacy; and such a kind of apostacy as too clearly proves, that you never were born of God; for it is the character of him, who is born of God, that he does not commit sin, or become a servant of sin. What? Because God has promised his grace to preserve true believers unto salvation, will you conclude, that you shall obtain salvation, even though you pervert this grace to encourage yourselves in iniquity? Such perversion of grace is an

evidence, that you are not true believers. You are never to depend on any past experiences, as evidential of a new heart, unless these experiences are permanent in their operations and effects. The promise of eternal life is made to those, who seek it by a patient continuance in well doing. If you refuse to seek it in this manner, you have no title to the promise. "If any man draw back, God has no pleasure in him.

The believer's security is not in a promise, that he shall obtain salvation even though he should return to a course of sin; for there is no such promise: but it lies in a promise of all necessary grace to prevent a total and final relapse. This grace he obtains by waiting on God in his appointed way. This is the language of godly souls, "Shall we sin, because we are under a promise of grace? God forbid. How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

V. When any measures are proposed for the spread and promotion of the gospel, they who, from unbelief or avarice, are unfriendly to such measures, often say, "God has promised, that he will give his Son the heathens for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession: and will he not make good his promise? What occasion is there for us to be at any expence or trouble in the matter?"

This is arguing exactly as Satan argued. "Cast thyself down from the temple, for God has promised, that he will give his angels charge of thee." It is, indeed, plainly foretold, and expressly promised, that the gospel shall spread and prevail in the world; and we believe the event will be realized. But then it is also foretold, how this event will be brought about: it shall be by the zeal and labour of Christians to send the gospel abroad in the



world. And whenever we see Christians remarkably engaged to extend the knowledge and influence of the gospel, then we may hope the good work is begun. God will bring to pass this work, as he does other great works, for the benefit of mankind, not by an immediate and miraculous power, but by employing, supporting and succeeding human labourers, as his subordinate agents.

The spread of the gospel after Christ's resurrection, was agreeable to previous predictions and promises; but it was effected by the labour and preaching of ministers, and by the zeal and liberality of Christians to support them. And God wrought with his ministers to confirm and succeed their preaching. The future spread of the gospel, which is so often foretold in scripture, will, like the past, be effected by God's blessing on human means.

God has promised, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church. "Why then," some ask, "need Christians and ministers be so much concerned about the church? Why so much talk and preaching in favour of the church, and against infidelity? If the promise can be depended upon, infidels will never subvert the church."

They never will; because there will always be a competent number of witnesses to oppose and confront them, and to bear testimony against them, and in defence of the truth. And, thank God, there is such a number in this day. But if the time were ever to come, when there would be none to plead for the truth, but all would silently yield to the influence and comply with the will of its enemies, the church would cease of course. We trust that there never will be such a time. This may be the case in particular places.

And wherever it is the case, the church in that place, will cease, as it has done already, in many other places, where it once existed. But it will, at no time, be the case universally. There will always be a church somewhere. If it should seem to be depressed, yet it will exist, and will again arise from its depression. And the time is coming, when all nations will see and admire it. In the mean time, we should all be solicitous to maintain it among ourselves. We should all enter into it, labor to promote its purity, and, according to our ability, contribute to the enlargement of its borders, and the advancement of its interest. And in a day, when a great and effectual door is opened, when many of the friends of Zion seem to be engaged in her cause, and when there are many adversaries, we should cheerfully afford our aid and concurrence in so important a cause.

Our subject teaches us, that neither in this case, nor any other, ought we to make the promises of God an excuse for the neglect of our duty. The good which God promises to men, he always brings about in a way of means, and in concurrence with human agency. And if, when God has promised a benefit, we, for this reason, neglect the proper means for obtaining it, we pervert the promise, and forfeit the benefit. God's promises are intended, not to encourage our neglect, but to excite our performance, of the duties required. We are to trust in him, and do good, and in well-doing to commit ourselves to him, as to a faithful Creator. When we wait upon him in the way of duty, then we trust and honour him. When presuming on his promise, we neglect our duty, we tempt and mock him. And it is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

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# SERMON XXII.



*The Anointing of the Spirit a sure evidence of our  
Title to eternal life.*



Delivered to an Association of Ministers.



I. JOHN ii. 27.

But the anointing, which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you ; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

**T**HE apostle here states the evidence by which believers ascertain their title to eternal life. This, he says, is the anointing, which they have received. What this anointing is, we shall, in the first place, explain ; and then apply the subject.

Anointing with oil was a ceremony used, according to divine institution, among the Jews, in consecrating men to sacred and important offices. And the design of it was, not only to indigitate the persons who were vested with the offices, but

also to denote the qualifications necessary to the execution of them. It in some cases signified an eminent participation of the gifts and graces of the divine Spirit. The prophet Isaiah, speaking in the person of the Saviour, says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach glad tidings to the meek." God is said "to have anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows." Hence he is often called the *Messiah* and the *Christ*, both which words signify the *Anointed*.

As Jesus Christ, who received the Spirit without measure, is said to be *anointed* and *sanctified* to the high office of *Redeemer*, so true believers, who are sanctified by the Spirit, and have the Spirit dwelling in them, are said "to have an *unction* from the Holy One. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "He who hath *anointed* us ~~is~~ God, who hath *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." To the Ephesians he says, "After ye heard the word of truth, and believed in Christ, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance."

The *sealing* of the Spirit is a metaphor, which St. Paul uses, to denote the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. As a seal impressed on wax leaves there its own image, so they, who are sanctified by the Spirit, are made partakers of the divine nature. They are renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. And he uses the metaphor of *anointing* in the same sense. "He who hath *anointed* and *sealed* us, is God." As ointment and perfume please the sense and rejoice the heart, so the graces of the Spirit shed abroad in the soul, are pleasing and acceptable to God. They are as oint-

ment poured forth. In them he smells a sweet favour.

This unction of the Spirit is a *permanent* work. Our apostle says, "The anointing, which ye have received of God, *abideth* in you." In the literal anointing, oil is poured on the head. In the spiritual anointing grace is poured into the heart. The former evaporates; the latter abides.

There may, indeed, be a work of the Spirit, which does not abide. "The Spirit is sent to convince the world of sin." The convictions, of which sinners are the subjects, are usually accompanied with some serious resolutions and partial reformations. But these too often are temporary and transient. We read of those, who in their affliction seek God early, but whose goodness vanishes as a morning cloud—who in their trouble return and enquire early after God, but are not stedfast in his covenant. We often see similar cases. But the anointing, of which St. John speaks, is a *durable* change. It is a holy temper formed and maintained in the soul by a divine influence accompanying the word of truth. "Whoever is born of God, doth not commit sin," or yield himself a servant to it, "for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

To know whether we are born of God, we must enquire whether we have our fruit unto holiness. To know whether we have received the spiritual anointing from God, we must examine whether the anointing abide in us. There may be in sinners an alteration, which, in many respects, resembles real conversion, and yet essentially differs from it. The reality of saving repentance is more surely known by its permanent effects, than by any discriminating circumstances, which im-

mediately attend it. “If ye *continue* in my word,” says our Lord, “then are ye my disciples indeed.” “Let no man deceive you;” says St. John; “He that *doth* righteousness, is righteous. He that committeth sin, is of the devil.” As the quality of a tree, so the character of a man, is known by the fruit.

You will observe farther; the apostle says, “Ye have no need that any man teach you; but as this same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him;” in *Christ*; or ye shall abide in it; in the *anointing*; or in the holy temper to which ye are renewed.

To understand the apostle here, we must go back to the two preceding verses. “This is the promise which he has promised us, even eternal life;” and this blessing he has promised us in Christ. The resurrection of Christ is a sensible and decisive evidence of a life to come. The immediate ground, on which we hope for this blessing, is the promise of God. But the question, which arises in the hearts of believers is, “How shall we know *our own* particular title to it? That there is eternal life for some, we doubt not; but what is the evidence on which we may appropriate the promise to ourselves?” The apostle signifies, that there is danger of deception here; for there are some who give false instructions on the subject. “These things have I written unto you, on account of them, who seduce you,” and who would gain you over to their sect by delusive flatteries. “But, says he, “if the anointing, which ye have received, abide in you, ye have no need, that any man teach you, for this will teach you of all things, which ye need to know relating to the matter in question; that is, whether ye have a title to the

promise of eternal life. "This is truth, and is no lie." This is a solid and substantial kind of evidence. There is no deception in it. It is an evidence within yourselves; and you may more safely depend on this, than on the opinions of men.

As the subject under the apostle's consideration was the believer's title to eternal life, so the *teaching*, of which he speaks, must relate to this subject.

There are two things here observable. First, that we are never to depend on the opinions of others concerning our claim to eternal life. And secondly, that the anointing or sanctification of the Spirit, is the best, and the only solid evidence of our claim; and if we have this, we have no need, that any man should teach us.

First. The apostle cautions us not to rely on the opinions of other men concerning our claim to eternal life.

Persons under strong exercises of religious fear, often resort to others, and especially to those, whom they think to be experienced Christians, for their opinion and advice, relative to their own spiritual state. And they feel themselves much relieved and comforted by the judgment of such Christians in their favour. Fear is a painful passion, and peculiarly so, when the object of it is the misery of the world to come. In this anxious state many are too easily flattered; and they too easily find some who are disposed to flatter them. Great injury is often done to such people by an officious kind of pity in hastily pronouncing them converted. It would be much better to state before them the nature of religion, the fruits of conversion, and the evidences of holiness, and to point out to them their duty, advising them to seek the full assurance of hope, in the way which

the apostle prescribes, by following them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Paul thought it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment. He advises every man to prove his own work, that he may have rejoicing in himself, in his own experience, and not in the opinion of another. We may lay before anxious and enquiring persons the rules, by which they are to try themselves; but we must leave *them* to apply the rules. We should not assume to be judges of their state, but rather assist them to judge their own. We are to entertain a charitable hope of them, as far as there is evidence to justify it. But that they may confirm their own hope we must refer them to personal examination, and advise them to religious improvement. However sudden conversion itself may be, the evidence of it to the subject must be his own experience; the evidence of it to others must be its visible fruits.

The apostle here says, that he gave the instruction in the text, as a caution against certain seducers, who, in that day had crept into the church. As these seducers endeavoured to make divisions, and form sects among Christians, so one artifice, which they used to gain profelytes, was hastily pronouncing men in a state of safety. And this has been an artifice of impostors in all ages.

Every religious sect has its own distinguishing peculiarities, either in doctrines, or forms. And an adoption of these peculiarities, is too often made a criterion of saving grace. The seducer, zealous to make profelytes to his sect, condemns all sects but his own, as alienated from God, and exposed to destruction. Thus he disturbs the peace and shocks the hope of many serious and tender minds. If he hears of an uncommon attention to religion in any place, he will think



there is a field prepared to receive the feeds of division, and will not fail there to bestow his labors. Persons agitated with fears and perplexed with doubts, are anxiously looking for direction and comfort. Among such the impostor promises himself greatest success. Having gained them over to his sect, he pronounces them children of God and heirs of heaven. He tells them, that all natural men are enemies to that religion, which he teaches, and consequently, that all who embrace the doctrines, and conform to the practices, which he inculcates, must be savingly renewed. Thus anxious minds see a short and easy way to obtain the peace and hope which they are seeking. It is only to change their sect, and join a new party. Such an expeditious method to gain comfort is tempting to many. They embrace the new forms and doctrines proposed to them, not on rational conviction, but for the sake of present relief. The sure way to peace, prescribed in the gospel, is too slow and tedious for their impatient feelings. Hence they eagerly hear, and implicitly adopt the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge.

Now St. John shows us,

Secondly, a more excellent way. He says, "We have no need, that any man should teach us," whether we are entitled to heaven. This is a question, which, after all advice, we must decide for ourselves. If we have the anointing of the Spirit, this teaches us all that we need to know in relation to the matter of our enquiry.

"We are chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." This sanctification consists in a temper conformed to the character of God and the pattern of Christ; or in an habitual opposition to sin, and love of

universal holiness. It comprehends all those graces and virtues, which are called the fruits of the Spirit, and which are opposite to the works of the flesh. These are enumerated by St. Paul in his epistle to the Galatians. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Against these there is no law." "There is no condemnation to them, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report, think on these things." St. Peter, instructing us how we may obtain the promises, says, "that, having escaped the pollutions which are in the world, we must become partakers of a divine nature; and besides this, giving all diligence, we must to our faith add fortitude, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity." St. James gives a similar description of the gospel temper. "The wisdom, which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." All these graces are included in that *anointing*, which, the scripture tells us, is the evidence of our title to eternal life. This is an evidence, because to this the promise is expressly made. "The pure in heart shall see God." "To be spiritually minded is life and peace."

This anointing is the *earnest* of the Spirit. It is a qualification for, and anticipation of the heavenly inheritance. As the happiness of heaven consists in seeing and enjoying God, so our preparation for heaven must consist in that holiness which assimilates us to God. And all, in whom the Spirit of God has wrought this holiness, have a pledge and earnest of their admission to heaven.

Their heaven is in some measure begun. They have some sensible foretastes of it while they are on earth. The pleasures, which result from the temper of religion in the heart, are of the same kind with those, which are to be enjoyed in the world above. They are, indeed, much inferior in degree; but their nature is the same. And the grace of God in sanctifying us to a meetness for heaven, is an evidence that he will bring us to it. His preparing us for the inheritance is our best proof of his gracious intention to put us in possession of it. He who thus begins the good work, will perform it to the day of Christ.

The apostle observes, that this kind of evidence will not deceive us. "It is truth, and is no lie."

All other kinds of evidence are uncertain, and may be delusive.

We cannot safely rely on the judgment of others in our favor; for they cannot know our hearts. Their judgment, if founded in our external conduct, must be uncertain; for it is but a small part, and perhaps only the best part of our conduct, which falls under their observation; and that which they see, may proceed from motives wholly undiscerned and unsuspected. If we give them information concerning the state of our minds, this information is too imperfect to be the ground of an infallible judgment. We may by examination gain that knowledge of ourselves, which we cannot communicate to another. If others think and speak favorably of us, yet we know not but they are blinded by friendship, or biased by personal attachment; nor can we say, but they aim to flatter and deceive us for their own unworthy ends.

If we judge of ourselves by a comparison with some reputed Christians, here again we are liable

to be deluded ; for perhaps they are not in reality such good Christians, as we imagine ; and if they are, yet it is not easy to make a just comparison between ourselves and them. We see in them many imperfections, and hear them complain of many more, equal, we think, to any of which we are conscious. But we know not what peculiar temptations may attend these Christians, what deep humiliation they may feel, what strict vigilance they may exercise, and what a pious temper and virtuous conduct they in general maintain. Their life is hidden with Christ in God, and but a small part of it is visible to us.

Or if we judge of our state by the convictions and terrors, which we have felt at particular times, and by the comforts and joys, which have ensued ; these perhaps were but transient. There may be sensible emotions of passion, which much resemble the workings of the mind in true repentance, but fall essentially short of that important change. If our hope rests in any temporary experience, we may be deceived.

But the anointing, which the true believer receives, and which abides in him, the apostle says, “ is truth, and is no lie.” If the Christian temper be formed and remain in us, we may from thence draw an evidence, which will not deceive us. True religion in the heart is not light and flighty, but solid and substantial. Whether we possess this religion, we must judge by looking within us, by comparing ourselves with the word of God, by attending to the general tenor of our conduct, by inspecting the motives which govern it, and by observing our tempers in the various changes and circumstances of life. If we find the gospel temper, in all its relations, operating steadily in us, and perceive a godly sorrow spon-

taneously rising from our conscious failures in duty, and a humbleness of mind accompanying our known imperfections, then we have the best evidence, which, in the present state, we can have, that we have passed from death to life. This is an evidence, which depends not on the opinion of others, but on our own experience—not on the occasional flow of affection, but on a permanent habit of holiness.

The apostle adds, “As this anointing hath taught you, ye shall abide in him,” in Christ, “that when he shall appear, ye may not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

The apostle refers Christians to their past experience of the power of religion. “This anointing hath heretofore taught you. Seek comfort in the way, in which ye have found it already. You have received the gospel, and, with it, the sanctifying influence of the Spirit. Thus you have gained additional evidence of the truth of the gospel, and good hope of your title to eternal life. Why do you listen to those seducers, who would persuade you to seek a confirmation of your faith and hope in another way? Is there a more excellent way? If the gospel has been blessed of God to your sanctification, then you know it is divine; for its efficacy on your hearts is God’s testimony to its truth. If you have experienced God’s sanctifying grace in your attendance on his institutions, then he has owned these institutions; and will you forsake these for others, which seducers would substitute in their place? Let this anointing abide, by which you have already been taught, and it will confirm what it has taught, and will teach you still more and more. You may complain of painful doubts concerning your state, and may long for higher comforts. But how did

you get the comforts which you have ? Was it not by attending to the gospel, and perceiving its sanctifying influence ? Then seek the grace of God to sanctify you more and more. Thus your comfort will increase. Thus you will have confidence before Christ at his coming.”

This is the tenor, and force of the apostle's argument. It is similar to that, which St. Paul uses with the Galatians to convince them of their folly in turning from the grace of God unto another gospel. “ This only would I learn of you ; Received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith ? Are ye so foolish ? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect in the flesh ?”

This argument may be applied to all, who under the pretence of greater comfort and better edification, forsake the administration of ordinances in the places where God has met them by his grace.

There are many Christians, who really believe that in their regular attendance on the ordinances of divine worship, they have received the anointing of the Spirit ; and hence they have gained a comfortable hope of their title to eternal life. But a wicked seducer tells them, “ There are great errors among the Christians with whom you assemble ; and you will find more purity of doctrine, and more of the power of godliness among us.” Tempted by such insinuations, they change their social connexion and their place of worship. Were I to speak with such Christians, on their change of relation, I should say, “ Consult your own experience. If you sincerely believe, that you have experienced the power of God's grace in the place, where you have sought it, why should you forsake this place to find the grace of God some-

where else ? Why should you contemn the very means, which you think God has owned and blessed to your sanctification and consolation ? You think, as some in John's time thought, that you can obtain greater comfort and improvement elsewhere ; and you choose to make the experiment ; but it is a rash and dangerous experiment. John's advice is this, " As the anointing hath taught you, abide in it. Thus when Christ shall appear, ye shall have confidence, and shall not be ashamed before him at his coming."

We see the way to obtain an evidence of our title to eternal life. It is to seek the sanctification of the Spirit. And this we are to seek by a regular attendance on the means of sanctification, which God has provided for us. Christ's prayer for his disciples was, " Sanctify them by thy truth : thy word is truth." It is by attending on the word of truth, that we may hope to receive the sanctification of the Spirit. Christians are said to be " begotten by the word of truth, and born of incorruptible seed, even of the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

We perhaps hope, that we have received, what the apostle calls the anointing of the Spirit ; but doubts rest on our minds. And what shall we do ? The apostle's advice is, " Abide in this anointing ; in this holy life which is begun, and seek greater measures of grace. Take no other methods to dispel your fears, and establish your hopes." This method is the most sure, and will be sufficient. Other methods may be deceptive ; this is truth and is no lie. The more you increase in the temper, and abound in the fruits of holiness, the brighter will be your evidence of a title to eternal life, and the stronger will be your religious comforts. Whatever hopes you may obtain without

the inward work of sanctification, they will fail you. Every kind of hope, which is different from, and unconnected with this, is vain and delusive. But in this there is no deception. It is probable indeed that many deceive themselves, in answering the question, whether they are the subjects of this sanctification. But the evidence itself is sure. If there be an error, it arises not from the nature of the evidence, but from the blindness of the mind in applying it. Examine yourselves then, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; for Christ is in you except ye be reprobates. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead with regard to sin; and the Spirit is life with regard to righteousness; for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

We who are ministers are taught, in what manner we should treat those, who apply to us for advice under spiritual doubts and fears. We are not to pronounce them in a converted state. This is assuming more than the apostles assumed. John intimates that seducers took this method to gain profelytes to their sect. The apostles were more cautious; for they pretended to no certain knowledge of men's hearts, and they used no inticing and flattering words to bring men under their influence. The proper way of treating such inquirers is that which our apostle has exemplified; we are to explain the nature of religion, state the evidences of conversion, and direct men to examine their own hearts, and prove their own works. Thus we are to establish our own hopes; thus our hearers must establish theirs. It is by walking in the fear of God, that we walk in the comforts of the holy Ghost. It is by abounding in the fruits of



righteousness, that we are to abound in the hopes of glory. It is by adding to our faith all the virtues of the Christian character, that we are to make our calling and election sure. If we do this, we shall never fall, but an entrance will be ministered to us abundantly into the kingdom of Christ.

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# SERMON XXIII.



*The Death of the Young lamented and improved.*



A Funeral Sermon.



'JOB xiv. 19.

— Thou destroyest the Hope of man.

**H**OPE is a principle, which prompts all our actions, and animates us in all the business of life. Whatever we undertake, we are influenced by the hope of some good to compensate our labours. "He that ploweth, ploweth in hope; and he that thresheth, is partaker of his hope." But the hope of man, though ordinarily in some degree realized, is frequently disappointed. Job observes, that even "mountains decay, and rocks are removed; that waters wear the stones and wash away the things which grow out of the earth, and God destroyeth the hope of man." This observation is verified, not only in floods, storms, and droughts, which cut off the hope of harvest,

but in a thousand other unexpected occurrences, which defeat our worldly designs. The truth of it is never more visibly manifested, and more sensibly felt, than when hopeful youths are snatched out of life, just as their promising virtues and talents begin to raise the expectations of those who know them. Such events Job seems to have had in view; for he adds, “Thou prevailest forever against him, and he passeth; thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away.”

The young are the hope of man. But this hope is often destroyed.

The young are the hope of man.

The human kind is continued by succession. “One generation passeth away, and another cometh.” The mortals now on the stage are soon to withdraw, and return no more. Were the race of men to be terminated with the present generation, and the earth to become a dreary waste, as soon as they were gone, the prospect before us would be covered with an impenetrable gloom; our labours would languish, and our enterprise cease. But in the melancholy assurance of our own speedy departure, our minds are comforted, and our prospects brightened, by the expectation that another generation will succeed us, and still another, and that the succession will be continued for ages unknown. The youths now rising up are our hope and joy. These are soon to fill our places, enter on our labours, take the benefit of our improvements, and add to them improvements of their own, which the shortness of our time will not permit us to make. We seem to ourselves, as if we should live in them after we are dead.

The rising generation is an essential link in the long chain of human succession. As we have been the instruments of bringing them into existence,

so they, in their turn, will be the instruments of bringing forward another generation, and these again of another; and thus the succession is to be maintained, until that distant period, when the earth itself shall pass away.

The young are the hope of *society*. They are soon to stand in our lot; to possess our property; to take up our duties; to sustain our offices; to enjoy our privileges, and hand them forward to the mortals, who will succeed them.

We value the *gospel*, which, by the piety of our fathers, has been transmitted to us. We view it as a most precious gift of God to fallen men. We know it to be the great charter of our eternal hopes. What it is to us, the same must it be to all who come after us. Could we believe, that they who shall live here some centuries hence, would be strangers to divine revelation; in this sad anticipation, we should lament their unhappy fate, and think it would be good for them not to be born. But we look on the youth now advancing forward, and hope, that by their means this richest of all blessings will be transmitted to distant ages. We resolve to commit it to them, to educate them in the knowledge of it and inculcate upon them its sacred importance. We hope, that they, in their turn, will do the same, when a new generation shall follow them, and that thus remote ages will be pious and happy by the virtue and fidelity of the youths, who are now growing up under our care.

Some of us feel *old age* invading them; others see it advancing toward them. We realize, that soon we shall be taken off from the active labours of life, and placed in a helpless and dependent condition. In the forethought of this evil day, we have comfort in our children, who, we think,

will naturally care for us, nourish our feeble age, sustain our trembling frame, and requite the kindness we have shewn to them. "As arrows in the hands of the mighty, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

There are some youths, of whom it may be said with *special* propriety, "They are the hope of man."

When we see young men of promising abilities, aspiring geniuses, and virtuous habits, coming forward into life, it is natural and just to hope, they will be blessings in society and in all their relations. We please ourselves with the expectation, that they will do much good in their day; will promote the interest of virtue and religion within their sphere; advance the honour and happiness of the families to which they belong; and, if they should stand at the head of families, the young, under their care, will be trained up to piety and usefulness; and thus innumerable blessings will descend to those, who shall hereafter be born.

As the young, in general, so the *virtuous* young in particular, are the hope of man. But this hope, as Job observes, is often destroyed. The premature deaths of promising youths disappoint our flattering expectations. Instances of this kind are recorded in scripture, and still occur in the course of providence.

But why must it be so?—Why may not our innocent hopes be realized?—Why may not pious and promising youths be spared for a comfort to their friends and a blessing to the world?—"God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. As the heavens are above the earth, so are his thoughts and ways above ours."

There are reasons, however, which we may perceive, sufficient to justify these dispensations, or, at least, to silence our complaints.

God is sovereign. All creatures are his, and he has a right to do what he will with his own. "He taketh away, and who can hinder him? Who shall say to him, What doest thou?"

God has appointed all men to death. The appointment is just, for all have sinned. He has sent his Son to redeem us from the misery of the world to come; but the sentence of death remains, as a standing testimony of his displeasure against sin, and a standing admonition to lay hold on eternal life. Our acceptance of the purchased salvation does not exempt us from natural death. By the death of Jesus a future life is procured; by our own death we must pass to the enjoyment of it.

The wisdom of God has subjected our mortal race to great variety in the time and manner of their death, that all might see the necessity of early preparation for it. If none died, but in old age, none would expect to die, and few would prepare to die, at an earlier period; and by long indulgence, men would generally become hardened in their wickedness. It is for their general benefit, that there should be all the variety, which we see, in the circumstances of their death, that all, admonished of their danger, might be always ready.

God destroys the hope of man, that man may place his hope in God. When we see promising appearances in the young, especially in our own children, it is natural to entertain pleasing expectations; but often these expectations rise too high. They need a rebuke. The death of a hopeful youth is a warning to parents, and to all, not to look for comfort in earthly things, but to seek

happinefs in God. This is the language in which it fpeaks, "Trust not in man, whofe breath is in his noftrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of? But trust in the Lord forever, for with him is everlafting ftrength." We never fhall enjoy ourfelves in this world, until we learn to look beyond it. All things here are uncertain; and the more confidently we rely upon them, the more frequent and painful will be our difappointments. God is allfufficient and unchanging; his promifes are fure and faithful; he is always near to us; he is a very prefent help in trouble; his favour is life. When we devote ourfelves to him, place our confidence in him, commit our interefts into his hands, and refign all our concerns to his difpofal, then we beft enjoy our earthly bleffings, and then only we enjoy him.

The death of a pious youth, though it feem a lofs to us and to the world, yet by the grace of God may prove a great and extenfive benefit. We think, that if fuch a youth might live, his example and converfation would have a happy influence on many around him. But who knows what influence his death may have? When the young, who were his affociates, fee how religion fupported him in the diftreffes of ficknefs, and comforted him in the profpect of eternity; when they hear his dying exhortations to early piety, and his follemn cautions againft neglecting the care of their fouls, perhaps fome of them will receive ufeful and lafting impreffions. Perhaps his death, and his dying example and advice may do more to convince them of the truth and importance of religion, and to awaken their attention to it, than all that he could fay and do in many years of health. Who knows, but fome, brought by his death to embrace and exemplify religion, may do all the

good in their life which we hoped from him? Who knows, but the important end, which we wished might be accomplished by his means, will be accomplished by means which God sees to be more effectual?

The pious youth may be taken away from evil to come. Man is born to trouble. This attends him in every stage of his progress through the world; death awaits him; from this there is no discharge. The world is full of temptations; the young Christian, while he lives in it, has many dangers to meet, and many conflicts to endure. Early death places him in a happy security from all the evils, which attend the saints who survive him. Had he lived to a greater age, he might have attained to higher glory. But he now attains to his proper measure of glory with greater facility and with a shorter probation.

To the godly there are advantages resulting from long life; and there are advantages resulting from early death. God knows how to order the time and manner of every one's removal. To the true believer life will not be too long, nor death too soon. Whether life, or death, both are his.

In the calm death of a religious youth, it appears, what religion can do. Hence parents may learn how to find comfort in the death of their children.

In the death of the young the greatest consolation of a parent is a consciousness of his fidelity in their education, and a persuasion that his labour has not been in vain. To part with a child is a great affliction. If this child be driven away in his wickedness and with terrors of conscious guilt, the affliction is inexpressibly aggravated. But, on the contrary, it is greatly softened and mitigated by observing his hope in death, and by reflecting



that his virtuous life has accorded with his dying hope.

If in the review of our own conduct we can say, we have faithfully discharged our parental obligations ; and in the retrospect on a child's behaviour, we can say, he has been observant of our instructions and obedient to our counsels, has conducted with sobriety and discretion, and appeared to make his duty his rule of action ; if in the distresses of sickness we see him patient and resigned ; and in the near expectation of death, hear him committing his soul to God with expressions of humble hope ; we feel a refreshment, which makes us almost forget our sorrow.

Such an example teaches all parents, how to provide themselves with means of consolation against similar trials. They well know, that they are liable to afflictions of this kind. There is not a parent, but who, in his children's death, ardently desires consolation. There is no consolation equal to the hope, that their death is their gain. Let every parent then train up his children in religious sentiments and virtuous manners, and exhort them to, and assist them in a timely preparation for death and eternity, that if they be early called away, he may have hope for them, and they may have hope for themselves. If it be a comfort to us to see the friends, who go before us, depart in peace, it will be a comfort to the friends who survive us, to see us depart in the same manner. Let us then leave to them the consolation, which we esteem so valuable for ourselves.

The observations, which we have made, come to us strongly enforced by the providence of the week past.

We have seen a youth of promising abilities and hopeful virtues taken from his affectionate pa-

rents and brethren, by a casualty sudden in its attack, and fatal, though slow, in its effect. We have seen his friends anxiously watching the symptoms of his malady, and suspended in anguish for days together between hope and despair. We have seen the youth enduring his uncommon distress with calm submission, and meeting his death with serene hope. We have seen the painful disappointment, which they suffered in his early death, and the consolation, which they derived from his virtuous life and dying resignation. We have seen, in this affecting case, a proof of the value of religion, and of the importance of embracing it in early life.

As he, just before his death, addressed the young, who stood around his bed, and urged their pious improvement of the casualty which had befallen him, and of the death which threatened him; I cannot forbear to second his address in a more public manner, than he had opportunity to make it.

Conceive, then, my youthful hearers, that you stood by his bedside, and heard him speak to you in the following manner; "You see, my friends, the situation that I am in. A few days ago I was in health like you. By a sudden accident I am confined to my bed, and probably shall soon be laid in my grave. None of you knows how soon his condition may be like mine. You see in me the necessity of being early prepared for death. I advise you to think seriously of the uncertainty of life, and to prepare diligently for its end. Delay not such a work any longer: no; not for one single hour. You may as well attend to it now, as at a future time. Make it a present business. I particularly advise you to reverence the sabbath and the house of God. There are some young people,

who, on the sabbath, are too vain in their talk, and in the time of worship are too light in their appearance. I have observed these evils with grief of heart. I beseech you to avoid them; for they will cause you to mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed. Never use profane language. This is a sin, which young people too often practise, but for which they must give an account. God will not hold them guiltless, who take his name in vain. Treat your parents and all elderly people with respect. Ask counsel and instruction from them, that you may grow in wisdom. Read the scriptures daily, that you may learn your duty and the way of salvation. Get an acquaintance with yourselves, that you may see your need of a Saviour; get an acquaintance with your Saviour, that you may see how safe it is to trust him. Go to Christ that you may have life. You are dependent on the grace of God; but you must seek, in order to obtain it. Seek unto God betimes. Seek him in the time when he may be found. This is the time. You can be sure of no other. You think religion is important to me, because I am soon to die. It is as important to you, as it is to me; for you are as mortal as I am, though perhaps you are not to die quite so soon as I shall. Whenever you die, you will need its comforts, as much as I do now. Therefore secure them immediately. I am weak and faint; I cannot say much.....I beg you to remember the little I can say.....I fear you will soon forget it. I see you in tears; but you will not always feel as you do now, while you look on my dying body and hear my feeble voice.....That you may call my advice to mind and awaken the resolutions, which you now feel, go sometimes to the place where my body will soon be laid, and

look on the clods which will cover it.....There recollect what I have said, how you felt, and what you resolved. Your bodies may soon be laid by mine.....May our souls meet in that world, where is no more pain nor death."

Such, in substance, were the counsels and exhortations which the youth, lately deceased, gave to some of you, on the last Lord's day. My information was not full, for the recollection of those who gave it me, was imperfect. But he spake in this manner ; and probably some of you remember more than I have repeated. What he spake was deeply felt. It was heard with flowing tears. You who heard it, I believe, realized its importance, and resolved to regard it. Abide by that resolution.

His advice was impressed by his dying condition ; it is recommended by his former good example ; it is sealed by his death. What can be said to enforce it ?

There was something in the close of his address, which struck my mind very powerfully. He advised you, now and then, to visit his grave, that you might remember his dying exhortation. This is so similar to the counsel of the dying Saviour, that I think it must affect you deeply.

The Saviour, when he was on earth, spent much of his time in giving religious instructions to as many as would hear him. He often gave instructions to the young. When the time of his death drew near, his instructions were more frequent and affectionate ; and he urged them by the solemn and impressive circumstance of his approaching death. He well knew, that good instructions were easily forgotten ; he therefore recommended the frequent remembrance of his death, as a mean to impress his words more deeply and indelibly on

the heart. The place of his burial could not be visited by his disciples in all ages and parts of the world. And if it could, his body would not be there, for it was soon to rise. He therefore instituted a particular ordinance as a representation and memorial of his death, and commanded, that this should be observed in remembrance of him, and thus his death shewn forth, until he shall come again. The reason why he appointed the ordinance, and enjoined the observance of it was, that we might remember him and the words which he spake; and might remember his death and the benefits which it procured.

Now, my young friends, you doubtless think, that the youth who advised you to visit his grave, that you might better remember his instructions, gave you judicious advice. I believe you intend to regard it. And will you not regard the command of your Saviour, who has required you to come to the place, where he is set forth as crucified for you, and there to awaken the recollection of his instructions, and a resolution to observe them? Your attention to this young man's counsel is expedient; your obedience to the Saviour's command is indispensable.

My children; You have had a solemn call from God to make religion your early choice, and your souls your early care. Obey it, and be happy. You know not but that the next call may be one, which will consign you to the grave.

You sometimes, perhaps, hear vain people talk lightly of religion—of the bible—of the Saviour—of divine worship. Listen to no such vain talkers and deceivers. Their instructions will cause you to err from the words of knowledge. Nothing will comfort you on a death bed, but the religion taught in the bible. That you may feel

its comforts then, embrace it now. "Think on your ways, and turn your feet into God's testimonies. Make haste and delay not to keep his commandments." Examine your hearts and try your ways. Under a sense of guilt, repair to the Saviour, who came to redeem them who are lost. In his name commit your souls to the mercy of God and devote your lives to his service, relying on the grace of the holy Spirit, which he gives to them who ask him. Watch against sin ; shun the places of temptation ; depart from evil doers ; choose for your companions those who fear God ; sanctify God's sabbath ; attend at his sanctuary ; reverence his word ; subscribe with your hands to the Lord ; dedicate yourselves to him in secret ; make known your vows in the presence of his people ; come to the Redeemer's table ; there remember what he has taught you and suffered for you, and what obligations you are under to him ; and thus enliven your affections to him, and your resolutions for him. Let the event, which you have seen, and the counsel which you have heard, be followed with such happy effects, as shall make it manifest, that God has not spoken to you in vain.

You, who are parents and have children under your care, are reminded of the duty which you owe them. You see how uncertain are their lives. You hope for their continuance with you while you live, and their kind offices to you when you shall be old. But your hope may be blasted by their untimely death. In such a painful, and not improbable trial there can be no greater comfort, than a belief that they have walked in the truth, and died in safety. That you may have this comfort, instruct, direct and assist them in the religious life. You are solicitous to provide for

them an earthly inheritance, and to prepare them for the enjoyment of it. This is not a fault. But perhaps they will never need the inheritance, nor have opportunity to possess it. Point their views, and direct your own to a heavenly inheritance. This is of infinite value, and may be made perfectly sure. Death will not deprive them of it, but bring them to it. It is only impenitence in sin, which can exclude them. Teach them the nature and danger of sin, and the way of deliverance through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Call their attention to the care of their souls; encourage their application to the great Redeemer; guard them against seduction into the way of the ungodly; lead them in the path of righteousness; direct their attendance on the solemnities of the sanctuary; assist their preparation for communion at the Lord's table; go before them in the way, in which you advise them to walk. There is reason to believe, that God will bless your faithful labours for their benefit. You see that he succeeds your worldly diligence and prudence; you have more reason to expect, that equal diligence and prudence in promoting their spiritual interest will be successful. You may apply what God says of Abraham; "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord."

The wisdom of your children will give joy to your souls. If God, in his sovereign providence, should remove them from you by an early death, your sorrow will be assuaged, and your souls refreshed by the peace and hope, which they will enjoy, in consequence of your parental fidelity. "Holy God, turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the

fathers, that they may be mutual blessings in this world, and may rejoice together in the day of the Lord. Pour down thy Spirit upon us, and thy blessing upon our seed. Satisfy us now with thy mercy, that we may be glad and rejoice all our remaining days. Let thy work appear unto us, and thy glory to our children. Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, establish the work of our hands, and bless us with thy salvation."



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# SERMON XXIV.



*Ezekiel's affliction in the Death of his Wife, and his Behaviour under it.*



A Funeral Sermon.



EZEKIEL xxiv. 18.

So I spake to the people in the morning, and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning, as I was commanded.

**A**T the time, when Ezekiel's wife died, the destruction of the land of Israel by the Chaldeans was near at hand. In the affliction which befel him, and in his behaviour under it, he was a sign to the people. The word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." The desire of his eyes was his *wife*; for he says in our text, "At evening my *wife* died." She died *suddenly*, within a few hours after he was premonished of the event. She was taken away with a *stroke*.

The order which follows is singular. "Thou

shalt not mourn nor weep, neither shall tears run down." This cannot be intended to forbid, either in him or in others, the natural sensations of grief ; for these, in such an affliction, are unavoidable. Neither our feelings nor our tears are always at our own command. To be incapable of grief for the death of a friend, would not be reason and virtue, but hardness and stupidity. The words rather import, that the stroke would be so sudden and severe, as to amaze and confound him ; that it would lock up the avenues of tears, and deny the relief which nature affords in more moderate afflictions.

In this respect he was to the Jews a sign of the dreadful calamity impending, under which they should not mourn nor weep, but pine away in their grief.

The prophet is next forbidden to use the common badges and tokens of mourning ; and thus to signify to his people, that, in the destruction of their city, they would be in no condition to use the ceremonies and wear the dress of sorrow, common on other occasions ; but would flee, or be driven before their enemies, in such habits as could be hastily assumed. "Be thou silent, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put thy shoes on thy feet, cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men." Partake not of the mourning feasts, which custom prescribes on funeral occasions.

"So I spake to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died ; and in the morning," following her death, "I did as I was commanded." "And the people said unto me, tell us, what the things, which thou doest, are to us. I answered them, Thus saith the Lord, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength and the

desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth ; and your sons and your daughters shall be slain by the sword ; and ye shall do as I have done. Ye shall not cover your lips," in token of mourning, " nor eat the bread of men. Ye shall not mourn nor weep, but shall pine away in your iniquities."

The words of our text, taken in their connexion, suggest to us the following thoughts :

That the death of a wife is a most painful affliction—That under an affliction of this kind careful attention must be paid to the commands of God—That in such an event, others are concerned, as well as the immediate sufferer.

I. The death of a wife is here represented, as one of the most painful afflictions incident to mortals.

Ezekiel's wife is called " the desire of his eyes." And his affliction in her death was to the Jews a sign of their approaching distress in the destruction of their cities and the depopulation of their country, in which general calamity each one's share would perhaps little exceed the anguish of a husband in the death of his partner.

The happiness of human life greatly depends on society and friendship. None of the social connexions are so intimate and affectionate, so strong and interesting, as the conjugal connexion. This is founded in love, cemented by reciprocal offices of kindness, strengthened by a community of interest, especially by a common relation to, and concern in the dependent members of the family. The dissolution of this connexion breaks one of the closest social ties, and crosses one of the strongest affections of humanity. It places the survivor in a lonely condition, and involves him in new and unexperienced cares. His affliction is

increased by the sorrow which he feels for his children, perhaps for a helpless offspring, deprived of a parent, and unable to realize their loss. Hence their loss is more sensibly realized by him. In other afflictions he could find one to take an equal share with him. But this he must bear alone without a partner to divide it with him. This spreads a gloom over the face of nature, and darkens all his worldly prospects. Every new care, which meets him, reminds him of his loss, and calls up his sorrows afresh. The objects, which once gave him pleasure, look as if they could please no more; the business, which formerly he pursued with cheerfulness, becomes a burden, because the one, who was wont to participate in his joys, is gone.

This affliction is, in scripture, placed among the most painful adversities incident to our mortal state. They who have experienced it acknowledge the representation to be just.

The trial is more overwhelming, when it comes *suddenly*. In the prophet's case, it was an aggravating circumstance, that the desire of his eyes was taken away with a *stroke*, and within a few hours after the first apprehension of danger.

To a godly person a sudden death is as safe as a lingering one. But to surviving friends it is more distressing, because it finds them unprepared for it. The expectation of such an event gradually puts the mind in an attitude to meet it. Though perhaps a long suspension between hope and fear may give equal pain on the whole, yet at no moment is the anguish so keen, as when the stroke falls suddenly. The mind, like the body, can sustain a heavier burden laid on by gentle degrees, and slowly increased, than if it fall with its full weight at once. In the former case, we brace

ourselves for the weight which we have to bear, and accommodate our posture to our approaching situation. In the latter case, we have no time to collect our strength and assume a position for the stroke which is invisibly descending.

The sudden death of a friend breaks our purposes, disappoints our expectations and cuts off our prospects. In other cases we gradually relinquish them, and give them up with a sedate and placid mind.

But we are taught,

II. That whatever may be our affliction, and in what manner soever it may come, we are to regard the intimations of the divine will.

When the prophet's wife died, "he did as he was commanded." There was something peculiar in the command given to him; but his obedience is a pattern for all.

I. The first duty required, in this and all other afflictions, is resignation to the providence of God.

The command to the prophet was, "Thou shalt forbear to cry," or "thou shalt be silent." And the reason of the command was, "Behold, I take away the desire of thine eyes." He was to be dumb and not open his mouth, because it was God who did it. And who shall dare to reply against God?

We ought, as men, to be sensible of, and affected with the strokes of the divine hand; but, as Christians, we must forbear to murmur and complain under them. The exhortation, which speaks to us, as to children, is this, "Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when ye are rebuked of him." To despise affliction is stupidity; to faint under it is weakness; to murmur against it is impiety.

That our complaints may be silenced, and our

spirits composed, we must consider the wisdom, justice, goodness and sovereignty of God. "The potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth; but wo to him that striveth with his Maker. Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? Or his work, He hath no hands?" "God has a right to do what he will with his own. He taketh away; and who shall hinder him? Who shall say to him, What doest thou?" He will do wrong to none. He will lay upon none more than is meet. To them who love him he will cause all things to work for good. In all the corrections which he inflicts on his children he has merciful ends. "He chastens them for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness." His grace is sufficient for their support. In the day of trouble he will hear them.

In the loss of friends we should consider the mercy of God in giving them to us at first, in continuing them with us so long, and in making them instruments of our comfort while we enjoyed them. The stroke which separates a dear friend from our bosom, is painful. But can we say, our having had such a friend, though but for a short time, has been a calamity? Was not the connexion, while it lasted, a real blessing? Did it not contribute much to our happiness—to our worldly prosperity—to our daily content and cheerfulness—to our virtue and piety—to our discreet behaviour and fair reputation? And if the connexion be broken, are we not even now in a more eligible condition, than if it had never been formed? We have, then, received good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? Yea, with all the evil which attends us, have we not, on the whole, received good?

We should consider our *desert* of affliction.

Death entered into the world by sin. The death of a friend reminds us of our fallen and guilty state, and urges us to flee from the wrath to come. Conscious of our guilt, we shall see the justice of God in all the calamities of life. "Why should a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins?"

2. In affliction we are commanded to "search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord."

When a friend, especially a companion, is taken from us, our thoughts follow him to the other world. We choose to entertain the pleasing hope, that he is gone to rest. To strengthen our hope, we recollect his amiable virtues and useful works, and all the indications of piety, which appeared in his life. A suspicion, that he has exchanged this life for a state of misery, would be the most distressing part of our affliction. But if future happiness be important to the dead, it is important to the living; for the living will soon be among the dead. A death in our family should call our thoughts home to ourselves. The state of the dead we cannot alter; but we may do something to alter our own state; for our probation still continues. It is still a day of salvation. What if *we* had been removed? Should we have left to our friends the same consolation, as some, who have gone before us, have left to us? Or if we were now to be called away, could we depart with the same serenity and comfort, as we have seen in some of our friends, when they took leave of us and of the world? They by their example and conversation have yielded us much assistance to prepare for heaven. Have our conversation and example been as highly beneficial to them? Have we done our part with them as fellow helpers to the kingdom of God? We have seen a

friend removed suddenly. It is a just enquiry, whether we are ready to depart on as short a warning. Is the temper of heaven formed in our hearts? Is religion our daily work? If our Lord should come suddenly, would he find us doing his will? Or rather, would he not find us sleeping? These are enquiries, to which the sudden death of a friend loudly calls us.

3. Prayer is a duty incumbent on us at all times, and is urged with particular force by affliction; especially by an affliction like this, which we are now considering. "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." "Let him call upon God in the day of trouble."

The death of a friend reminds us of our weakness, our wants, and our dependence. We cannot rescue our dearest companion from the grave. We cannot arrest the hand of death, when it is stretched out against one whom we call the desire of our heart, and on whom our happiness in life principally depends. Nor can our friends preserve *us*, when the number of our months is finished. Nor shall we ourselves have power over our own spirit to retain it in the day of death. What an impotent creature is man? All our dependence is on God; all our hope is in him. Should we not live near to his throne; and daily spread our requests before him? He can supply all our wants, and do more than we ask or think.

Affliction gives a disposition to prayer; it softens the heart to the impression of divine truth; it awakens the attention to another world, and makes it seem more real; it teaches us that all our comforts must come from above; it furnishes us with matter for prayer, and enlarges the heart in this duty; it encourages a hope of acceptance, for God has made special promises of his gracious at-



tention to the prayers of the afflicted. If we feel a spirit of prayer awakened by affliction, this is a hopeful token of God's favour ; for thus far affliction answers its purpose.

4. The death of a friend is an admonition from God, to withdraw our hearts from the world.

What is the world now to him who has left it? What will it be to us, a few days hence, when we shall have left it? Just the same, as it is now to him. "We brought nothing into the world ; and we shall carry nothing out of it. Naked shall we depart to go as we came." The removal of our friend has extinguished more than half of the joys of life. It has spread a gloom over the world's brightest scenes. Every earthly object is as uncertain, as was the one which we have lost. Shall we set our hearts on things so precarious?—on things which so soon may leave us, or lose their power to please us? Let us look for some more substantial and permanent good. Let us choose for our portion the favour of the allsufficient God. There is nothing on earth to be compared with this. It is better than the life of a friend ; it is better than our own life. When flesh and heart fail, this may be our strength and portion forever. Let our affection and conversation be in heaven. There is our God and our Redeemer ; there are holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect ; there are the godly friends, who have died before us, and thither will come the pious souls, who shall leave this world after us. If our friends had continued on earth for the present, we could not have enjoyed them long, for we are strangers here, and there is no abiding. If we meet them in heaven, we shall be parted from them no more. They were amiable here ; they will be more amiable there. We here saw in them some imperfec-

tions, and felt more in ourselves ; there we shall see in them nothing to offend us, and shall shew nothing to offend them. The connexion here was intimate ; but the best part of it was that which arose from similarity of tempers and affections. The friendship of heaven will be wholly of this sacred kind ; it will therefore be perfect, uninterrupted and permanent.

5. The death of a friend urges upon us religion in all its various duties ; for it solemnly teaches us the necessity of religion to our comfort in life, hope in death, and happiness in eternity.

If such an affliction have its proper influence, we shall commune with God in our closets, worship him in our families, converse daily with his word, educate our children in his service, honor his name before men, compassionate the afflicted, contribute in our places to advance the interest of the gospel, and assist our fellow mortals in their preparation for death and the future world.

Thus we should endeavor to make our own affliction a benefit to those around us. Then may we hope, it will do them good, when we make it manifest, that it has done good to us.

III. This introduces our *third* observation, That any affliction, which befalls men, especially the death of the head of a family, calls for the attention of all around, as well as of the immediate sufferers.

The death of the prophet's wife was appointed, in providence, to be a sign to the people in general, as well as an admonition to him. They were commanded to do the same things, which were required of him. The event was a warning to them of impending calamities ; the prophet's behaviour was a pattern to them of their duty under those calamities.

When we see a neighbor deprived of the desire of his eyes by a stroke, and left with the care of a family, who needed her nurturing and guiding hand, we feel a tender compassion for him and them; we give him some condoling words; we wish him divine consolation and direction; we hope he will be wise. We observe his subsequent behaviour, to judge whether he derives any religious advantage from his painful affliction. If we see him grave, serious and heavenly-minded, we rejoice in his wise improvement of the solemn admonition. But if we should see him quite the reverse, we should censure his inattention to the voice of God, and should wonder, that he could so soon forget so loud a warning—so soon forget his first feelings and resolutions.

But let us remember, that our afflicted neighbor is a *sign to us*; that the voice, which speaks to him, speaks to *us*; that the serious attention, which becomes him, becomes *us*; that the improvement, which ought to be made of the affliction by him, ought to be made by *us*; that *we* have no more right, than he, to disregard such a warning. The same view of the vanity of the world and of the uncertainty of life; the same piety and prayerfulness; the same self-examination and seriousness; the same diligence in preparing for death, cultivating religion in the heart and promoting it in society; the same prudence and fidelity in family education, which we would recommend to him, or which we expect from him, are, by the same providence, urged upon *us all*. In his case, we see that *our* friends are mortal, *our* connexions uncertain, *our* families appointed to change. The time is at hand, with respect to us all, when a cloud will be spread over our houses by the hand of death; when some will

mourn the loss of those, who go before them, and when these who are left, will follow those who are gone. In respect of mortality, there is nothing peculiar to one family or another. Every change, which we see, is an admonition to us all. And if thoughtless would be criminal in the family, in which a change took place the last week, it is also criminal in the families, in which a similar change may take place this week.

As a common expression of condolence to the afflicted, we say, "We wish their affliction may be sanctified to them." But we ought to make the same use of it ourselves, which our benevolence wishes them to make. We pray for them, that they may be guided in the path of duty. If our prayer be sincere, we shall walk in the same path, in which, we think, they ought to walk. Can we really pray, that they should walk in it, when *we* turn from it? Our very prayers for the afflicted at a funeral, and in the house of God, reprove our neglect of religion, and our inattention to the daily warnings of providence. The censures, which we bestow on some, who make light of their own afflictions, fall back on ourselves, when the same afflictions are unimproved by us.

We live in a mortal world; we often see changes and deaths; the providence of God, in various ways, is renewing and repeating its admonitions, some of which are more painful than others; but all equally plain and intelligible. Let us hear and obey the exhortation, which speaks to us, "What your hands find to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave, to which you are going."

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# SERMON XXV.



## *The Universal Obligation of Religion.*



II. KINGS xvii. 40, 41.

Howbeit, they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so did they unto this day.

**A**FTER the king of Assyria had conquered the kingdom of Israel, and had carried away captive the greater part of the inhabitants, he re-peopled the country by colonies sent from his own empire. These new inhabitants were idolaters. They worshipped their own deities, who, they imagined, had given them the country, and against whom, they supposed, Jehovah, the God of the land, had not power to defend it. As the country, after they were settled in it, was much infested with lions, they began to conceive more exalted thoughts of the God of Israel. They apprehended, that he might have some power in the country over which he presided, and that, to keep at good terms with him, it might be best to observe the particular ceremonies which he was pleased with, but which, at present, they did not un-

derstand. They therefore sent to the king of Assyria an account of the trouble they met with, and of the probable cause of it. They said, "The nations which thou hast removed and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land; therefore he hath sent lions among them; and behold they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land." They imagined Jehovah to be a divinity of the same kind with their own, a local God, who presided only in a particular country, and who must be honored with certain peculiar rites, in which they had not been instructed. The *Syrians* had the same idea. When they had been defeated in an engagement with the Israelites, they accounted for the disaster by the local power of the gods of Israel. "Their gods are gods of the hills, therefore they are stronger than we: but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they."

Upon information of the disturbance, which the new inhabitants of Samaria suffered from the lions, the king of Assyria ordered, that one of the captive priests should return back to reside in Samaria, and teach these people the manner of the God of the land. Accordingly a priest was sent, who dwelt among them, and taught them, "how they should fear the Lord,"—or how they should serve and worship the true God. But the priest was not able to bring them off from their attachment to their own deities and forms of worship. The most he could do was to introduce the worship of Jehovah in conjunction with idolatry. "Every nation," the people of every province in Assyria, who had been transplanted to Samaria, "made gods of their own. They feared the Lord

and served their own gods, and worshipped their graven images." They only admitted Jehovah into the number of their former divinities, and gave a share of their worship to him among the rest. They worshipped him in Samaria, because they supposed him to be the God of that country; but, at the same time, they served their own deities, who, they supposed, had given them the conquest of the country. Thus they formed a motley religion, partly rational and true; partly idolatrous and absurd.

In this respect the new inhabitants resembled the former ones, who had been carried from thence to Assyria. For *they* feared not the Lord, and him *only*; but, in contempt of the express law of their religion, which forbade the worship of other gods, they worshipped the calves of Jeroboam, and other idols introduced in succeeding reigns; for which corruption they were given up to the power of their enemies. Thus had God instructed them; "The covenant which I made with you ye shall not forget, neither shall ye fear other gods; but the Lord your God ye shall fear; so shall ye be delivered out of the hand of your enemies." "Howbeit," says the historian, "they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner."—"So *these* nations," which were brought from Assyria, "feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as their fathers did, so did they."

It is natural here to remark, in the

First place, The powerful influence of custom and education in matters of religion.

These Assyrians, who had been trained up in a superstitious reverence for the objects and forms of worship admitted in their own country, could

not be persuaded to renounce them. They still retained their early veneration for them, even after they had been instructed in the character of the true God, and the service which he required. The superstition of the parent was transmitted to the children, and from them to *their* children, and so on from age to age.

To one who has been educated in the pure and uncorrupt principles of religion, nothing can appear more irrational and absurd than polytheism and idolatry. But absurd as they are, nothing is harder than to reclaim to just sentiments of God and religion those who from their youth have been educated in a veneration for idolatrous rites and customs. So hard it is to recover men from habitual errors, however foolish and vain, that God expresses a kind of astonishment at the versatility of his own people, who had suddenly and easily been seduced from his rational service. "Pass over the isles of Chittim and see, and send unto Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed her gods, which yet are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this!" The prejudice of education the apostles had to contend with in preaching the gospel among both Jews and gentiles; and they found it one of the most powerful obstructions to their success. The intrinsic excellence and external evidence of the gospel wrought mightily to the conviction of many: but they who professed to be convinced of its truth, were still fond of retaining some favorite parts of their old religion. The Jews were not more tenacious of the Mosaic rites, than the gentiles were of the forms used in their pagan festivals. It was much easier to bring both to an acknowledgment



of Christianity as true, than to a renunciation of their old usages as vain. They would receive Christianity as an improvement on their former religion ; but to give up a religion, which from their youth they had been accustomed to venerate, was a change which could be effected by no evidence less than miraculous, and by no power less than divine.

1. We may hence take occasion to reflect on the weakness of human reason.

When we consider what mighty improvements have been made in the arts and sciences—in mathematics, astronomy, navigation and mechanics, we conceive an exalted opinion of the powers of the human mind. And, indeed, they are capable of being raised to a very considerable height. Though our sagacity originates but few things, yet, when by some fortunate accident a hint is given, we can push our discoveries in natural things to a great length. But let us not think of ourselves above that which we ought to think. If we view mankind in regard to religion and morality, we shall have but a humbling idea of human nature. What shocking absurdities are mixed with all the religions of the world, except that which is founded in revelation ? Human reason has never yet attained to a just knowledge of the divine character and government, or struck out a plan of religion and virtue, free from absurdity and folly. The wisest and politest nations of the earth—they who have made the greatest proficiency in arts and sciences, have grossly blundered in their notions of a Deity, and of the service due to him.

It appears obvious to us, that there is one God ; and that he is a spiritual, eternal, omnipresent Being, possessed of boundless wisdom, power and

goodness ; that he is to be served with pure affections and constant obedience ; and that, whenever we offend him, his forgiveness is to be sought by humble prayer and sincere repentance. But how came we by these just and rational sentiments ? The heathens never had them. Their reason and invention were as good as ours ; and nature held out to them the same light as it does to us. Yet, “ professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” Whence is it, that *we* have more rational sentiments of God and religion ? It is revelation which has made us to differ. This has taught us the character of God and the service which we owe him. When these are taught in revelation, we see them to be reasonable, and are apt to imagine, that our reason would have discovered them without any such aid. But if we may form an opinion, what reason can do, from what is has done, we must suppose, that without revelation we never should have had a just knowledge even of the first principles of natural religion. To revelation we are indebted for that very knowledge, which puffs us up to despise it. There is a great difference between seeing a thing to be reasonable, when it is suggested to us, and originating the first suggestion. We are capable of the former in many instances—of the latter in very few.

How shortsighted is human reason—how blind in things of highest importance ! A plain demonstration this of the depravity of human nature. On no other supposition can we assign a cause,

why reason has not been as able to make religious, as natural discoveries. We are bound to bless God for that clear revelation which he has given us of his character and will. Without the light which this affords us, we should have been involved in the same darkness of ignorance, and bewildered in the same perplexed mazes of error, as they are to whom this light has never shone.

2. The powerful influence of education shews us of what importance it is, that they, who have the care of youth, guard them against dangerous errors, and form them to right sentiments in religion ; for principles and opinions early implanted, and long cultivated, are not easily eradicated. From the influence of education the contrary inference has, indeed, been made. "For," say some, "if we instruct our children in religion, we shall form them to our own habit of thinking, and fix in them such an obstinate bias to the notions which we inculcate, that they never can think freely : it is therefore safest to leave them wholly untaught in religious matters, that, when they grow up, they may form their opinions for themselves fairly and independently."

Is this reasoning just in the things of religion ? It is just then in every thing else. You need not stop at religion ; you may as well go through with the argument. Say then, "It is not safe to teach our children our own method of husbandry, lest, attached to this method, they never strike out any thing new, nor hit on any thing excellent. We will leave them to spend their early years in ignorance and idleness, that, when they come to act for themselves, they may prove judicious and successful husbandmen." Every one sees such reasoning to be absurd in our worldly affairs. It is as absurd in religious affairs.

But are not children liable to be biassed in favour of errors early taught them?—Certainly they are. And what then? Must you forbear to instruct them at all?—No: but be careful that you give them only wholesome instructions.

If the danger of prejudice be a reason against *early* instruction, it is equally a reason against instruction at *any time*: for if your children ever know any thing about religion, there must be a time when they *begin* to know. And let them begin ever so late, there is the same danger of their being prejudiced in favour of the sentiments first embraced, as if they began in childhood.

Let those, who argue in this manner against religious education, speak out, and say, “Religion is a mere chimera: men will do better without it than with it: it is the effect of bad education: if people be not taught it when they are young, they never will believe it, nor concern themselves about it afterward.” To this the argument plainly leads.

If there be such a thing as religion, it is undeniably a matter of infinite and universal importance. Every one, therefore, should rightly understand it, and fully believe it, and faithfully practise it. And every parent should diligently teach it to his children, and guard them against the instructions which cause to err.

II. Another observation which arises from our text is, that religion in general is a matter of such obvious concern, that every man, on the least consideration, must see himself obliged to be of some religion or other.

These Assyrians worshipped their several deities, as they had been taught. When they found themselves infested with wild beasts in their new settlement, they at once apprehended, they had been

guilty of some offensive behaviour toward the God of the land; and they desired to be instructed in the service, which best would please him. They sent for a teacher, and they so far attended to his instructions, that "they feared the Lord."

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through the earth, and their words to the end of the world." What a being God is, and how he is to be worshipped, men have been much divided in their notions; for every man will ascribe to his deity the properties which he calls perfections, and will frame for his god a worship correspondent to his supposed character. But that there is a God, and that he is to be worshipped, mankind have almost universally agreed. The various kinds of superstition and idolatry, which have been practised in the world, are proofs, that men, in their corruptest state, feel a sense of their obligations to religion. False reasonings and vicious practices may gradually weaken this sense of a Deity; but it is difficult so entirely to extinguish it, but that, in times of calamity and danger, it will revive and operate. These idolaters, when they saw the beasts of the wilderness making incursions, and spreading destruction among them, immediately turned their thoughts to some invisible being, who directed the motions of the animal creation; and they wished to be instructed, how they might secure his favour and protection.

The general, the almost universal belief of a divine, superintending power, is an evidence that this sentiment is as ancient as the human race; for if the first pair had been atheists, tradition from

them would have given atheism such a spread among their posterity as it never appears to have obtained. The heathens were idolaters, but not atheists. The ancient enemies of true religion opposed it, not on the principle, that there was no religion, but on the pretence, that their own religion was better. It is probable, there are more atheists in Christian countries, than in all other parts of the world. And the reason is obvious : the precepts of the gospel are so pure, and its sanctions so solemn, that men of corrupt hearts cannot be reconciled to it ; and yet the evidences of its truth are so full and strong, that they cannot reject it without rejecting all religion with it ; for if there be any such thing as religion, it must be contained in the gospel. Every reasoning man easily sees and feels the absurdity of acknowledging religion in general, and denying the gospel-religion. And hence the enemies of the gospel, that they may preserve a consistency in discarding this, renounce religion in the gross. And it is a circumstance much in favour of the gospel, that the most subtil reasoners, conscious, that it must stand, while natural religion stands, have directed their main force against the latter. This is a virtual acknowledgment from the enemies of the gospel, that, if there be any religion, it must be here.

There are heathens, who will rise in judgment against many in Christian lands. Even idolaters in ages of darkness will condemn infidels who live in an age of light. They who, with all the absurdity of their speculative opinions, were yet awed by the apprehension of an invisible power, may put to shame those hardy sons of impiety, who cast off fear and restrain prayer ; and who, while they pretend to believe there is a God, live in every respect as if there were none.

The solicitude of the idolaters in Samaria, under a threatening calamity, rebukes the stupidity of thousands in times and places of superior light.

The Samaritans owned an invisible hand in the depredations of ravenous beasts : but how many overlook this hand in the calamities brought on them by the rapacity of unreasonable and wicked men ? *Those* idolaters supposed that the wild beasts, which infested them, were let loose to punish them for some omission of duty to the god of the country ; and they were anxious to know wherein they had offended him : but how many, forgetting their own impieties and the justice of providence, impute all their calamities to the immediate instruments and visible causes of them ? *They*, in the time of their trouble, sent to Assyria for one of the captive priests of Israel to come and instruct them in the will of Jehovah : but how many neglect to hear divine instruction, when it is brought to their doors, and even refuse to obey it when it is sounded in their ears ? *They* paid so much attention to their new teacher, as to reform, in some measure, their system of religion, and set up the worship of the God of Israel : but how many are wholly unreformed by the corrections of God's hand, and the admonitions of his word, and live unmindful of their obligations to that Almighty Being, whom still they acknowledge ? *Their* reformation was indeed but a poor defective business, since they stopped where they did. But yet they went farther than many go under judgments more obviously divine, and under instructions more clear and convincing. In *them* there was some amendment ; in many there is none at all.

It becomes us to enquire, how far this rebuke falls on us. May not some confess, that under

their superior light and distinguished advantages, they never went so far in religion, as these poor Assyrians did? Bring the enquiry home. See how it is with you. You have been educated under the clearest light of divine revelation—have been instructed in the nature and perfections, in the government and will of God—have been taught what is the design of personal afflictions and public judgments, and what is the moral use which you should make of them—have heard your duty, in all its branches, often stated and inculcated, and the terms of your eternal felicity repeatedly proposed and urged. And what have you done? Have you shewn as much sense of a Deity—as much regard to his governing hand—as much concern to learn his will—as much solicitude to approve yourselves to him, as those poor heathens? If you live without prayer—without attendance on the means of religious instruction—without self-examination—without a sense of your dependence—and without regard to God's providence, you are more remote from religion than they were.

The concern in Samaria to obtain the favour of the god of the land, and to be instructed in his will, seems to have been *general*. Is there any such general concern among us? There are doubtless many who believe the truth, and feel the importance of religion. But is this our general character? Is there not rather a prevailing indifference and carelessness?

As the people in Samaria sent far for a priest of the Lord to instruct them; so, we may conclude, they diligently attended on his instructions when he came. This priest would naturally call them together to hear the law on the sabbath—the day divinely instituted for the purpose; and certainly



they paid so much regard to the day, as to assemble and receive instruction. But how many among us waste the sabbath in indolence, or profane it by unnecessary labours and vain amusements? How many contemptuously turn away from the stated instructions of the sanctuary, and say of God's worship, What a weariness is it?

Only one judgment, the incursion of ravenous beasts, brought these Samaritans to consideration. But what good effect has been produced among us by a series of remarkable dispensations both corrective and merciful? We may well be ashamed and afraid when we reflect, how much *they* did, and how little *we* do, to avert the displeasure, and procure the favour of God.

But still let it be remembered, that they came short of a sincere and acceptable service, because, while they feared the Lord, they served their graven images. The motives, which governed them in their religion, were of a worldly nature. They were more concerned to rid the land of wild beasts, than to rid themselves of their sins. And instead of directing their service to the one supreme God, they divided it between him and their own false divinities.

We see, then, that men may make the appearance of a reformation, and yet fall short of sincere repentance. Let us not rest in external forms, partial amendments, and divided services; but devote ourselves wholly and without reserve to God, and walk before him in simplicity and godly sincerity. The sincerity of the heart is the life and soul of religion. And since, without this, men may seem to do much in religion, let us take good heed to ourselves, that we rest not in the form of godliness, when the power of it is wanting. There are those who seem to themselves to

be religious, when all their religion is vain. See that ye be not deceived. God requires truth in the inward parts. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new."

This brings us to another observation from our text, That true and acceptable religion is pure and simple, directed to God and to him only.

This observation we will reserve to be illustrated in another discourse.

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# SERMON XXVI.



*True Religion pure and simple.*



II. KINGS xvii. 40, 41.

Howbeit, they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so did they unto this day.

**T**HE Assyrians, who were sent to re-people Samaria, after the native inhabitants had been carried to Assyria, found themselves dangerously infested with lions. This calamity they imputed to their ignorance of the religious service, which Jehovah, whom they called the god of the land, required of them. A Jewish priest was sent from Assyria to instruct them in the character and worship of the true God. Under his ministrations, they were so far reformed, that they feared the Lord; but still, attached to the notions in which they had been educated, they worshipped their graven images. And thus did their children after them from one generation to another.

Hence we have remarked,

I. The powerful influence of custom and education in matters of religion. And,

II. The general sense of mankind, that there is such a thing as religion, and that it is a matter of universal and indispensable obligation.

We now proceed to remark,

III. That true religion is pure and simple, free from corrupt mixtures, and uniformly directed to one great end.

These Assyrians "feared the Lord." They acknowledged the God of Israel ; but, at the same time, they served their own gods ; and therefore the service, which they paid to the true God, was of little value.

As there is one God, the sole author and governor of the universe, and the fountain of all excellencies any where seen, and of all blessings any where enjoyed, so we are required to give him our highest regards, and to serve him with undivided affection ; and we are forbidden to worship any other object in opposition to him, or in conjunction with him. And to us, who have been taught the unity of the godhead, nothing is more obvious than the necessity of directing all our religious honours and services uniformly to this all-perfect being. We easily see, that those Samaritans, by mingling idolatry with the worship of the true God, utterly corrupted their religion. But let us enquire, whether we, in some other way, may not be guilty of the same corruption.

When we are under any remarkable and severe affliction, we perhaps think of God, acknowledge his power and fear his anger ; we are more strict and constant in attending on his worship ; we pray oftener and desire the prayers of others. But do we, at the same time, search our hearts, mortify our lusts, subdue our passions and renounce our sins ?—If not, what is our religion better than the motley religion of the Samaritans ? The man,

who, in a time of affliction, only becomes more engaged in the external forms of devotion, and is still unbounded in his avarice, unjust in his dealings, intemperate in his enjoyments, ungoverned in his passions, profane in his language, or sensual in his affections, is but like those who feared the Lord and served their own gods.

We are required to love and fear God with all our heart. Our external services are of little value farther than they are animated with an inward regard to him. If our hearts be principally set on riches, honours, pleasures, or any earthly objects, we are as really guilty of idolatry, as they who worship an idol; because we transfer to them the regards which are due to him. Hence the covetous man is called an idolater; and they who serve divers lusts and pleasures, are said to make them their God. How much so ever we may do in a way of external service to God; if the world, or any thing which belongs merely to the world, be supreme in our hearts, we are like those who feared the Lord, and served their own gods. "No man can serve two masters. If he love the one, he will hate the other. He cannot serve God and mammon. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

God has given us a revelation to instruct us in his will and in the terms of his favour and acceptance. If we believe this revelation to be from him, we must take it as it is, and obey it without reserve, neither presuming to supply its supposed defects by our own invention, nor to retrench its supposed redundancies by our own wisdom. If esteeming some of its precepts too severe, we relax them; or some of its doctrines too mysterious, we reject them; or if imagining

it has not taught us our duty completely, we add to it some new rules of conduct ; or thinking its motives insufficient, we tack to them some fictions of our own fancy ; we corrupt the pure religion, which God has taught us ; and, while we profess to serve him, we worship our graven images. To some in the apostle's days the gospel was too mysterious, in its more grand and sublime doctrines, for their proud reason to receive. The resurrection of the dead seemed a thing incredible ; and Christ crucified for the sins of men was foolishness. To others it was too plain and simple, and they would not trust it without the addition of the favorite ceremonies of their old religion. Hence St. Paul's caution to the Corinthians, " I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy ; for I have espoused you unto *one* husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ ; but I fear, lest your minds should be corrupted from the *simplicity* that is in him." The same caution he gives to the Colossians ; " As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ ; for ye are *complete* in him."

If we acknowledge *one* God, we are to yield ourselves to his *whole* service. When we have offended him, we must regain his favour by repentance, and continue in his favour by obedience. In our repentance we must renounce every false way ; in our obedience we must have respect to all his commandments. A repentance with a reserve in favour of some known sins ; and an obedience with exceptions against certain plain duties, is like the reformation of the Samaritans, who feared God, and retained their idolatry. He who

indulges one favorite iniquity, though he discard every other, is not a penitent ; and he who offends in one point, though he obey the rest of the law, is not a saint.

Again. The gospel teaches us, that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men, and no man can come to the Father, but by him—that his atonement and righteousness is the only ground of our pardon and acceptance, and on this ground our faith and hope must rest. “ There is salvation in no other, and there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby they must be saved.” “ We are justified by faith in Christ, without the deeds of the law ;” for this requires perfection, and accepts of nothing less. We must therefore “ glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

But how many, while they pretend to believe in Christ, place a dependence on some other way of salvation ? Many of the Jews, as we have already observed, instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of God through faith, went about to establish a righteousness of their own. They allowed that Christ was a Saviour ; but they imagined, that they could not be saved by him without an observance of the ceremonial law. They thought, that without this appendage, the gospel-scheme would be defective. Their religion resembled that of the Samaritans, who, in conjunction with the true God, worshipped gods of their own.

Of much the same nature is the religion of those, who rely on their own righteousness, in conjunction with that of the Redeemer, as the ground of their acceptance with God. I say, as the *ground* of their acceptance ; for I am not now speaking of the *terms* and *conditions* of acceptance. These

must undoubtedly be some internal and personal qualifications.

Christ came into the world to save *sinners*—not to save the innocent and righteous. If we are not sinners, we have no need of his interposition ; our innocence—our righteousness will secure us. But it must be such a righteousness, as God's law demands, a final continuance in all things written in the law to do them. If we come short of this, we have sinned. If we have sinned, we deserve death. And if we deserve death for our evil works, we cannot deserve deliverance from it for our good works. However perfect our future works may be, they are but our reasonable service, and therefore can never cancel past guilt.

“ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Our acceptance therefore is grounded wholly on what he has done ; not at all on what we have done. The remission of sins that are past is by faith in Christ's blood, not by reliance on our own future obedience. A sinner wholly reformed and perfectly obedient in future, if such a character were to be found, would not, indeed, continue to accumulate his guilt and demerit ; for no man will be punished for sins which he never committed ; but then he would not extinguish the guilt already contracted by the sins which he had committed. We must therefore depend wholly on the atonement of Christ—not at all on personal recommendations, as the proper ground of our pardon and acceptance.

Works of holiness and obedience are required in the gospel, as *necessary to*, but not *meritorious of* salvation. They are only the *conditions of*, and *qualifications for* future happiness—not the *grand consideration* on which God is pleased to shew us



mercy and release us from past guilt ; for it is only through Christ that our best works are accepted ; and it is only through him that we obtain grace for the performance of such works as can be accepted. “ By grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God ; not of works, lest any man should boast ; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath ordained, that we should walk in them.”

We must not imagine, that we may be accepted on easier terms—on a more slight and partial repentance than some others ; or that we stand fairer than they for acceptance on the same terms, because we are not yet so great sinners as they are, or because we have done some duties which they neglect. For whatever different degrees of guilt there may be in different sinners, repentance is in all the indispensable condition of pardon ; and true repentance, though attended with some variety of circumstances, is substantially the same in all who are subjects of it. It is a turning of the heart and life from sin to God. We must not imagine, that there are certain eminent services to be performed, or certain rounds of duty to be run, before we can trust the righteousness of Christ to justify us, or before we may seek his grace to sanctify us ; for the righteousness of God through the faith of Christ is unto all that believe, and there is no difference. He who is athirst is invited to come to Christ for the grace of the Spirit ; and the Spirit itself by its inward motions, repeats the invitation, and says, “ Come.”

Pardon is offered to all sinners, small and great, young and old, upon the same terms. In this respect there is no difference. The same God is rich in mercy to all who call on him. The blood

of Christ can wash out the deepest guilt. He came to save the chief of sinners. Grace abounds to the humble penitent, how much soever sin has abounded. No sinner is accepted, but in a way of repentance toward God and faith toward Christ; and in this way none is rejected.

We cannot be too zealous of good works, nor lay too much stress upon them, while we regard them in their place, as duties required, as fruits of faith, as expressions of love, as conditions of a reward, and as evidences of sincerity. But if we put them in the place of that which the Redeemer has done—if we rely upon them as the ground of our acceptance, and the great consideration on which God forgives our sins—if we imagine they give us a claim on his justice for an exemption from punishment, and for the bestowment of a reward—if we think he would deal cruelly with us to reject us from his favour after we have done so much for him; we then go about to establish a righteousness of our own in aid of Christ's righteousness; we are corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ; we mar the virtue of all our works by our pride and self-confidence; and we imitate the religion of those, who feared the Lord, and served their graven images.

The sinner, awakened to a conviction of his sins and a sense of his guilt, is not to wait, until he has made himself better, before he ventures to apply to the mercy of God in Christ for relief, as if there were not worthiness enough in Christ to recommend, nor grace enough in God to regard a creature so vile, as he finds himself at present; but he must, immediately and without delay, hope and seek for the divine influence to renew and sanctify him, and for the divine mercy to pardon and save him, through that Redeemer who died

to save the chief of finners—through that Saviour who invites all, and such as have no money, to come and buy wine and milk without money and without price—through that Surety who has paid the debt of five hundred pence, as well as the debt of fifty. He ought now to apply himself to Christ, relying on the grace of his Spirit, and the atonement of his blood, to sanctify him from sin, and justify him from guilt. The gospel requires no previous course of preparation for such an exercise of faith as this ; it only requires, that we feel our guilt, danger and impotence. Until we perceive our unhappy condition in ourselves, we shall not see our need of a Saviour ; when we do perceive this, we must repair to him. If we thirst, we must go to him and drink ; if we be weary, we must go to him for rest ; if we know that we are poor, blind and naked, we must go to him for tried gold that we may be rich, for eye-salve that we may see, and for white raiment that we may be clothed. We are to consider him, not as a partial, but complete Saviour, and go to him for all that we want—for righteousness to justify us, light to direct us, grace to purify us, and strength to establish us ; for “ Christ is of God made to believers wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.”

Faith in Christ is often required in the gospel, as the condition of salvation. But we must remember, that faith in Christ, as the Mediator, terminates in God the Father. “ By him we believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.” We must not go to Christ to save us from God, as if all goodness were in the Son, and nothing but stern justice in the Father ; for “ God so loved the world, as to give his only be-

gotten Son, that whoſo believeth in him might have everlaſting life.” But we muſt go to God in the name of Chriſt, “ who has once ſuffered for our ſins, the juſt for the unjuſt, that he might bring us to God”—might open a way for the exerciſe of mercy to us, and give us ſuch diſplays of God’s grace and love, as ſhould reconcile us to him.

Let it farther be obſerved ; Though the awakened ſinner is not to wait until he makes himſelf better, before he truſts in Chriſt and ſeeks ſalvation in his name ; yet he muſt wait until he finds himſelf better, before he truſts that he *is* in Chriſt and actually *entitled* to ſalvation.

There is a great difference between truſting in Chriſt for ſalvation, and truſting that this ſalvation is already ours. For the former nothing more is neceſſary than a ſenſe of our wants, and a view of Chriſt’s ſufficiency. For the latter it is neceſſary that we experience the power of the goſpel in ſanctifying our hearts. If we feel our guilt and impotence, and know Chriſt’s glorious name, we ſhall put our truſt in him. “ And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” “ When our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence toward God.” “ We ſhew our faith by our works.” “ We conclude that we have paſſed from death to life, becauſe we love the brethren.”

A ſincere faith gives us an immediate intereſt in the ſalvation of Chriſt ; but our *knowledge* of this intereſt muſt ariſe from the work of faith in purifying our ſouls unto unfeigned love of the brethren. There is no condemnation to them who are in Chriſt Jeſus ; and we know that we are in Chriſt, when we walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit. “ He who faith, he abideth in Chriſt, ought himſelf alſo to walk even as Chriſt

walked. He who keepeth his commandments dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us by his Spirit which he hath given us. And if we are led by his Spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; for they who are sensual have not the Spirit."

In the improvement of this subject, we are,

First, naturally led to observe, that true religion, as taught by the revelation of God, is far more easy to be understood and practised, than the religions contrived by the invention of men. The former is plain and simple; the latter are obscure and perplexed. The Assyrians, who were settled in Samaria, greatly embarrassed their religion by mixing the superstitions of their country with the worship of the God of Israel. Had they been content to observe only the latter, their service would have been, not only more reasonable, but more cheap and practicable. The same may be said of those Christians, who in the apostles' times, added to the institutions of the gospel the various rites of their former religions. They took on themselves a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear; when the yoke which Christ laid on them was easy and his burden was light. A superstitious zealot enquired of the prophet, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come with thousands of rams, or with rivers of oil? Shall I offer my first born for my transgression, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The prophet answered, "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?" How plain and simple is the divine direction, compared with the inventions of human superstition?

Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, but the way of transgressors is hard. The path of the just is as the shining light, but the path of the wicked is as darkness. The man of the world has no certain rule to direct his pursuit, nor divine promise to ensure his object. He is perplexed in his schemes ; he shifts his plans ; he guards against disappointments, and runs into them by the course which he takes to avoid them. He envies the success of his competitors, and is mortified at his own miscarriages. He uses art and disguise to accomplish his projections, and when he has accomplished them his mind is still dissatisfied. But the man of religion has one great object in view, the favour of God ; and one sure rule to guide him, the word of God. His path lies plain and strait before him. He has only to walk right on, trusting in the grace of God to strengthen his steps, and in the promise of God to make the end safe and happy. In his doubts, he has no occasion to ascertain the worldly consequences of the action in question ; he may apply directly to his rule, and there learn his duty ; and when he has found it, nothing remains but to do it, and leave the consequences with God. Thus the good man is satisfied from himself. "His rejoicing is the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has had his conversation in the world."

Secondly. Our subject should be improved to guard our hearts against every kind of corruption in religion.

As we believe there is one God, so our affections should be directed to, and concentrated in him ; and other objects should be regarded only

in subordination to the favour of this supreme all-perfect Being.

As he is one, so his will is uniform—not, like the will of man, devious from, and inconsistent with itself. He is of one mind; who can turn him? Let us then be constant in his service, doing his will from the heart, guiding our actions by his commands as our only rule, and seeking his favour as our only happiness.

As we believe there is one Saviour, let us come to God through him, do all things in his name, rely on his righteousness as the only ground of our hopes, and trust in his intercession as the only effectual recommendation of our unworthy prayers.

Thirdly. We see that sincere religion in the heart is a great attainment—greater than many perhaps imagine.

Religion consists in a heart uniformly and unreservedly devoted to God; or in a supreme love to him, governing all our affections, and directing all our actions. Men may do much in religion from worldly motives. The persons mentioned in our text did so. The people of Israel, in a time of famine, assembled themselves for corn and wine, but rebelled against God. Some, in our Saviour's day, sought him with diligence, and spared no pains to find him, not because they loved his doctrines, but because they had eaten of his loaves. This was a worldly religion. God was not its immediate object.

Men may do much in external duties, and yet be destitute of a holy temper. They may act in some good things with zeal and engagedness, and yet retain their favourite sins. The Samaritans took much pains to learn how they must fear the Lord; but still they held fast their idolatry. The young man mentioned in the gospel had a strong

desire to enter into life ; but he chose to hazard the loss of it, rather than abandon his worldly pursuits.

Whatever we do in religion, if we indulge any known sin, our religion will not carry us to heaven. Whatever works we perform, if we glory in them as the foundation of our claim to heaven, and forget our dependence on the righteousness of the Saviour, our works are vain.

Fourthly. Our subject may lead us to reflect on the heinous nature of sin. The excellency of religion consists in its being directed to God ; and the great evil of sin consists in its being committed against him. Religion is a conformity ; sin is an opposition to the divine nature. Religion is a love of God's commands and a submission to his will ; sin is a hatred of his laws and a rebellion against his authority. Religion is resigning ourselves to God's government, and yielding ourselves to his disposal ; sin is rising up against God, and setting ourselves above him.

In this view, how horrible must sin appear ! How amazing is the guilt of those who thus have treated, and thus continue to treat the Almighty !

Do you wonder that rational men should be so stupid as to set up idols for objects of adoration, in opposition to, or in conjunction with the supreme Jehovah ? Why not also wonder at yourselves, that you should set up the interests and pleasures of the world, as the objects of your supreme affection ?

Fifthly. What abundant cause of rejoicing have we, that there is an all-sufficient Saviour to whom we may repair ?

Had we nothing, but our own righteousness, to rest upon, we must sink in despair. Such sinful creatures as we are, have nothing to recommend



them in the presence of a holy God. But Jesus has brought in everlasting righteousness, and the greatest sinner may have the benefit of it. Did sinners realize their own condition, they would apply to this Saviour; they would seek him earnestly and constantly; they would cry to him day and night, and not hold their peace, till his righteousness came to them as brightness, and his salvation as a lamp that burneth.

To conclude: Since there is one God, the great object of religion, and one Mediator by whom we must draw near to God, and since the religion which he requires is pure and simple; let us prove what is true and acceptable religion, take it as he has prescribed it, adopt it in its simplicity without human additions, direct all our services to him, and do all things in the name of Christ through whom alone we have acceptance.

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# SERMON XXVII.

*Folly conspicuous in a Virtuous Character.*

ECCLESIASTES x. 1.

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor.

THE preacher here teaches us a very useful lesson; that the wiser and better a man is reputed to be, the greater caution he needs to use in his language and behavior, lest he viciate the reputation which he has acquired. For as dead flies, though but small insects, falling into a pot of sweet ointment, will render it rancid and disgusting; so errors and follies, small in themselves, will appear as great blemishes in the character of a man, who is highly valued for his superior virtue and wisdom; and faults scarcely noticed in other men, will be imputed to him as intolerable crimes. "The case of men eminent for virtue," says one, "is peculiarly difficult, because their errors, though ever so small, are not easily pardoned. As in a diamond of great lustre, the eye is offended by the least speck, or the smallest cloud, which in a grosser stone would not be observed; so in men of singular abilities, the least infirmities are quickly discerned and made matter of conversation, when in persons of meaner character they would be wholly unnoticed, or easily forgiven. A little folly in a wise man, a small sin in a strictly honest man, a flight indecency in a very polite man, much derogates from his fame and reputation; when the same things in men of different characters

would pass uncensured, and perhaps unobserved."

In the writings of Solomon, wisdom and folly usually signify virtue and vice. We may therefore, by the man in reputation for wisdom, understand the man eminent for virtue; and, by a little folly, we may understand the infirmities and indiscretions incident to such a man.

The truth, then, suggested in our text will be this; that small offences are easily observed, and freely censured in men of distinguished reputation for religion.

This we often see to be a fact. Those very things, which pass for indifferent in the men of the world, are condemned as criminal in men of reputed piety. Virtue and vice are the same in their nature; but we judge of them differently according to the character of the persons in whom they are found.

There are many who appear to live without any governing regard to religion. They take no care to educate their children in sentiments of piety, or to keep up the worship of God in their families. They are much addicted to pleasure, company and amusement. Their language is sometimes profane, and often loose and unguarded. They neglect the stated means of religion and treat with indifference the instituted ordinances of God. Thus they pass along in the world, and few take any unfavorable notice of them. If one reprove them, they are ready to vindicate themselves; and perhaps there are some, besides themselves, who will plead in their excuse, and palliate their neglects and transgressions. But if a man who professes *religion*, or sustains an office in the *church*, should for once appear to be guilty of the same exceptionable conduct, will it thus pass off unobserved? Or will it meet the same excuses? No: one *rash* expression from this *good* man will be more severely condemned, than a hundred profane *oaths* from the *customary* swearer. A single instance

of inordinate *passion* in him will be more talked of, than the daily *ravings* of those who have *no rule* over their spirits. If his children for once run to excess, break the sabbath, or trespass on good order, he is reproached as a man who exercises no government in his family. But youths of other families may make themselves much more vile; and few, except they happen to suffer injury from them, will ever reprove them, or even complain, that they are not restrained. If the Christian, crowded with business or company, should sometimes omit the stated devotions of his house, this omission will be matter of much animadversion; but a total *neglect* in other people is scarcely imputed as a fault. If a temperate man should by accident be overtaken and disguised with strong drink, he becomes the talk of the whole neighborhood; but a sot may get drunk half a dozen times in a week, and little is said about him, and little pains taken to reform or restrain him.

Yea; men of immoral and vicious lives will remark with indignation in the Christian the smallest appearance of those vices, which they themselves notoriously indulge without remorse. They can see a *note* in a good man's eye, when they feel not a *beam* in their own. They wonder that the Christian professor can take such liberties; but seldom think of their own iniquities. The apostle, in strong terms, reproves this self-deceit and blind partiality. "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest, dost the same thing. Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest, a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayst, a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?"

The partial world, in the severity of their censure, condemn in good men many things, which in their nature are really innocent, and which they themselves practise with freedom, and without suspicion of guilt. How often was our Saviour reproached by the Pharisees for healing the sick, and relieving the distressed on the sabbath day; when they would have felt no scruple to lift a *beast* out of a *pit*, or *lead* him to *water* on the same day? Jesus might not do as much on the sabbath, for a human creature, as they might do for one of their *cattle*. He came in the high character of the Son of God. He reproved the proud Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Stung with his reproofs, they determined to blast his reputation, and sink him below the sons of men. Real faults in him they could find none; and they studied to turn his virtues into faults.

The apostle Paul exhorts Christians to "provide things honest in the sight of all men—to walk in wisdom toward them, who are without—to take heed that their good be not evil spoken of." He supposes that the men of the world will inspect the manners and observe the actions of the professors of the gospel. And let them do so. Christians will hence become more watchful; and perhaps their enemies more wise. The apostle Paul advises Christians to walk with great caution and circumspection, and to shew themselves patterns of good works, that their enemies may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of them. For himself he professes a concern to cut off occasion from them, who desire an occasion to reproach the gospel. Many things, which he had a right to do, he would forbear, rather than expose religion to the obloquy of designing and unreasonable men.

Saint Peter intreats Christians to have their conversation honest among the gentiles, that they

who spake evil of them, as evil doers, might, by the good works which they beheld in them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

These repeated cautions given by the apostles, shew their apprehension, that Christians were then, and ever would be strictly watched by a jealous world; and that the smallest errors and imprudences in their conduct would be made the occasion of reproach to Christianity itself.

The fact being undeniable, let us enquire, what are the causes.

1. This is partly owing to the strong *contrast* between the particular instances of their folly and their general character for wisdom.

As every stain is visible on a white and clean garment, so the smallest failings are noticed in men of eminent virtue and holiness. In a vicious or unprincipled man we *expect* to see a conduct answerable to his general character. If he be unjust, profane, intemperate, or deceitful, we are not disappointed, for he made no pretensions to a religious faith or a virtuous life. But if a man, who has professed to believe the reality and to experience the power of godliness, and who, for a time, has lived, or seemed to live answerably to his profession, turn to folly and wickedness, the gross and palpable contradiction between his present conduct and former character, strikes us with a kind of horror. It is a change which we did not expect. We were persuaded of him better things. The same conduct in a man of profligate manners and dissolute principles, would have been much less noticed; for he never pretended to any thing better. It is all of a piece with his prevailing character.

2. In this case, there is much to be attributed to *prejudice* and *ill will*.

Fools look with malice and displeasure on the

man who is in reputation for wisdom; and they would detract from the excellence of his character, because it eclipses their own. They are watchful to espy some error in his opinions, some fault in his manners, some defect in his virtues. When they have discovered, or think they have discovered some miscarriage in him, they are pleased and gratified. They make it the subject of their conversation. They magnify it beyond bounds. They annex to it circumstances which have no foundation in truth, and spread the scandal into all companies, where they think it will be received. Charity hopes all things, and bears all things; but envy rejoices in iniquity.

3. Some there are who observe and magnify the failings of good men, that they may *justify themselves*.

The pure and virtuous manners of the Christian are a censure and reproof on the guilty world. The wicked and ungodly, when they view his amiable character, and observe his useful and blameless manners, feel themselves condemned. They wish to remove the reproach, which justly falls upon them. They are vigilant to find something in the Christian, which may be improved to their own justification or excuse. If *he* deviates from the strict rules of virtue, in any instance, this, they hope, will vindicate *them*. They do no worse than *he* does. If such sins are found in a *saint*, they imagine, that the same things, and a hundred others as bad, may be *excused* in *them*. If the saint, notwithstanding his sins, will go to heaven, why should *their* sins exclude *them*. And they will venture to do those things *habitually*, which the Christian has perhaps done under some particular temptation, and for which he has sought pardon by deep repentance. They argue and conduct as if an *act* of sin in a good man, would justify a *course* of sin in them; as if what was the effect of *surprise* in *him* may be matter of deliberate *choice* in

them; as if what was in him followed with repentance, may be practised by them with self approbation.

There is many a sinner, who is much better pleased with the story of David's adultery and murder, and Peter's perfidy and falsehood, than he is with the account of their deep repentance, or with the narrative of all their virtues. Their virtues condemn him: their *transgressions* are the main support of his hopes.

For the same reason, that sinners attend so much to the falls of good men recorded in scripture, they are gratified with the transgressions of reputed Christians now on earth. If they see a neighbor, who is in high esteem for piety, wandering out of the way, and deviating from the strait path of gospel purity, they are highly pleased, because if this good man, (and a good man in such a case they allow him to be; if he) can so greatly offend and not lose his character, they hope *their own* offences are consistent with goodness. Hence the smallest offences of the Christian are exaggerated into enormous crimes, that they may better serve to pacify the guilty consciences of sinners.

There are many, who judge of their own character by a comparison of themselves with other men. These derive a secret pleasure from the sins of the godly, because hereby they seem to stand in a more favourable light. The Pharisee, when he thanked God, that he was not as other men, felt a real satisfaction in their supposed wickedness, because this was the main ground on which his hope could stand. There are many such self-deceivers. The sins of others do much more, than their own virtues, to raise and strengthen their hopes. If David's impurity, Peter's apostacy, and a few more transgressions of good men were taken out of the bible, they would be undone. Their hope would find no ground, on which it could set its foot.

4. There are some who magnify good men's faults out of enmity to religion, and with an aim to bring it into disrepute.



They hate religion, because it testifies of them, that their works are evil. Our Saviour says, "He that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Their enmity to the truth prompts them to asperse and reproach all who endeavor to support it, and those chiefly, who are most able, and most active to support it. If they can see in *them* any error of conduct, they will rejoice in so good an opportunity to obstruct their influence. If they can see none, they will hatch the more in their own dark imagination.

5. The failings of good men, as they are matter of joy and exultation to the enemies, are matter of grief and humiliation to the friends of religion, because they are peculiarly injurious to its interest.

The open transgressions of Christian professors are not in themselves more criminal, than similar transgressions in others, who enjoy the same light and the same means. It is not the profession, but the enjoyment of the gospel, which aggravates the guilt of the disobedient. But such is the malignity of infidels and gainfayers, that, while they excuse their own sins, they will make the sins of professors an objection against the gospel itself. David's crimes gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Hence the godly are in a peculiar manner affected with the transgressions and falls of their brethren ; for thereby religion itself is wounded.

From these causes even a little folly will be much observed in those who are in reputation for wisdom and honour.

Let us now attend to the improvement of our subject.

1. We see that it is dangerous to make too high pretensions to religion, because we thus render our faults more conspicuous, and consequently shall bring on religion greater dishonor.

The man who professes a higher degree of goodness, than he ever has attained ; or than man, in

the present imperfect state, is capable of attaining, will hardly be allowed full credit for the goodness which he has. It is so in all other professions, and it is so in the religious profession. He who assumes a character which he cannot support, sinks much lower, in the general estimation, than if his pretensions had been more modest and humble.

They who would be Christ's disciples, are advised to sit down and count the cost—to consider whether they can take the cross and follow him—whether they can for his sake relinquish all worldly interests and connexions.

We should set out in the religious life with a persuasion of its importance, and with a sense of our own weakness—with an apprehension of dangers before us, and with a reliance on the grace of God. We should apply the caution given by the apostle to Christians in his day; “Be not high-minded, but fear”—“Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

Solomon warns us, that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Confidence in ourselves, not only exposes us to the power of temptation, but also renders our transgressions more conspicuous in the view of the world, and consequently more injurious to the cause of religion.

But then, let none imagine that a diffidence of his own perseverance and constancy will *excuse* him from engaging in religion at all. Whatever distrust one may have of himself, still he is to enter upon the service of God, trusting in that grace which is sufficient for him.

There are some, who, when they are exhorted to a religious profession, will say, This is doubtless the duty of some people; but we are afraid, *we* shall not act up to our profession if we should make one; and we think best to delay it for the present. But tell me; when will you be delivered from

this fear? When will you have such assurance of your own strength, that you can make the profession without any concern, lest you dishonor it? Whenever you make it, be it ten, or twenty years hence, must it not be made with a fear and concern, lest you fail in practice? Without this fear, would you not be wanting in humility and watchfulness? Let not your fear then restrain you from engaging in your duty; but rather excite you to prayer and diligence, that you may obtain grace to help in performing your duty.

If you feel your dependence on the grace of God, why may you not trust this now, as well as at another time? It is as free and as sufficient now, as it will be hereafter. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

2. Christians, we see, ought to walk with great prudence and caution, that they may shun the errors and follies, which would degrade their character and obstruct their usefulness.

In them a few dead flies may taint the whole pot of ointment; a little folly may viciate all the favour of their good name, and corrupt all the sweet perfume of their wisdom. Folly in them will be more observable, than in those, who never applied themselves to wisdom. The partial world will not bear from them so much as it will from fools. Envy and malice will exaggerate their faults, and the noisy tongue of slander will trumpet them around. "Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

3. Be not fond of the company of those, who are known enemies to religion; for they will endeavour to seduce you into folly, and then will make use of your folly to discourage religion.

There are, indeed, but few men, who will openly and directly deny, that there is such a thing as religion; but there are many who by their practice shew, that they wish there were no such thing. They will

acknowledge in general, that religion is good and important; but will cavil and dispute against almost every particular thing which belongs to it—before against every thing which condemns their temper, and reproves their practice. They oppose all the means of supporting it in the world—they deride all the forms of it, and especially those which are most in use—they endeavour to subvert the order of Christ's kingdom, and to introduce into it error and confusion—they neither enter into it themselves, nor suffer those, who are entering, to go in. Thus, while they pretend a general regard to religion, they manifest a real enmity against it.

The Christian, especially the youthful Christian should cautiously avoid the company and conversation of such enemies. It is the advice of Solomon, "Cease my son, to hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge." It was the wisdom of David, to "keep his mouth with a bridle, while the wicked were before him." "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

4. Our subject teaches us, that, in our religious conduct, we should guard against every imprudence which might cause our good to be evil spoken of.

A little folly is highly disgusting in those, who are in reputation for wisdom. See then, that ye be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. Attend not only to the more important duties of religion, but also to the least commandments of the gospel. Make conscience of every thing which has a near connexion with a virtuous character. Indulge in no liberties, which would turn to the dishonor of religion. Decline those levities, which indicate a careless and worldly spirit. But while you avoid a light and airy behavior, assume not

an affected and hypocritical austerity. Be cheerful, but not vain—serious, but not morose. Shun all fellowship with sinners in their unfruitful works, but still shew a benevolence to all men, and a peculiar regard for good men. Study to be useful by your works; but be not ostentatious of your works. Maintain a modesty of behaviour; but affect not that awkward humility, which courts applause by speaking diminutively of itself. Shew out of a good conversation your works with meekness of wisdom.

5. Our subject teaches us, that we never ought to pay much attention to ill reports, which the known enemies of wisdom utter concerning its friends.

A little folly is conspicuous in one, who is reputed wise; and a small transgression is severely marked and censured in one who is esteemed godly. When therefore we hear evil spoken of a man, whose virtuous character is well established, we may charitably presume, that his conduct has been misunderstood, or an infirmity has been imputed as a fault, or a real fault magnified beyond its demerits. If the slander comes only from one, who is known to be unfriendly to him, or to his profession, or to his religious character, let it return back on the author. For it is more credible that an enemy will misunderstand, or misrepresent the actions of a good man, than that a good man will grossly depart from his habitual conduct and established character.

Solomon says, “He who utters a slander is a fool.” He is a fool, because he discovers a mischievous disposition, trifles with truth and sports with human happiness. He does evil without a prospect of advantage to himself; and brings on himself the mischief, which he intended for another. “The fool’s mouth is his own destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”

6. We see, that we should be solicitous, rather to become wise, than to be thought so; rather to maintain the power, than to acquire the reputation of religion.

How much soever we may desire a good reputation, it is really of little value farther than we deserve it. We all choose to stand well in the opinion of the world; but if we stand too high, our standing is precarious. It will be no easy matter to preserve it. We are more exposed to envy and obloquy; more liable to fall, and to be wounded by a fall, than if we stood on humbler ground.

If men think better of us than we deserve, they will expect more from us than we can do. Disappointed in their expectations, they will censure us more severely, than if we had made more modest pretensions. "For a man to seek his own glory, is not glory. A man's pride will bring him low; but honor will uphold the humble in spirit."

Our greatest ambition should be to stand approved in the sight of God, to do our duty, correct our errors, improve in every virtuous temper, and abound in those works, which are of good report, and worthy of praise. When our reputation for wisdom rises by wise improvements, and our character for religion is supported by religious practice, we are in little danger from the obloquy of the world. The shafts of calumny will not pierce deep; they will either pass harmless by us, or, falling on the buckler of our righteousness, will recoil on him who sends them. The apostles, conscious of their integrity and the divine approbation, could pass through good report and evil report; through honor and dishonor, without elevation in the one case, or depression in the other.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; if there be any virtue, any praise, think on these things; and the things, which ye have heard and learned, these choose and practise, and the God of peace will be with you.







