

~~James P. Wilson~~ SERMONS, *James P. Wilson*

BY THE

REV. JOHN EWING, D. D.

LATE PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION
IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA.

James P. Wilson = *James P. Wilson*
SELECTED FROM HIS MANUSCRIPTS

BY THE

REV. JAMES P. WILSON,

Of the City of Philadelphia, D. D.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED, A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

EASTON, PENN.

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.....

1812.

District of Pennsylvania, to wit:

.....
: SEAL : BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the twenty-second
: day of January, in the thirty-sixth year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. D. one thousand eight hundred and twelve, JOHN EWING of the said District, hath deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following; to wit:

“ Sermons, by the Rev. John Ewing, D. D. late Pastor of the First Presbyterian Congregation in the City of Philadelphia. Selected from his manuscripts by the Rev. James P. Wilson, of the City of Philadelphia, D. D. To which is prefixed, a Life of the Author.

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D. CALDWELL,
Clerk of the District of Pennsylvania.

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LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

THE following life is an eminent example of the beneficial results of persevering industry; and the object of recording it will have been attained, if it shall teach the timid, a proper confidence in his own efforts, and the presumptuous, an humble confidence in his God.

Dr. JOHN EWING was born on the 22d day of June, 1732, in the township of Nottingham, in Cœcil county, Maryland, near to the line which separates that state from Pennsylvania. Of his ancestors little is known.— They emigrated from Ireland at an early period of the settlement of our country, and fixed themselves on the banks of the Susquehanna, near to the spot where he was born. They were farmers, who, if they did not extend their names beyond their immediate neighbourhood, yet maintained within it that degree of reputation, which their descendants can speak of without a blush.

His father was enabled by his industry, to support his family* from the produce of his farm, and to give to his children that degree of education, which country schools at that time had to offer. This indeed was little, but it was all that was necessary to such a mind as Dr.

* There were five brothers: William, George, Alexander, John, and his twin brother James, who is the only one now living.

Ewing's. It was sufficient to furnish the rudiments of science, which, however early they are lost by ordinary minds in the distractions of a life of business, only serve to fan the fire of ambition in stronger intellects, and to direct and guide their possessors to fame.

The school-house at which Dr. Ewing was taught the elements of his native language, and the first rules of arithmetic, was at a considerable distance from his father's residence. The daily exercises of walking thither in his youth, tended to invigorate a constitution naturally strong, and enabled him to acquire a stock of health, which carried him through sixty years without sickness.* At this school it cannot be supposed that he learned much: but he was soon removed from it and placed under the superintendance of Dr. Alison, a cler-

* Dr. Ewing has been heard to state a fact which he witnessed at this period of his life, and which I cannot resist relating, since, established by his character for veracity, it may shed some light on a question in natural history, hitherto involved in some obscurity. As he went to his school one morning at an early hour, he observed a bird in extreme agitation, flying repeatedly across the road, but never going beyond the fence on either side, on which it constantly alighted. It would rest there for a moment and then return to the opposite fence, always descending in its flight, until it nearly touched the ground. Its agitation arrested his attention, and he stood to observe the cause. On the spot where it seemed disposed to alight in its flight, he observed a snake, which had evidently fixed on its victim, and fascinated it beyond the power of escaping by its own efforts. He frightened the snake away by throwing at it a stone, when the bird instantly flew off with evident symptoms of joy.

gyman eminent for his erudition and piety, who then directed a school at New London cross roads, in the state of Pennsylvania. After having finished those studies usually taught in his school, he remained with him three years as a tutor. To this he was led, not merely by inclination, but by necessity. His father died about this time, and left his small property to be distributed according to the laws of the state of Maryland, in which that of primogeniture prevailed. The eldest son inherited the patrimonial estate, and left Dr. Ewing and his remaining brothers, to struggle in the world with twenty pounds each. At this distribution of his father's property he did not repine, for he then felt a confidence in his own powers which did not deceive him, which, poverty could not diminish, and which enabled him subsequently to attain that honorable elevation, which he adorned by his virtues as well as his talents.

Under the kind care of Dr. Alison, he made considerable progress in his favourite pursuit, the study of mathematics. Books of science were not at that time easily obtained in America, especially in places remote from cities: but such was his thirst for knowledge, that he frequently rode thirty or forty miles to obtain the loan of a book, which might afford him some information on the subject of his favourite speculations. Those authors who were safe guides, could not always be obtained. Incorrect writings sometimes fell into his hands, the errors of which did not escape the detection of his penetrating and original genius. It often occurs, that difficulties only quicken the eagerness of the mind in its pursuits, and bring into action its latent energies. Such

was the result of difficulties on Dr. Ewing, at this early period of his life. His mind did not shrink from intellectual conflict, but gathered vigor from hindrance, and bade defiance to difficulty. At this period he certainly learned much from books, and much from the conversation of Dr. Alison, of whom indeed he always spoke with kindness, but he acquired more from the habits of close thinking in which he early indulged. To the two former he was much indebted, but if we allow to those sources of information all that they merit, it will yet not be hazardous to say, that in the science of mathematics he was self-taught, and could never have reached that station which he afterwards adorned, struggling as he was with poverty and harassed with difficulties, without receiving from other than human aid the impulse which carried him forward.

In the year 1754 he left the school of Dr. Alison, and removed to Princeton for the purpose of entering the college. Mr. Burr, the father of the late vice-president of the United States, was then President of that institution, and of that great and celebrated man he was a favourite pupil. He joined the senior class, and impelled by pecuniary embarrassments, engaged at the same time as teacher of the grammar school, which was connected with the college. His intention was to graduate, and for this purpose it was necessary that he should study in private some branches of learning to which he had previously been unable to attend.—These causes made his labour greater than that of his classmates. His studies were arduous and multiplied; but he brought to the contest a mind which difficulties

did not easily subdue. He graduated with his class in the year 1755, and finding that he had still to toil for a subsistence, he immediately accepted the appointment of tutor in the college. At this period he resolved to choose his profession; and feeling the study of theology congenial with his wishes, and calculated to permit him to mingle with it scientific researches, he adopted it with his usual promptitude and his usual zeal.

In pursuance of this design, he returned to Dr. Alison, his former tutor and friend, and, after the usual period of preparatory study, he was licensed to preach the gospel by the presbytery of Newcastle, in the state of Delaware. At the age of twenty-six, before he undertook the pastoral charge of any congregation, he was selected to instruct the philosophical classes in the college of Philadelphia, during the absence of the Provost, the late Dr. William Smith. Whilst he was engaged in the discharge of this honorable office, he received an invitation from the presbyterian congregation of his native place to settle himself among them as their pastor. This was an invitation on which he deliberated, before he declined it. To be selected by the friends of his youth as their spiritual guide; to fix himself with a decent stipend on his native spot among his relations and former associates, was a temptation calculated to win a man who was social in his affections, and who was little troubled with the unquiet spirit of ambition. But he was by this time married, and having early known the value of a liberal education, he wished to give his offspring the opportunity of possessing those instructions which he himself had so long toiled to acquire;

which, during his life, he praised as more valuable than wealth, and recommended to the attention of his children by all the persuasions of paternal affection.—Whilst, however, he was deliberating, he received, in the year 1759, an unanimous invitation from the first presbyterian congregation in the city of Philadelphia to undertake their pastoral charge. This he did not feel himself at liberty to decline, but accepted it, and fixed himself for life.

From this period until the year 1773, he continued to discharge his duties with a diligence and zeal seldom surpassed. In the bosom of his congregation he found affection and friendship, and learned that life has few stations to offer to an unambitious heart more valuable than that of a pastor beloved by his flock.

New scenes now opened upon his view. In the year 1773 he was commissioned, with the consent of his congregation, in conjunction with Dr. Hugh Williamson, late a member of Congress from the state of North Carolina, to solicit subscriptions in Great Britain for the academy of Newark in the state of Delaware. He took with him letters of recommendation from men of science and respectability to several eminent characters. These, aided by his own reputation for mathematical science, his general information, and his virtues, procured for him the intimacy and friendship of several persons, who at that period and since held the highest stations of literature. Among these were the celebrated historian Dr. Robertson, Dr. Webster, Mr. Balfour, and Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet of Scotland. He

visited every place of importance in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and in all of them was received with that attention and respect which are due to the man of science and the minister of God. The cities of Glasgow, Montrose, Dundee and Perth, presented to him their freedom, and from the university of Edinburgh, of which Dr. Robertson was then the *principal*, he received without application, the degree of Doctor of Divinity. Dr. Robertson, on presenting his diploma, declared that he had never before conferred a degree with greater pleasure. The acquaintance, thus commenced with this celebrated personage, ripened into intimacy, and until the death of the latter, in 1793, he made constant and affectionate inquiries about Dr. Ewing from travelling Americans who visited him at Edinburgh. A few days before his death, some young American gentlemen waited upon him, to whom he spoke of his friend "*as a man of great talents for whom he entertained a great personal regard,*" and his last words at parting were, "*Do not forget to present my kind regards to Dr. Ewing.*"

Such a testimonial from such a man as the historian of Charles the fifth, the descendants of Dr. Ewing may be permitted to remember and to speak of to the world.

When he first visited England, the approaching contest with his native land was a topic of conversation in every society. He was warmly and uniformly the friend of his country, and although he had frequent offers of reward from men, high in power, if he would remain in England, yet his knowledge of the causes of the revo-

lution; his acquaintance with the spirit and resources of his countrymen, and his integrity forbade him to listen to them. He held frequent conversations with the minister, lord North, to whom, with that frankness and independence of sentiment, which characterised him, he communicated all his information respecting the resources and power of the people of the united colonies. To the minister he predicted the issue of the contest, and urged him to pause before he alienated irretrievably from the mother country the affections of loyal subjects. These conversations he was in the habit of repeating to his friends on his return from England, not without some degree of surprise that the minister should have involved his country in a war with a people, of whose character, numbers, spirit and resources, he was utterly ignorant.

Among the eminent literary characters whom Dr. Ewing met at the hospitable table of Mr. Dilly, the London bookseller, was the truly great Dr. Johnson.— He loved to speak to his friends of this interview, which serves to illustrate the character of a man, of whom every one, who has read, knows something. When Mr. Dilly invited Dr. Ewing to dine with him, he added, “You will meet the great Dr. Johnson, but you must not contradict him; we never contradict him.” The day arrived, and Dr. Ewing, on entering the parlour of Mr. Dilly, found several eminent literary characters engaged in easy conversation, which however, was instantly suspended when Dr. Johnson entered the room. There was a general silence. He scarcely noticed any one, but seizing a book which lay on the table, read in

it attentively until dinner was announced. Here, every one seemed to forget himself, and anxious to please him by the most assiduous attentions. He attended however to nothing but his plate. He did not seem to know that any one was present, until, having eaten voraciously without exhibiting many of those *graces* which constituted so great a portion of Chesterfield's morality, he raised his head slowly, and looking around the table, surveyed the guests for the first time. They were then engaged in a discussion of the expected controversy with America, and as Dr. Ewing had lately left his native country, he, with his usual frankness, and without adverting to, or regarding the prejudices of Dr. Johnson, began to defend the cause of the colonies.—Johnson looked at him with sternness, and said, “*What do you know, Sir, on that subject?*” Mr. Dilly's caution was forgotten, and Dr. Ewing calmly replied, that having resided in America during his life, he thought himself qualified to deliver his opinions on the subject under discussion. This produced an animated conversation. Johnson's prejudices against the Americans were strong; he considered them, as he always termed them, rebels and scoundrels, and these epithets were now by no means sparingly used. It is difficult to say how far he might have been provoked, by opposition in argument, if a fortunate turn had not been given to the dispute. Johnson had rudely said, “*Sir, what do you know in America? You never read. You have no books there.*” “*Pardon me, Sir,*” replied Dr. Ewing, “*we have read the *Rambler.**” This civility instantly pacified him, and after the rest of the company had retired, he sat with Dr. Ewing until midnight, speaking amica-

bly and eloquently, and uttering such wisdom as seldom falls from the lips of man.

In the summer of 1775, Dr. Ewing returned to his native land, with a mind highly improved by his travels. He had directed his inquiries to the study of man, in all the varieties which Great Britain and Ireland afforded. He had collected much information and many anecdotes, which, on his return, were reserved for the amusement and instruction of that social circle, which he loved to collect at his own fireside. His parlour was always the scene of cheerfulness and hospitality. His finances indeed were never more than moderate, but he was always able to furnish for his guests something more valuable than the delicacies of the season, or the wines of France.

War had now commenced between the United States and Great Britain, and he adhered to the cause of his country with steadiness and zeal. When the British army was expected in Philadelphia in 1777, he removed his family to his native place, where he continued to reside until the city was evacuated by *Clinton*, immediately before his retreat through the state of New Jersey to New York. He then returned to his congregation, and in 1779, was elected to the provostship of the University of Pennsylvania, which station he filled until his death.

To this station he was fully competent. In all the branches of learning and science usually taught in colleges, he was uncommonly accurate, and in his mode of

instruction and of communicating information, he was probably never surpassed. On his appointment he prepared a course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy, which have been published since his decease, and which he delivered to his pupils during a period of twenty years. They will be found to contain all that is necessary for the mere student; written in a plain and simple style, and arranged with great method and perspicuity. As a teacher, perhaps no one was ever more beloved. His authority over his pupils was that of a parent, and while he maintained that discipline, without which genius will be wasted and diligence useless, he won their affection by the mildest manners.

All his hours were now occupied. He attended at the University during the mornings and afternoons of every day, and devoted his remaining time to the duties of his pastoral charge, and a necessary attention to his private affairs. These were arduous and multiplied.—Visiting the sick, and interchanging with his parishioners the visits of friendship, occupied much of his time. And when from the performance of these duties, he retired to his closet, he was obliged to prepare, usually two, but always at least one discourse for the approaching Sabbath. But these difficulties yielded to his love of method and untiring diligence. He rose with the sun and retired to rest at a late hour in the night; yet his constitution was naturally so robust, and the care of his health so judicious, that during a period of forty years, he was never prevented by sickness, from attending to his pastoral duties.

But these were not his only employments. His mathematical reputation attracted the attention of his fellow citizens, and on various occasions he was appointed to perform public duties. He was one of those gentlemen who were commissioned to run the boundary line of the state of Delaware, and to settle the boundary line between the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut, and between Pennsylvania and Virginia. He was also appointed in conjunction with the late David Rittenhouse, by the state of Pennsylvania, to survey the most practicable ground for a turnpike road between Philadelphia and Lancaster. He was a distinguished member, and for some time one of the Vice-Presidents of the American Philosophical Society, to which he made several valuable communications, which are recorded in the volumes of their transactions.* He also made several valuable additions to the astronomical articles in the American Edition of the British Encyclopædia, published by Thomas Dobson. About the year 1795, he commenced the compilation of a course of Lectures on Natural History, for the use of the pupils in the University, and made some progress in the work; but his health did not permit him to complete his plan.

From the year 1779, to the time of his death, his life had little variety. He continued to discharge the

* The following were the communications which he made to the A. P. S. "An Account of the Transit of Venus over the sun, June 3d, 1769, and of the Transit of Mercury, November 9th, 1769, both as observed in the statehouse, Philadelphia." "An improvement in the construction of Godfrey's Quadrant."

various duties of pastor, preceptor, husband, parent and friend, without making, as it is believed, one good man his foe. The compensation which he received from the University and from the Church, although not large, enabled him, with œconomy, to raise a numerous family, and to acquire a moderate property. But he was not versed in the artifices of business. He was a friend, and he trusted. He was himself free from guile, and therefore easily duped; and thus, in his old age, he had the mortification to see his little property swept from him by those to whom he had formerly loved to render acts of kindness. Yet he did not speak harshly of those who had injured him. Some of them indeed he forgave, though he could not forget. But for the conduct of the rest, he was always desirous to find excuses, and he continued during his life to defend those who could find no other apologist.

In the summer of 1796, he was attacked with a violent disorder, which it required a long time to subdue. He never however recovered from its effects; but although it left him so feeble as to be unable to walk without aid, he still persevered in performing his public duties. His remaining strength began to fail him during the early part of the year 1802, and in the month of August, he removed his family on account of the yellow fever, to the house of his son in Montgomery county, in Pennsylvania, where he died on the 8th of September, of that year, in the 71st year of his age.

The following sketch is extracted from a funeral sermon, preached by his pastoral successor, the Rev.

Dr. John Blair Linn, on the 21st of November, 1802, in the First Presbyterian Church in the City of Philadelphia :

“ The unembellished incidents which have now been
“ narrated of Dr. Ewing’s life, his religious and scien-
“ tific writings ; his observations and deportment in
“ the different relations of society, declare that his
“ mind was uncommonly strong and penetrating, and
“ that he had a mild and correct taste. Were we to
“ distinguish between his powers, we would say that his
“ understanding predominated over his imagination.—
“ He had more the mind of Locke than of Milton. He
“ looked through nature more with the eye of the philo-
“ sopher than of the poet. The sublimer and minuter
“ forms of matter were objects of his investigation ; and
“ we cannot but suppose him to have been gifted with
“ diversified talents, who could scan the illuminated
“ glories of the heavens, and inspect the insect which is
“ only visible to the microscopic eye : We cannot but
“ suppose that his researches were extensive, who look-
“ ed into the mind of man, analyzed his faculties and
“ affections, who unfolded to him the great truths of
“ his God, who looked through the howling wilds and
“ taught the properties of the brutal tribes, who looked
“ through the fields of air and described the race which
“ travel on the wing. In the science of mathematics,
“ Dr. Ewing, if not unrivalled, was unsurpassed by any
“ character in this country. His knowledge of the learn-
“ ed languages was very considerable. The Hebrew
“ language, which is too often neglected by the minis-
“ ters of God in the present day, was one of his favourite

“ studies. In the mornings of his latter days, he al-
 “ ways read a portion of the scriptures in their original
 “ tongue; and you could seldom enter his room without
 “ seeing on his couch beside him, his Hebrew Bible.—
 “ His qualifications as a minister of the gospel, were
 “ many and eminent. Science was to him a powerful
 “ assistant in the labours of his sacred office. She was
 “ with him a handmaid to religion; and aided by her,
 “ he was an able champion of the cross, both in the ad-
 “ vocation of its cause, and in the repulsion of the at-
 “ tacks of impiety and error. He was mighty in the
 “ scriptures. To the fountain of all religious know-
 “ ledge he went for instruction. His religious opinions
 “ were not so much founded upon the systems written
 “ by fallible men, as upon the scriptures of infallibility.
 “ He adopted not Calvin or Arminus, or Socinus, but
 “ the word of God as his guide. He read, he examined,
 “ he decided for himself. With the works of commen-
 “ tators and systematical writers he was familiar; he
 “ considered them as indispensable assistants to the stu-
 “ dent, but his veneration for these did not impress
 “ upon him a blind obedience to their dictates: He
 “ was first convinced by his own researches that they
 “ corresponded with the sacred volume, before he ac-
 “ knowledged their authority. His own investigation
 “ confirmed him in his belief of the doctrines of grace.
 “ These were the doctrines which he preached, and
 “ which he endeavoured to impress upon the hearts of
 “ his people.* His discourses were written with accu-

* “ Among the practical writers he thought that Doddridge was the best; and he thought that the method which he followed

“ racy; the truths which they contained were well examined and digested before he ventured to offer them to the public. He thought it a duty which he owed to his God and his hearers, to think before he spoke, to study and to ponder in private, before he arose in the presence of an audience as the messenger from heaven. To God he looked for aid and support: but he looked for assistance in his study, before he trusted to divine impulse in the sacred desk. Perhaps it may be said with truth, that no minister in this country has adopted a better method of instruction than that which distinguished his discourses; and perhaps it may be said, that none more fully illustrated and confirmed by plain and decisive reasoning, the passage which he chose for discussion. The style in which he embodied his conceptions was always perspicuous and occasionally ornamental. Ornament however he did not often employ. He sometimes poured forth ‘ thoughts that breathed and words that burned,’ but his most usual manner was sober and temperate, such as was adopted before him by Tillotson and Sherlock. Mere declamation was never heard from him; his discourses were always solid and edifying, and so equal in the scale of merit, that perhaps to no one which he wrote in the vigour of his mind could a decided preference be given.

“ His delivery was pleasing and happy. If in his old age, from debility, it was not remarkable for anima-

in his discourses, was a good model for the practical and devout preacher.

tion, yet it was distinguished for correctness, and could sometimes touch the finest springs of tenderness and pity.*

“The temper of Dr. Ewing was generous and not often ruffled. His manners and deportment were easy and affable. Free from guile himself, he suspected not guile in others. He had a freeness of salutation which sometimes surprised the stranger, but which was admired by those who knew him, as it proceeded from a heart open and honest. His talents for conversation were remarkably entertaining. From severer studies he could unbend, and become the companion of innocent mirth and happy gaiety. In the house of bidden joy his religion did not wear the frown; it covered not itself with the mantle of sorrow, but it taught him to rejoice with those that rejoice, as well as to weep with those that weep. He was perfectly free from pedantry, and from every thing that bore its resemblance. In the company of philosophers, he was in his conversation the philosopher, and with the unlettered, the man of ease and accommodation. His talent of narration was universally admired. His observation of men and manners in this country and abroad, furnished him with many scenes and facts

* The discourse which he, not long before his death, delivered from the answer of Jacob to Pharaoh, bore witness to this truth. The remarks which he offered on life, and the conclusions which he drew for its improvement, were conceived and delivered with eloquence. He then spoke from the heart, and impressed the hearts of his people who saw in him the venerable patriarch bowing beneath infirmity and years.

“ which as painted and related by him were extremely
“ entertaining. In domestic life he was amiable. He
“ had all the heart of the husband ; he had all the heart
“ of the parent ; he had the full heart of a friend ; sur-
“ rounded by a large family, he had care and tenderness
“ for them all. His affection for his children was such,
“ that even in his moments of severest study, he received
“ them with smiles, and laid aside his books to partake
“ of their infantile sports.

“ Dr. Ewing was tall in his person, and while in
“ younger life, was handsome and graceful. His consti-
“ tution was remarkably sound and strong. He was
“ settled with his congregation forty years without be-
“ ing prevented more than once or twice by sickness,
“ from discharging the duty of his pastoral charge.—
“ The only serious disorder which he had, was the one
“ which proved fatal, and which first seized him (in
“ 1796) six years before his death. After his first at-
“ tack he frequently preached, but never regained his
“ strength of body, or vigour of mind. In his sickness
“ he discovered patience, fortitude and resignation to the
“ will of his heavenly Father. No murmur escaped his
“ lips, and his last moments were closed apparently
“ without a pang and without a struggle. In a good
“ old age, in his seventy-first year, he fell to the ground
“ *like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.* A short
“ time before his death he buried the last of those mem-
“ bers of his congregation who signed his call.”

SERMON I.

A PARTICULAR DIVINE PROVIDENCE EX- PLAINED AND PROVED.

MAT. X. 29. 30. 31.

Are not two Sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many Sparrows.

OUR blessed Redeemer, well knowing the labors and sufferings to which the preaching of his gospel would expose his disciples, gives them in our context such directions as were suitable to their circumstances. He warns them, "that they shall be hated of all men for his sake; for the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord; and if they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household so?" But notwithstanding these difficulties, he exhorts them not to fear their enemies, but to persevere in preaching the gospel publicly. "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the house tops." And the reasons for this advice he assigns in the following words:

First. Because the power that opposed them was limited to the meaner and less excellent part of them. The worst they could do was only to kill the body; for the soul was beyond the reach of their power and malice. Hands of violence and instruments of death have nothing to do with thought and perception. The only possible destruction of the soul is its final separation from God; and therefore we should rather fear his displeasure, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Secondly, Our Lord encouraged his disciples under the prospect of persecution from the care and inspection of divine providence. This he suggests in our text, where he argues from the less to the greater. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?” and yet one of these inconsiderable creatures is not neglected or suffered to perish without the notice of the universal parent of all. And surely that God, who takes such a particular care of sparrows, will much more take care of you, who are his children, and are engaged in his immediate service. Nay, he takes notice of, and interests himself in, your minutest concerns: for the very hairs of your head are all numbered by him. “Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” From this passage of sacred writ, it appears an unquestionable truth, in the judgment of our Saviour, that there is not only a general but also a particular providence exercised over the creation. I am not insensible that this doctrine is attended with difficulties, of which we, who can see but a very small part of the grand scheme of divine providence, can render but unsatisfactory solutions.— Yet we are sure from the perfections of God, that he is holy and just in all his ways; and that all the dispensa-

tions of his providence are conducted so as to answer purposes, great and important in themselves, and worthy of the supreme ruler of the universe. For the judge of all the earth can do nothing, but what is right; however mysterious his dealings may appear to short-sighted ignorant creatures. Therefore that we may proceed with safety and as much precision as we can upon this difficult subject, we propose, through divine assistance,

I. To make some observations necessary to the right stating and explaining the doctrine of a general and particular providence.

II. To prove the doctrine asserted in our text.

III. To consider the principal acts and properties of divine providence.

I. We shall make some observations necessary to the right stating and explaining the doctrine of a general and particular providence exercised about the whole creation.

1. *God usually effects his gracious purposes without disturbing the settled order of Nature.*

By the order of nature, we mean the original laws by which the universe is governed; in consequence of which, one part of the creation depends upon another, and natural causes produce their proper effects, and events happen punctually as God intended they should happen. The world we inhabit is a beautiful and magnificent system, in which much of the divine wisdom and goodness is displayed, in the mutual dependence of its parts, and their

evident subserviency to the grand design of the whole. Thus the sun revolves from day to day, and from year to year, to enlighten and cherish the earth, and to exhale the vapours, which are again returned in fruitful showers. The earth receives the several seeds committed to it, and in a plentiful return of fruit at its proper season richly repays the labor of the sower. Summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, day and night, keep their regular succession, according to the laws and appointments of the great disposer of all things. The several species of animals propagate their kind without mixture or confusion: some objects are calculated to give us pain and others pleasure; some to wound, and some to heal us. Now the same almighty power, and infinite wisdom, who at first established this order and mutual subserviency of one part of his works to another, not only maintains it, but in general governs the world by the same original laws. And in this appears his tender regard for our happiness. For was there no settled order by which the world was governed, the utmost reach and compass of thought could avail no more than childhood and ignorance. All human industry and foresight, which depend upon things going on in a stated track, would be at a stand. There could be no room for counsel and deliberation, where there was no orderly constitution of things. On this supposition, it would not signify to cultivate the ground as there could be no foundation to hope for harvest. Nay, we could not support our animal lives, if we have no security, that what is healthful and proper for us to day, may not be poison to morrow. So that God usually governs the world by those stated laws and ordinances, which he has appoint-

ed in the beginning. Therefore by the doctrine of a particular providence, we are not to understand, that God will depart from the established laws of nature to gratify the wishes and importunity of particular persons, as this would be inconsistent with the good of the whole, and would introduce confusion and anarchy in his moral government. But still it is to be remembered that God in his wisdom sometimes sees fit to go out of the usual way, and he either retards or quickens the springs of nature, or weakens and controuls their power in bringing about some extraordinary events; to shew that he is not confined to instruments and visible causes. This has been so remarkably the case in some instances, that the most careless observers of divine providence have been constrained to say, “who knoweth not by all these, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?”* But still when God proceeds according to the ordinary course of things, and we observe no such remarkable interposition, causes being left to operate according to their proper natures: even in these instances, there is no more reason to conclude that he does not superintend and conduct every particular action and motion in the universe, than for a man to conclude that there is no spring or weight that gives motion to a clock, merely because he does not see it. We observe farther,

2. That nothing is casual or accidental with God.

That there is such a thing as chance with respect to us is certain; and when no more is meant by it, than that

* Job, XII, 9.

such occurrences happen, as proceed from causes unknown or unforeseen, or such as produce effects unexpected by us ; such a notion of chance or fortune is to be allowed. For in this sense Solomon observes, “ that time and chance happen to all men.” But this cannot take place with regard to the divine mind, which is full of wisdom and boundless penetration, incapable of resistance or disappointment, conducting every event to its final issue, and serving himself of all the power and action in the creation. So that what we call accidental effects, that frequently disconcert the best laid human schemes, can create no disorder in the plan of his government, nor hinder the execution of any of his designs. For he who made and governs the world, must comprehend at one view the whole course of things, and be perfectly acquainted with the nature, the power, and influence of every agent and of every action in the universe. “ He that made the eye, shall he not see ; and he that made the ear, shall he not hear ; and he that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know.” Can we stupidly imagine that what we think and know can possibly be concealed from him who invested us with the power of thought ? He searches the heart and knoweth all the thoughts and intentions of men before they are cloathed in words or expressed in actions. So that what we call chance or accident with respect to our limited knowledge, is in reality the wise dispensations of an all directing providence, and is as entirely subject to his direction and controul as any other necessary effects of necessary causes. Thus the scripture teaches us to refer, what appears a casualty to us, to the supreme disposer of all things. The same royal

preacher, that says, "time and chance happen to all men," says also, that "the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."* By which he plainly intimates, that what is chance with respect to us, is design and contrivance with respect to God. When the eleven apostles chose by lot another in the room of Judas; the whole affair is referred to the unerring providence of God. "Thou Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen."† Nothing could appear more fortuitous than Joseph's being sold into Egypt, and all the steps of his humiliation and advancement there. Yet he afterwards told his brethren; "as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive."‡ The wrath of Ahasuerus against the queen Vashti; the advancement of Esther to the royal crown; Mordecai's discovering a treason against the king; that being registered in the chronicles of the empire; the king's calling for that book on a night when he could not sleep; his fixing upon that particular record, &c. were a chain of the most accidental and fortuitous events; but yet evidently directed by the hand of providence to make way for the preferment of Mordecai, the destruction of Haman, and the preservation of the Jewish nation. Instances of this kind might be easily enumerated; and indeed every person, who is careful to consider the dispensations of divine providence with regard to the prosperity, or destruction of states and kingdoms, or to him-

* Eccl. ix. 11, and Prov. xvi, 33.

† Acts i, 24.

‡ Gen. L, 20.

self, may soon see how many accidental events have been overruled by God, to bring about important purposes.

3. *God exercises his Providence in perfect consistence with the liberty of moral agents.*

The liberty of the will is essentially necessary to constitute the morality or immorality of an action. For if we suppose that the human will is necessarily determined without a rational freedom of choice; it must follow that we are not free agents, but are unfit to be the subjects of moral government, and so neither entitled to rewards, nor deserving of punishment. But nothing is more certain, than that man is a reasonable and accountable creature, and placed here in a state of probation and discipline, to be trained up for a state of perfection and happiness. And on the other hand it appears equally certain, that there is a providence, which some way or other, superintends and overrules the conduct even of free agents, so as to secure a certainty of events. But perhaps we can no more reconcile these two propositions, than we can deny either of them.—But if they are both undeniable, they must in themselves be reconcilable, whether we are able to reconcile them or not. And this is only one, among a thousand instances, that demonstrates the imperfection of our limited reason, which constrains us to acknowledge that as a certainty, which we cannot comprehend or account for. The ways of God's providence have their mysteries, as well as the works of his hands; and therefore, after our most painful researches, we must leave many

truths to be fully discovered in that state of light and perfection, which God has given us the pleasure to expect:

But some may say; is it not more rational to deny the particular interposition of providence influencing the actions of free agents; than to assert such a doctrine, as appears to destroy the freedom of the human mind? To which it may be answered; that it is beyond all reasonable contradiction, that the supreme being may have an immediate access to the human mind whenever he pleases. As he originally formed it, he must be perfectly acquainted with its internal frame, with the strength of its faculties, with all the various ways, in which it may be impressed, and with what degree of force impressions may be made upon it, consistently with the natural and regular exercise of its moral powers and its use and design in the creation. There is therefore no difficulty in admitting that God may influence the human mind consistently with its natural freedom. But the only question is, whether he ever does act in this manner. And that he does so, appears both from reason and scripture. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, and as the rivers of water, he turneth it, whithersoever he will.”* “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the forward is carried headlong.”† And nothing can be so suitable to the character of God, as the creator, governor, father and friend of mankind, as the supposal of such a particular interposition in their affairs. Nothing can be so exactly agreeable to his concern for the happi-

* Prov. xxi. 1.

† Job. v. 13.

ness of his creatures, and his peculiar delight and complacency in virtue, as that scheme, which supposes him, by a gracious communication with the mind, to engage the attention to virtue and goodness, to lay restraints on intemperate passions, and to divert from hurtful purposes; to assist the penitent in reforming vicious habits; to strengthen the resolutions of the good and virtuous; to render duty easy and delightful; to supply inward strength for extraordinary trials, and inward consolation in particular straits and troubles. And all this, he has given us reason to expect from him, when he promises to change and sanctify our hearts, to take away the hard and stony heart out of our flesh, and to give us hearts of flesh, susceptible of divine impressions; to draw us unto himself, to give us that repentance and faith, which is the operation of his spirit; to work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure; and to lead us in the way everlasting. And this may be done, without offering any violence to our rational nature, but by *suggesting* proper thoughts to the mind, by setting the motives and arguments of the gospel in a striking and convincing point of light, and with such a degree of evidence as is necessary to fix the attention and to counterbalance contrary prejudices and passions. And this we know to be analogous to the common course of things and the original constitution of God; that mankind should mutually offer arguments, suggest powerful and determining motives, inform, persuade and convince each other; and that such occurrences should frequently happen, as will engage our attention and constrain us to reflect, notwithstanding our reluctance and aversion to it. And this is done daily without offering

violence to our rational freedom by men : and surely it may also be done by the operation of God upon our minds. And this will form a particular providence of prodigious extent. For an influence that is entirely personal, and where the subject of it is an obscure character, may have a considerable share in forming the tempers, the manners, and states of others, may dilate and expand itself to great multitudes, and at last settle in grand events, that are of the utmost consequence to whole societies.—We may further observe,

4. *That the doctrine of divine providence does not supercede the use of means on our part.*

From what has been said, it appears, that men are free agents, the subjects of moral government. And while God can never be at an uncertainty with regard to the final issue of things, but overrules the actions of men, and by an amazing concurrence of various means and instruments brings about his own wise and gracious purposes ; he at the same time allows us to act agreeably to our rational natures and rank in the creation, and has made it our duty to make use of the various means put into our hands for accomplishing our designs. And it is in concurrence with our own endeavours, that the providence of God co-operates with us in producing the desired effect, which he rarely produces without them. It is as great presumption to pretend to trust divine providence without the use of means, as it is impiety to trust to the use of means without a dependence on divine providence.

5. *The providence of God is so exercised about the actions of free agents, as not to make him the author of sin.*

If it be asked how far it may be rationally supposed that the providence of God is concerned in our evil and sinful actions? To this it may be answered, that nothing can happen without his permission. For if he who is perfectly wise, and has all nature at his command, does not see fit to permit any designs of his creatures to be executed, he can easily prevent them. But this permission of events is not to be considered as the indolence and carelessness of one, who is unconcerned about the state of the universe, and the course of its affairs; but as his suffering things to proceed in such a particular channel because it is upon the whole wise and fit, and agreeing with the plan of his government. Nor does this make God the author of sin. For he is a being of the most untainted purity and holiness, and he cannot look upon sin with approbation and complacency. But men being free agents, their sin is to be imputed to themselves, who commit it freely, and not to God, who providentially permits it. Upon the whole, God made man innocent, and endowed him with reason, liberty and active powers: he abused his liberty, lost his innocence, and brought upon himself sin and misery. But God still rules in the world that he made, and maintains his dominion over it. He governs his creatures in a way suitable to his own perfections and their respective natures; he takes a particular notice of the actions and purposes of men, and overrules them for his own glory; he still preserves them as free agents, and continues to do every thing that is becoming his perfections to deliver

them from sin and misery, and to restore them to life and happiness.

6. *The present prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous are not inconsistent with the doctrine of a particular providence.*

All, that the assertors of a particular providence contend for, is, that if God does not think fit to prevent the calamities of the righteous, he will either support them under their troubles, deliver them out of them at a seasonable time, or make all things, at the last winding up of the drama, work together for good to them, who love him. This life would not be a state of probation and trial, if there were no troubles, no temptations to draw us aside from duty, but every advantage lay on the side of virtue. But still it cannot be denied, that the wicked often share in the richest bounties of providence, while his own children are in want and distress. And this at first sight appears a strange paradox; that if there is a wise and good God, who loves virtue and hates vice, and who governs the world with wisdom and goodness; he should nevertheless heap his favors upon his enemies, and treat his own children with so much seeming severity and neglect. But upon a more close examination of this matter, it does not appear to have so much weight in it, as we might at first imagine. For this is not the case universally. Some good men have a great share of external peace and pleasure, health and ease, honor and riches; while some wicked men are in the lowest and most wretched circumstances of life. But the foundation of the objection is built upon a false

principle; viz. that worldly prosperity is in itself a great blessing, and always to be desired, and that poverty and difficulties in this life are an indication of the divine displeasure and inconsistent with his love to his children. How many persons are born with an healthy constitution, to a plentiful fortune, and hereditary honours, who are thereby exposed to many and strong temptations, which prove too powerful for them to corrupt and debauch their minds; so that it had been an advantage to them never to have enjoyed such things, as laid them open to such temptations as ruined them at last. And how many, in the midst of riches, power and dignity, have by their sinful excesses, (which they could not otherwise be guilty of,) rendered themselves the most miserable of all men, insomuch that the poor healthy and peaceful peasant has been the object of their envy? So that in this view, the unequal distribution of external things is so far from being a proper objection against the providence of God, that we have reason to adore his wisdom and goodness, in thus delivering us from many temptations that would ruin our souls, and in thus convincing us of the emptiness of mere earthly enjoyments by conferring them so freely on the worst of men. Again, although good men may not some times possess so much of this world as the wicked, yet they have more satisfaction in what they possess. They have a truer enjoyment of their small pittance, than the wicked worldling has of his abundance. "Better is a little, which the righteous man hath, than the riches of many wicked."* If his enjoyments are plain, they are pure; if

*Ps. 37, 16.

few, they are sweet; they are not attended with a snare, followed with a sting, and loaded with a curse. If he has not a superfluity of earthly comforts, he has a good conscience and a contented mind, wisdom and religion for his guide and support, peace and serenity within, and a glorious prospect before him. And to crown all, he has the favour and protection of Almighty God, which secures to him that recompence of glory, which shall be revealed. And as to the afflictions of the righteous, they are designed by their heavenly father, to work for them the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to awaken their attention to the great concerns of their souls, when they grow remiss in duty; to reclaim their wanderings to mortify their pride, the natural growth of prosperity, to strengthen their graces; to train them up for more distinguished usefulness, and the sublimer duties of christianity. And at the same time that this severe discipline hardens our spirits, and teaches us firmness and fortitude of mind, it melts us into commiseration and tenderness for the distressed, and teaches us to sympathize with the afflicted. So that we have frequently reason to say with David—"It is good for me to be afflicted." And lastly, the objection against a particular providence taken from the present administration, entirely vanishes upon the consideration of a future state, and of that glory that shall be revealed, with which the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared. This was a thought that quieted the Psalmist's mind under his perplexity, when he considered the prosperity of the wicked. Were this the only state of our existence, there might be more force in the objection against a particular providence; but as this is

only a state of preparation for an eternal one, and as the sufferings of the righteous are a necessary discipline to train them up for virtue and happiness; that consideration removes the objection entirely. In the coming world, all the inequalities of the present administration shall be compleatly rectified; and all shall be treated, not according to their places and stations in this world, but according to their real character.

APPLICATION.

1. *From this discourse we are led to entertain the most august apprehensions of the Supreme Governor of the Universe.*

This spacious earth on which we live, is but a small province of God's universal empire, one little wheel in the vast machine. How astonishingly great then must that power be, which sets every wheel in motion, and how incomprehensible that wisdom which regulates the whole circumference of the creation! It is the almighty power of God, which wields the rolling worlds above, and continues them in their destined rounds. It is his wisdom which adjusts such an unknown variety of movements without the least confusion, through the whole creation. And it is his goodness which has enriched the universe with such a profusion of mercies, that has beautified it with the strictest order and harmony, and that has enobled it with inconceivable magnificence and grandeur. Yet this earth and these worlds above, far more than the eye or even the most lively imagination can reach, are before the supreme governor of all things, "as the small drop of the bucket, or the incon-

siderable dust of the balance." And what are we, that we should be the care of such a glorious Being; that he should extend his providential regards to us, "who are less than nothing and vanity in his presence?" But yet such is the condescension of the incomprehensible Jehovah, that no person is so little or insignificant, as to be disregarded or overlooked amongst all the works of creation and providence. We have been preserved by him "in our going out and coming in," comforted in our troubles, assisted in our difficulties, directed in our perplexities, saved from innumerable dangers on every hand, and followed with unremitting instances of love and mercy. O! how should this constrain us to cherish in our minds, the most exalted apprehensions of all his adorable perfections, and the warmest sentiments of devotion and gratitude? Have we been the care of a kind and indulgent providence? and shall we not devote ourselves to *his* service, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being?"

2. *Let the superintending Providence of God support us under the wars and commotions that are in the world.*

The idea of a fatherless world, without any unerring council to direct in the government of the universe, but where all things were left to the guidance of blind chance or necessity, must fill a thinking mind with horror and distraction. But it is matter of consolation and joy to us, that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, that his counsel standeth forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations;" that amidst all the confusion and madness of the world, men cannot faster perplex

and embroil the world, than he can bring order out of confusion; and that the wicked are under the sacred council of his providence, and that he can make their evil designs the accidental occasion of good, and serve his gracious purposes in opposition to theirs.

3. *Does God exercise a particular Providence over the Righteous, so that the very hairs of their head are numbered? Let us endeavour to live so as not to forfeit his protection.*

Let us ever consider, how vain are all schemes of happiness, out of which *he* is left, who alone is the fountain of all good, who can dash the joys of prosperity with such bitter ingredients, as will render them no joys at all, and who can qualify the bitterness of poverty and trouble with such infusions of gladness and consolation, as will render them easy and tolerable. While we enjoy the light of his countenance, we need not be dejected at the frowns of the whole world. For if that God be for us, who controuls universal nature by his sovereign will, it is but of little consequence, who be against us. Our communication and intercourse with our dearest relatives are often interrupted; but our intercourse with that glorious being, that eternal father and friend, who takes care of us, can never be interrupted but by our vices. “He is found of them that seek him;” and he never forsakes us, until we forsake him and his service. Let us then be careful to walk in his ways to seek his favor and assistance, to comply with his will in all things and to cultivate every branch of real and substantial goodness and virtue. Then may we

safely confide in his wise and gracious providence, and trust that he will make all external things work together for our good, and that he will conduct us with safety through all the troubles and perplexities of life, and bring us at last to dwell with him in unfading glory and blessedness.

SERMON II.

A PARTICULAR DIVINE PROVIDENCE EX- PLAINED AND PROVED.

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MAT. X. 29, 30, 31.

Are not two Sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many Sparrows.

IN the context our saviour encourages his disciples to preach the gospel publicly, notwithstanding the opposition and persecution to which it would expose them. And for this purpose he assures them, that they are the care of a kind and indulgent providence, which is interested in their minutest concerns. For their heavenly father, who takes care of the sparrows, which are of so little value that two of them are sold for a farthing, numbers the very hairs of their head, and will much more preserve them who are of more value than many sparrows, and who are engaged in his immediate service. The doctrine of a general and particular providence, which is evidently contained in these words of our saviour, has been the subject of a preceding discourse, in which we endeavoured to state and explain it, and to remove some objections that have been made against it. For this purpose we observed, that God

usually effects his gracious purposes in the moral government of the world, without disturbing the settled order of nature. So that we are not to expect, that he will reverse the original laws which he has established in the world, when he interposes in favour of any particular person; as this would be inconsistent with the good of the whole.

Again, we observed that nothing was casual or accidental with respect to God; but that as he created all things, he must be perfectly acquainted with their natures, their powers, and with all the effects that could be produced in his creation; and that what was fortuitous or accidental with regard to us, was the effect of design and contrivance with respect to God. We farther took notice, that God governed the world in perfect consistence with the liberty of free agents; that he knew how far impressions might be made upon their minds, without offering any violence to their rational freedom, by proposing the various motives and arguments that are adapted to work upon the human understanding, in a striking and convincing point of light; that to suggest such arguments in favour of virtue and piety, was agreeable to his character as the father and friend of mankind, and the lover of virtue; and was, what he has given us ground to expect from him, when he promises to work in us, to will and to do, and to change and renew our hearts; and was agreeable to his own constitution, in which he originally provided, that we should mutually inform, persuade, and convince each other, without any violence done to our rational freedom. Again we observed, that the doctrine of a di-

vine providence was not so to be understood, as to supersede the use of means on our part. For while God effected his own purposes, he has made it our duty to use the means which he has appointed for the execution of any design, and has given us encouragement to expect his assistance in concurrence with our own endeavours. Another difficulty, which we took notice of on this subject, was, how far it was rational to suppose that the providence of God was concerned about the evil actions of free agents? To which we answered, that the least we can suppose, was that he permits them, not through carelessness or indifference, but because it was wise and fit to do so, and agreeable to the design and scheme of his moral government: But that he was not therefore the author of sin, which is inconsistent with the rectitude of his nature; but that we being free agents, and left to act according to our own natures, were chargeable with the sins which we voluntarily commit. And lastly, we observed that the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous in this life, were not a sufficient objection to the reality or equity of a particular providence. Because that prosperity in this life was not always a blessing to be desired, that the afflictions of the righteous were not an indication of the divine disregard, but were necessary to train them up for virtue and happiness; and because there will be a future state, in which all the seeming inequalities of the divine administration shall be perfectly rectified, and every one shall be treated according to his real character.

We dwelt more fully upon these particulars in a former discourse, when we proposed,

I. To make some observations necessary to the right stating and explaining the doctrine of a general and particular providence.

II. To prove the doctrine contained in our text.

III. To consider the principal acts and properties of divine providence.

In that discourse, I considered the subject in general, and attended to the objections which metaphysical and ignorant geniusses have raised against this comfortable doctrine; rather taking it for granted, that such a doctrine was asserted in the sacred scriptures.

I am now to address myself to the direct proof of the doctrine, that there is both a general and particular providence exercised about the universe and particularly about every individual of the human race; not excepting their minutest and most trivial concerns. Hence I have chosen the expression of our Saviour, that the very hairs of our head are numbered and that not one of them falls to the ground, without the notice of our father.

II. To prove the doctrine contained in our text.

1. *If there is a God; the world is governed by his providence.*

And that there is a God, is known and proclaimed by every order and rank of rational beings in the creation. Angels see and enjoy him, " devils believe and tremble "

at his power, and men confess and adore him. We may be as sure of the existence of a God, as of our own. For nothing could ever have existed if there be not some necessarily existent being, from whom all others have derived their beings. Nothing could not make itself. And if there be a God, he must be possessed of all possible perfection; because all other perfections flow from him as their origin and fountain. Therefore he is able to preserve, and govern the world, which his almighty power has formed. And if he is able to govern the world, there is no imaginable reason to conclude that he does not do it. To say that he cannot, is a reflexion on his power and wisdom. For can any thing necessary for the government of the world lie beyond the reach of that wisdom, which contrived or of that power, which executed the plan of the creation. To say that although he is able, yet he will not take care of the beings that he made, is a reflexion on his unbounded goodness. It is very absurd to imagine, that when he has formed a beautiful and orderly world, he should leave it to shift for itself, and for want of his wise and powerful superintendency to run into disorder and confusion. When we see so many instances of care and tenderness among the creatures of his hands, who can imagine that the most perfect of all beings should be defective in tenderness and benevolence towards his offspring? Do not brutes defend and cherish their young? Does the parent animal deny the shelter of her wing to her defenceless brood? Does the mother forget her sucking child, or the father neglect its riper years? And is there not order, œconomy, and propriety of conduct observed through the whole scale of created be-

ing? And is it to be supposed, that God, the Maker and Lord of all, can fall short of any of his creatures in any thing that is excellent and lovely? Can that goodness which is so universal and diffusive, that there is no nation or land, nay, not a single living being, but largely shares his bounty, be consistent with his exercising no care over his creatures? Can the universal parent of all, whose affection and tenderness infinitely transcends the united affections of all earthly parents, be careless of his children? No: his goodness so far exceeds that of his creatures, that our Saviour says, "there is none good, but one, that is God." To say that the constant attention, necessary to the government of the universe, would disturb the tranquility of the divine mind is an objection, founded on low and unworthy apprehensions of God. He is an infinite spirit, not subject to lassitude or distraction. He can as easily do every thing possible, as any thing. And thus we must always think of that glorious being; before whose eye, the darkest recess of nature lies open and unveiled, and who encircles the universe in his arms. And it is also an unbecoming conception of his adorable perfections, to think that it is unworthy of his dignity and glory to regard minute occurrences, and things, that appear little in our esteem. For how could an infinitely perfect being act worthy of the character, if he did not know or care what became of the millions of creatures, that he has made, or the numberless events, that befall them? Can there be an employment more noble, more suitable to the nature of the most perfect being than the government of his own world; where there is so wide a theatre for wise contrivance and beneficent action? It is so

far from obscuring and diminishing, that it greatly exalts, the glory of his divine perfections. Nay, the relation of a creator and creature requires, that what he thought proper to make, he should also think it became him to govern. Is it beneath the wisdom and dignity of the most august earthly monarch, to be concerned for the meanest, as well as the greatest of his subjects? Nay, is it not a perfection, and an essential maxim of policy in every wise constitution? And can the uncreated fountain of all perfection and goodness be outdone by any of his creatures, in what is excellent and praiseworthy? Besides who can tell of what importance in the scheme of God's universal government, those occurrences may be, which we call trivial and of little consequence? In the natural world, were we left to the direction of unintelligent chance, or without a wise director at the helm, in smaller matters, how miserable would our situation be? What disastrous accidents arise from small beginnings? A single breath of pestilential vapor might prove the ruin of thousands, and the bursting of a single artery, death. And in the moral world, the particular interposition of providence with regard to a single person may have a great share in fixing the character, and state of many of his fellow-creatures. The forming the tempers and characters of thousands, their success, prosperity and honor may very much depend upon the resolutions and course of action, which a single man pursues. The influencing and directing of a single person, who may be of no considerable character, may not only extend to multitudes of individuals, but also, after many intermediate events impossible to be traced, may at last settle in grand

events, that are of the utmost consequence to whole societies. And impressions made upon different minds at the same juncture, and possibly by some trivial occurrence, may produce effects neither intended nor foreseen by any of the immediate agents, but effects, that are critical and in the utmost degree momentous and useful. And yet the whole might have been rendered abortive, if the interposition had failed in any particular instance. A proper and seasonable address to the minds of princes or of such as have the conduct of public affairs, may decide the fate of nations, and establish liberty or slavery. Such an interposition may promote the practice of public virtue and secure a lasting tranquility and peace; whereas the want of it might introduce the desolations and horrors of war, which might be succeeded by a gradual declension, and at last by the utter extirpation of the most flourishing states and empires. A single man may be raised from the lowest obscurity and by inconsiderable occurrences at last gain such an extensive influence as to make a surprising change in the face of public affairs. So that we ought to be perfectly acquainted with all the connections and mutual dependencies of things through the unbounded universe, and all the possible methods by which grand events of the utmost consequence may be brought about, before we take upon us to deny a particular providence, which may have such a prodigious extent. For every wise end, that is best promoted by such a particular providence, is a reason why it should take place; since, if God governs the moral world at all, he must govern it in the most perfect manner. So that the doctrine both of a general and of a particular providence, depends

upon the perfections of God; and the contrary supposition would be inconsistent with any worthy and becoming apprehensions that we could form of him. What! is God omnipotent, and yet the world independent of his power? All-wise, and yet the whole creation in perpetual danger of running into confusion and disorder? Most just and righteous, and yet unconcerned for the welfare of any individual of his creatures? Omnipresent, and yet regardless of transactions and events, that fall under his immediate inspection? The fountain of love and mercy, and yet without compassion and a particular regard to the persons that love and adore him? All this can never be imputed to a being of matchless perfection. Nay the very supposition implies a contradiction: for how could he be the wisest and best of beings, and yet be exceeded in benevolence and goodness by his own creatures?

2. The doctrine of a general and particular Providence is farther confirmed by the order and harmony of the world.

Can we view the magnificent structure of the universe, not only created in number, weight and measure, but also preserved and supported in the same harmony and proportion for almost six thousand years, without acknowledging a superintending providence? It is as absurd to ascribe the continued preservation of that order and subserviency of one part of the creation to another, to an unintelligent, unmeaning chance or blind necessity; as it is to suppose, that some happy concourse of jumbled atoms might at first have produced that infinite variety, that awful grandeur, that mathematical ex-

actness, that surprising beauty and harmony, which strikes the attentive observer of the works of God. Is it only accidental, that the planetary worlds should so long travel their mazy rounds through the trackless sky, and perform their stated revolutions with mathematical exactness; that we have the constant succession of day and night, of summer and winter, of seed time and harvest, of heat and cold? It is God alone, "that binds up the sweet influences of Pleiades, and looses the bands of Orion, that brings forth Mazaroth in his season, and guides Arcturus with his sons. He giveth the former and the latter rain, and stayeth the bottles of heaven, until the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together." It is by his secret direction and energy, that the vegetable tribes put forth their opening leaves and ripen into maturity; and it is by his fatherly care that the animal creation, with all the variety of their different species, are preserved. "For the beasts of the forest are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." What is it but his liberality that supplies them with food, that directs them where to find sustenance proper to their various natures? What is it but his secret operation, that teaches them how to construct their habitations, how to nourish their helpless young, and to resign their care when the grown offspring can provide for themselves? And shall the parent of universal nature govern the inanimate and take care of the animal creation, and yet neglect one of the human race? And does not this prove a particular as well as a general providence? This is the very argument of our Saviour in the text. He, whose overflowing bounty daily supplies the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, with

whatever is suitable to their nature, will surely provide for man, the head and lord of the visible creation.

3. *If there is a general Providence, there must also be a particular one.*

All the arguments that prove, that God governs the world in general, in a manner which suits best with reason, prove also, that he takes care of particular cases in the same manner. For God can no more act contrary to reason in any particular case, than he can do so in general. The time, the manner, and the condition of every man must be determined by that God, on whom every man's existence depends, which cannot be done without descending to particulars. Besides, generals are nothing but a collection of particulars, the sum total of individuals; and consequently, as generals include particulars, a general must imply a particular providence. If the whole of worldly affairs be the universal chain of providence, then each man's private concerns are a link of that chain, that is supported by the hand of God. The supreme law, by which the universe is governed, must be the good of the whole, which cannot be promoted but by a constant regard to all the particular parts that compose the whole. So that if there be a general, there must of necessity also be a particular providence.

4. *The predictions of future events, with their punctual accomplishment, prove both a general and particular Providence.*

If God did not hold the reins of government, and

overrule even the minutest occurrences by an almighty hand, a thousand incidents might intervene, which would render the accomplishment of all prophecies precarious and uncertain. For what else but a particular providence could so manage the actions of free agents, could so order a continued series of events for hundreds of years, or could make use of such a chain of intermediate causes and effects, as to secure a certainty of any foretold event? If therefore, predictions of future events are verified by their punctual accomplishment, as is evident from the whole word of God, there must be a particular providence that takes notice of, and overrules every transaction in the creation. Was there time or necessity for it,

5. *We might appeal to matter of fact and universal experience for the proof of a general and particular Providence.*

What is the language of all those occurrences, which have happened contrary to the established laws of nature, and beyond the power of created beings to perform? The sun's standing still, and returning back ten degrees on the dial; the preservation of Daniel in the lion's den, and of the three children in the fiery furnace; the raising persons from the dead, and such like effects of an almighty power, all must be ascribed to an overruling providence. What else could restrain the enemies of Israel from making a descent upon a naked and defenceless country, when their frontiers were left unguarded, by their males going three times every year to Jerusalem? Who could do this, but that God, who in

the language of scripture, “ boweth the hearts of a whole nation, as the heart of one man?” And indeed there are thousands, who have felt a sudden check or restraint upon them, when they were just on the point of perpetrating a bad action. Trembling and fear has come upon *them*, that were strangers to fear, and an unusual damp has overcast the soul, that was inured to hardy attempts. And how often has a good thought, we know not how, been suggested to the mind, without any antecedent train of ideas? And what is this but a beam of light darting in upon our minds from the father of lights? We proceed,

III. To consider the principal acts and properties of divine providence.

1. *The providence of God is exercised in the preservation of all things, and in governing them according to their natures.*

If God did not *preserve* the whole frame of nature, it would soon run into confusion, and be reduced into that state in which it was before “ the spirit of God moved upon the waters.” If this was not the case, the world might be said to exist independent on God, which is as absurd and contrary both to reason and scripture, as to say, that it might have produced itself at first from nothing. To this we must ascribe our continued existence: for he has preserved us from innumerable dangers, which we could neither foresee nor ward off.—“ Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,” and held us up from the womb, and fed us all our life long. “ He is

the preserver of man and beast;" so that we are not the sole objects of his providential care. The common parent of the universe provides for the subsistence of his large and numerous family. "He heareth the young lions roaring for their prey, and the young ravens when they cry." Nay, "he openeth his liberal hand, and satisfies the desires of every living thing; for they all wait upon him, that he might give them their food in due season."

But the providence of God is not only concerned in preserving, but also in *governing* all things, according to their various natures, directing them to their proper ends, and making them subservient to the purposes of his wisdom. The inanimate creation move and act according to established laws wrought in their very frame. The animal tribes are governed by instinct and appetite, which lead them effectually to answer the end of their creation. But man, who is a free, active, and rational creature, is addressed by arguments and motives, adapted to convince his judgment, to engage his affections, and to influence his conduct, without offering any violence to our rational natures, or destroying our liberty; as we endeavoured to prove in a former discourse.—
"But the most high, not only rules among the inhabitants of the earth, but also over the armies of Heaven," and all the various ranks of other rational beings through the boundless universe. "The angels that kept not their first habitation," are under his absolute controul, "and are reserved by his sovereign power in chains of darkness, unto the judgment of the great day;" and the good angels, that constantly behold the face of their heavenly father with ineffable delight, are also the sub-

jects of his government, and are “sent forth as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.” They constantly perform the will of our heavenly father, are commissioned to proclaim the good will of God, and “encamp round them that fear him” to preserve them from danger, “and to bear them up, lest at any time they dash their feet against a stone.” How many good offices they perform for us, we cannot tell; but we are sure that they wait upon our departing spirits to convey them in safety to Abraham’s bosom, and shall at last gather the elect from the four winds of the earth. In a word, there is not a single being through the whole creation, but what owes its continued preservation to his constant care, and is governed and conducted by his almighty arm.

2. *We proposed also to mention some of the principal properties of divine providence.*

These are agreeable to the essential attributes of his nature; and from what has been already said, we are led to conceive of it, as sovereign and incontroulable,—wise and regular,—holy and just.

The governor of the world is “the Lord God *omnipotent*.”* Power belongs to him in such an absolute manner, that none can resist his will.† Arrest the sun in his race; turn the planets out of their orbits; and bid the raging sea subside into a calm; all this is not as impossible, as to obstruct the course, or to frustrate

*Rev. 19, 6.

†Rom. 9, 19.

the scheme of the divine providence. Who can disannul his judgment; who has an arm like God, or can thunder with a voice like him? "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty; he uttereth his voice and the earth melteth, the pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof."* But the sovereignty of God's providence is not the unmeaning fatality of the Pagan or Stoic, but is founded on this, that his designs are formed upon the most accurate knowledge of the nature and capacities of all his creatures. So that his government does not destroy liberty and free-agency, but proceeds according to his own wise establishment, which no created power can controul or confound. Which leads me to add, that

The divine providence is most *wise and regular*. He is "a rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment."† All his administrations are as wise and regular, as if they had been the effect of the most mature deliberation. For the intuitive knowledge of the all-wise God, who is intimately acquainted with all the secrets of nature, and at one view comprehends the qualities and powers of the whole creation, infinitely more effectually secures wisdom and regularity in all his administrations, than the closest debate and consideration of his wisest creatures can in the plainest instance. And the scheme of divine providence is as regularly conducted as it is wisely contrived. Ezekiel's wheels, full of eyes, are an emblem of divine providence, which looks every way and is never liable to mistake or sur-

*Job, 26, 11.

†Deut. 32, 4.

prize. Yet to us, who know but in part, and who view the wheels within the wheels, without being able to comprehend the design of the whole or to understand the necessary connection and dependence of one part upon another, the ways of providence must appear dark and mysterious. But we are sure from the perfections of God, that he is carrying on some wise and regular design through the whole, worthy of himself.

Again, the providence of God is most *holy and just*. His judgments indeed are often inscrutable; his way is frequently in the sea, so that his footsteps are not to be traced by the most piercing eye, nor his designs to be fathomed by the most penetrating mind. Yet certain it is, that "God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Though sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed; though the wicked are sometimes cloathed in purple, while the righteous mourn; though ambition sometimes treads down the humble, and avarice grinds the poor; though cruelty sometimes oppresses the innocent, and revenge riots in blood; yet in the day of final retribution, it will be found, that "the judge of all the earth hath done right," and "that the eyes of the Lord hath run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them, whose heart is perfect towards him."

APPLICATION.

1. *Is there then not only a general, but also a particular Providence exercised over the world? How reasonable and becoming is prayer to the Governor of the universe?*

Whatever conviction we might have of the glory and

perfections of God, yet we could have no sufficient encouragement to prayer, without a belief of his providence. For to what purpose should we ask the blessing and assistance of a being, however great and powerful, if he did not concern himself with the affairs of our world? But on the other hand, if a being of the most perfect wisdom, power, and goodness, the maker and Lord of heaven and earth, be also the constant director, and never-failing guardian of every creature he has formed, to whom should they fly for relief in seasons of distress, but to this almighty friend? Prayer is a duty of natural as well as of revealed religion, and the means that God has appointed for deriving from him the various blessings that we need. It never was designed to inform God of what he did not know before, or to prevail with him to alter his immutable determinations. "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning; and he is of one mind, and who can turn him?"* But duty is ours, and while we are found in the way of God's appointment, we have reason to expect the divine concurrence and assistance. So that the doctrine of a divine providence enforces our obligations to prayer, by discovering the use and propriety of it. It is a proper expression of our dependence and gratitude, it promotes the noblest sentiments and dispositions, raises our thoughts and affections to heaven, unites our spirits to God, is the evident means of peace and happiness to our souls, and has been the perpetual delight and practice of every pious person in all ages of the world, and what no good man dares or desires to restrain.

*Job, 23, 13.

2. *The doctrine of divine providence rebukes the anxious solicitude of good men about future events, and lays a firm foundation for trust and confidence in God.*

That good men, who believe that God governs the world, that all things are under his immediate eye, and that he takes care of his children, and will do what is best for them, should nevertheless be perplexed with anxious fears about future events, is indeed unworthy their character, a sinful distrust of divine providence, and dishonorable to God and their profession of christianity. For what more solid considerations can be urged, to fortify and confirm the mind under the apprehension of approaching evil, than this, that in all the mazes and changes of life, they are under a divine direction, that the most gloomy and threatening dispensations are wisely ordered to promote their best interests upon the whole; “and that all things shall work together for their good?” Let us then leave the government of the world to him, who alone is equal to the mighty work, and cast the care of our souls and our bodies on him, who careth for us.

3. *Let us be exhorted to review with gratitude the particular instances of the divine favor in the dispensations of his providence towards us.*

Let us consider the several stages of our life, and the particular mercies we have received in each. Who, my friends, nursed our helpless infancy, directed our giddy youth, or supports the feeble age? who, but that God, who gave us being, and who is willing to be our guide till death? Let us recollect the mercies that have

crowned our endeavors to do good, that have been conferred in answer to our prayers, either for the removal of some sore affliction, or for the obtaining some wished for blessing. Let us call to mind the extraordinary occurrences that we have met with, on which our greatest comfort and usefulness possibly depends. Let us review the supports and consolations we have received under pressing difficulties, and the circumstances of alleviation that have attended our sorrows. Let us also consider how rich, how free, how suitable, how seasonable the mercies of our prosperity have been; and let us not despise our present blessings, because they are common or long enjoyed. And above all, let us not forget our spiritual mercies; the kind and gracious things that God has done for our souls. Let us review, with devout gratitude and high delight, the means, the time, the instruments, or the happy occasions, that first awakened us into consideration, and that led us to God. In a word, let us make wise reflections on these things, attend to the voice of God in all his providential dispensations, submit to his will in all things, and aspire after that state of light and perfection, where the mysteries of providence shall never more perplex us.

4. And let us ever remember, that "Jesus Christ is exalted to be head over all things for the church." The administration of the kingdoms of nature and of grace is committed into his hands as a reward of his voluntary sufferings.

"All power is given him in heaven and in earth, and he rules with universal dominion over all his creatures." Angels, men and devils are under his absolute

controul. Let us then submit to him as our Lord and governor, and trust in his almighty protection. He that triumphed over all his enemies, when he hung upon the accursed tree, cannot want power to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God through him; and he that died to save us from ruin, cannot want a disposition to communicate to his children those gifts, which he received a power to bestow upon his triumphant ascension to heaven. Let us then constantly depend on his prevalent intercession for every necessary blessing, and guard against every thing that might provoke him to withdraw his protection. Let us be persuaded to adhere to his cause and interest in every circumstance of life, and approve ourselves as his faithful servants until death. For happy are those who are the care of this almighty and compassionate Saviour. And let those, who will not have him to reign over them, who persist in their rebellion against him, who neglect his wise and good commands and who are at no pains to bring down every high thought that exalteth itself against the dominion of Christ, remember their perilous situation and their dreadful doom, when this universal king shall descend in clouded majesty, "to take vengeance on all them that know not God and obey not the gospel of his Son." And let us all bow to his supreme authority and submit to the sceptre of his grace, complying with the equitable terms of the gospel covenant, imitating his exemplary conduct, depending upon his grace and protection, and paying an unreserved subjection and universal regard to all his injunctions. Thus we may depend upon his protection through all the storms of life, until we are brought to reign with him in glory.

SERMON III.

KNOWING THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS.



1. CHRON. XXVIII, 9.

And thou Solomon, my 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 understandeth 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.

THE works of creation, and especially the sacred oracles of truth, represent the adorable God to us, as a being infinitely perfect and all-sufficient, and the unwasting source of life and happiness. And he has assured us, that an interest in his favour, through the merits of the blessed Redeemer, is the only safe foundation, on which we may build our hopes of happiness both here and hereafter. And further to encourage us in the quest of that happiness, for which we so ardently thirst, he has not only directed us how we shall seek his favor, but also excited us by many powerful arguments, addressed to the various springs of human action. When David, on his approaching dissolution, was about to lay down the burden of life and government, he addressed his son in the emphatical words which we have read. He had done much for the honor of God and the benefit of his peo-

ple, in the active part of his life: and amidst the distractions of government, the cares of a crown, and the grandeur of a court, he maintained such a sublime spirit of piety and devout intercourse with God continually, as is scarcely to be found under all the advantages of a private life. This is evident from those exalted strains of devotion, which are transmitted to us in the book of the Psalms, for the comfort and instruction of every christian. This he maintained till the last, and resolved to close his life with that signal act of piety, the building an house to the Lord, which the immense wealth he had acquired, and the tranquility he then enjoyed, gave him a favourable opportunity of accomplishing. And accordingly, he prepared materials for the work in great abundance: but the Lord assured him, that although he approved of his pious resolution, yet the honor of building the temple should be reserved for his son; because he was a man of war, and had shed blood. However, his heart was so much set upon the work, that he assembled the princes of Israel, and addressed them with the greatest condescension and affection on the important affairs of religion and government; and then in the hearing of the multitude, he turned to his son, and delivered his last solemn charge to him in the words of the text. "And thou Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind;" and then he enforces the solemn exhortation with the following arguments: "For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth 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."

Now, although this judicious and weighty advice was given to Solomon, yet, “because whatsoever was written afore time, was written for our instruction,” it may with equal propriety be addressed to every one of us in this assembly. We shall therefore, in improving this portion of sacred writ for our advantage, endeavour, through divine assistance, to shew,

I. What we are to understand by knowing the Lord.

II. What is implied in serving the Lord.

III. In what manner we shall serve him.

IV. The force of the arguments mentioned in the text, to excite us to comply with the advice to know and serve the Lord.

I. What is implied in knowing the Lord.

1. *To know God implies in it a firm and unshaken belief of his existence.*

This lies at the foundation of all religion: “for whosoever comes unto him must believe, *that he is;*” that there is such a glorious being as God in the universe, who is the original cause of every other being; and is therefore uncreated, eternal and independent. Without the supposition of such a being, there never could have been any other existence; unless it could be said, that something could make itself, or act before it had any existence, or was in a capacity of acting. But this is such

a glaring absurdity to reason and common sense, that it cannot be admitted; and therefore, there must be some being who is the original cause of all others, and must of consequence be eternal and independent, as he could not make himself. The whole creation around us teach us this fundamental point; and a divine revelation supposes and confirms the belief of it. As the apostle justly reasons,* “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.” Would we then know God, we must have our minds deeply impressed with a sense of this fundamental article, that there is an original cause of all things, who has made, and still superintends the affairs of the universe. And we must not have only a bare speculative belief of this important and essential truth, but also such a firm and steady persuasion of it, as shall powerfully affect our hearts and lead us to such practical regards to him, as the relation in which we stand to him requires. This brings me to add, that,

2. *To know God implies in it, that we endeavour to form just and becoming apprehensions of his adorable perfections.*

And in order to this, we must be careful, that we do not think of him in a manner unworthy of him, or injurious to his perfections; and should diligently attend to the discoveries he has made of himself, in creation, providence, and the revelation of his will. It is but too

* Rom. 1, 20.

common with christians, who, notwithstanding acknowledge, that God is possessed of all possible perfection, to represent him in such a light, and to speak of him in such a manner as is ^{also} honorable to his nature, and inconsistent with his perfections. But to avoid this, we ought always to remember, that whatsoever argues imperfection in man, should never in the most distant resemblance, be ascribed to the ever blessed God. For instance, a fondness for show or external pomp and grandeur, is a weakness in man, which we should never ascribe to God, by imagining that he is more acceptably worshipped in stately temples and magnificent edifices, than in any other place; or with costly rites and ceremonies, or pompous forms, than in any other manner. As if the supreme maker of heaven and earth, and only proprietor of the universe, delighted in a beautiful and elegant structure, and was therefore best pleased with the worship performed there, when he has assured us, that he is acceptably worshipped only in spirit and truth, and that his proper temple is an humble heart. Again, cruelty, rigor, and injustice, are criminal and detestable qualities in men; and therefore we cannot, without trembling, hear others attribute to the best of beings, any thing that has the least appearance of that which is so contrary to his nature; especially when we consider in how many amazing instances he has magnified his amiable attributes of benignity, love and mercy. Those, who murmur and repine, when they are involved in trouble and calamity of any kind, or are discontented with the condition, in which his providence has placed them, should seriously consider, whether they are not forming unworthy conceptions of God, and representing him as

if he had cast off all paternal affection for them. And thus also, do those form injurious and dishonorable apprehensions of God, who secretly complain of the rigor and severity of his holy and good law, or imagine that he has laid them under unnecessary restraints. And on the other hand, we must not dare to imagine, that the righteous judge of all the earth, is so unobservant and regardless of the affronts and dishonors that are done to his name by his creatures, that he will always bear with their profaneness and provocations. His mercy and patience are indeed amazingly great, and infinitely beyond any thing we can see in man; yet they are always exercised in conjunction with the honor of his wisdom and the rectitude of his government. And therefore, however sinners may deceive themselves, and take encouragement to proceed or to continue in sin, from the unbounded compassion and mercy of God: yet they may certainly expect a punishment adequate to their offences, if they do not repent and amend their ways. Therefore, if we would know God, all such injurious apprehensions of him ought particularly to be avoided.

But this is not all; we should ever maintain on our minds such honorable and exalted sentiments of him, as should naturally arise from a steady attention to the discoveries he has made of himself in creation, and providence, and in the revelation of his will. A diligent and attentive survey of the wonderful works of God, tends to lead our minds to the great uncreated original of all, and to fill us with admiring and adoring thoughts of his unlimited power, his incomprehensible wisdom, and unbounded goodness. This brought the enraptured

Psalmist (VIII, 1.) to cry out, “ O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens.”

Again, the conduct of divine providence is another open volume in which we may read much of the adorable attributes of God. He often discovers himself, not only in his severer dispensations, and in the judgments which he executes, but also in the mercies and blessings which he dispenses with a liberal hand among his creatures. And did we carefully observe the nature, importance, and seasonableness of these, together with the manner in which they are conveyed to us, we should often discover very plain and affecting marks of a divine hand, to excite, assist, and direct our devotion. But the most clear and comprehensive method, in which God has condescended to discover his adorable perfections to us, is the revelation of his will, and particularly of the gospel. There they are displayed in the most perfect harmony; there they shine with the fairest and most attractive lustre. This is the glorious scheme in which the demands of unbounded mercy and goodness are satisfied, and perfectly reconciled with his unchangeable veracity and the honor of his government. Here “ mercy and truth are met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”* Therefore, in seeking the knowledge of God from his word, and in forming honorable conceptions of him, we should consider the representation of his perfections made to us in the blessed redeemer, “ who is the brightness of the father’s glory

and the express image of his person." And we should diligently compare the several representations he there makes of himself, together, that we may see the united glory of his perfections, their entire harmony and consistency, and the additional lustre reflected upon each other; and that we may not magnify one attribute at the expence of another, and thus form unworthy and injurious conceptions of God,

"Undeified by our opprobrious praise." YOUNG.

3. *To know God, further implies in it, that we frequently meditate on his adorable perfections, until our hearts are deeply impressed thereby.*

How ever just and honorable our sentiments of God are, yet if we do not frequently meditate on his adorable perfections, until our hearts and consciences come under the influence of them, we cannot be said to know God in the sense of our text. The great design of knowledge is not barely to enlarge the understanding and enlighten the mind, but also to direct the practice and to mend the heart. And any other knowledge of God, that does not produce those correspondent practical regards, which are due to him, and that does not excite us to glorify him as God, can answer no valuable end. Would we therefore study to know the Lord, in the sense of our text, we must often contemplate his adorable perfections, until our hearts are filled with suitable sentiments of love, gratitude, veneration, confidence, humility and the like. We should, for instance, often contemplate his *almighty power*. With God nothing is impossible, but what includes a contradiction

in itself, or would shew him to be weak and imperfect to accomplish it. I know, (says Job, 42, 2,) that thou canst do every thing. He has spoken every thing into existence, and he upholds and governs universal nature by the same almighty word of his power. And can any thing be too hard for him, who has given and still continues to give such amazing discoveries of his power? Do we then believe that God is a being of almighty power and incomprehensible majesty? With what humble reverence should we always adore him? O! who would not fear that tremendous arm, that supports the stupendous fabric of the universe, that is able to protect his friends and servants in the most threatening dangers, and that can crush his enemies in an instant to the lowest hell. Now, if this sentiment of the Deity does not inspire us with an habitual reverence of him, it has not its proper effect, and we may be justly said not to know him, or to be still ignorant of that attribute of almighty power.—Again, we should consider God as a being of the most *perfect purity and untainted holiness*, infinitely removed from all possibility of moral defect and “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity but with the greatest abhorrence.” And his holiness and power are frequently mentioned together in scripture, to teach us that omnipotence can never be exerted in any way unbecoming the moral rectitude of his nature. The angels of God are represented as crying out with the profoundest reverence before his throne, “holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.”* And we should dwell on the solemn thought until we are ex-

*Rev. 4, 8.

cited to aspire after a greater conformity to him in the temper of our minds, and until we are humbled in the dust, that we are no more like him. Holiness must transform us into the divine likeness, before we can be happy in his everlasting love. But O! how defective are we in that very thing, which constitutes the perfection and happiness of our natures! This should lead our thoughts to the gracious discoveries of the gospel, and the method which God has proposed to recover degenerate creatures to holiness and happiness, by the mediation of his son and the grace of his holy spirit. Thus we should think of the holiness of God, if we desire to know him as he is.—Again, we should consider him as a being of the most unerring and *unsearchable wisdom*, who discerns and uses the best means to accomplish the best ends. He is the only wise God, and all the operations of his providence and grace are conducted with the same exquisite skill and unsearchable wisdom, which was at first manifested in the formation of all things. And “the wisdom of the world,” who are so miserably mistaken in the great end they should pursue, and in the means they use for the accomplishment of it, “is foolishness with God.” Would we then know God; the contemplation of his wisdom should lead us to depend upon him for that wisdom which we need, and which he giveth liberally to those that ask it. For he that truly knows the Lord, will not lean or trust to his own understanding, but will trust in the Lord, in whose wisdom he sees his own folly, and the folly of all the ways and wisdom of wordly-minded men.—Again, we should often consider God as a being of *inviolable truth and fidelity*, who will certainly fulfil all the gra-

scious and refreshing promises he has made to his servants, and will execute all the dreadful threatenings he has denounced against his incorrigible enemies. He will never suffer his faithfulness to fail; for "he is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." And if we would truly know God to any valuable purpose, we should dwell on this thought, until we were established in a firm and unshaken belief of whatsoever he has promised or threatened; notwithstanding the difficulties that some of his providential dealings, which the weakness of our understandings prevent our comprehending, may throw in the way of such a belief. For every man, whose life and character is a contradiction to his faith, does in effect make God a liar; and whatever he may profess to believe, yet his conduct evidently shews that he does not in reality believe, that God will ever accomplish what he has promised or threatened. And on the other hand, if we are firmly persuaded that God is most faithful and true, we shall, in virtue of that faith, receive all the sacred declarations of his word, and readily submit our practice to them.—Again, would we rightly know the Lord, we should often meditate upon his *impartial justice*, which disposes him "to render to every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings," and which will at length take place of his patience and forbearance, and be conspicuously displayed in the condemnation of those incorrigible sinners, whom all the methods of his grace and mercy could not reclaim. The thought should ever dwell in our minds, that however the righteous judge of all the earth, may suffer presumptuous sinners to pass unpunished in this world, to

answer some important ends of his moral government ; yet the day will certainly come, when the impenitent offender shall not be able to stand in judgment, “ but shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God.” And this consideration should make us afraid of offending him, and prevent our taking encouragement to set our hearts to do evil, because “ sentence against a wicked work is not executed speedily.” This will certainly be our temper and conduct in some good degree, if we rightly know the Lord. For certain it is, that those are the persons who know not God, that have not his fear before their eyes. Whatever pretensions they make to the knowledge of God, they evidently shew by their conduct, that they are ignorant of him. To mention no more instances, we should consider God as a being, whose nature is *love*, whose delight is *mercy*, and whose glory is his *goodness* ; who communicates all that is excellent and lovely to every thing we love, from whom all happiness springs, in whom all moral excellence and perfection unites, the source and centre of universal good. We should often contemplate the infinite compassion and benignity of his nature, which he has so amazingly discovered in the works of creation and providence, and especially in the redemption of an apostate world by the death of his son ; in which glorious transaction he has opened to us the unsearchable depths of his mercy and love. His distinguishing love and goodness should be the delightful theme of our meditations, until our hearts are filled with gratitude and our lives with praises. For hereby we discover that we know the Lord, when we love him with all our heart, and delight to converse with him in prayer and

meditation. For he that loves God most, must certainly know him best.

4. *To know the Lord further implies in it, that we deliberately and cordially choose him for our God and portion.*

This is a natural consequence of that high esteem and veneration, which should arise from the contemplation of God as a being possessed of every moral perfection; and from the expectations of happiness which are suggested to the mind from having such a being engaged in our favour. A mind rightly disposed, will esteem real excellence, even where there is no expectation of interest: But it gives new life and vigour to our affections, when we can consider the object of them as not only excellent and amiable in itself, but also conducive to our happiness; and the more it is suited to our advantage, the more closely will our affections be united to it. Hence, he that knows the Lord, is brought to choose him for his portion and happiness, and to cry out with the Psalmist, “whom have I in the heavens but thee? and there is none upon the earth, that I desire besides thee.” He is convinced that all the enjoyments of this world, all its riches, its honors and pleasures, are not sufficient to answer his enlarged and immortal desires; and as he feels an ardent thirst of something beyond the narrow limits of time, of an happiness commensurate to a never-ending existence; he fixes on God alone as the everlasting portion of his inheritance. Without an interest in his favor, which is life, and in his loving kindness, which is better than life, he cannot but

account himself poor and wretched, though surrounded with every worldly comfort. Because he knows that these things will desert him in the solemn hour of his dissolution, and leave him destitute of comfort and support, when he stands in the greatest need of their assistance. But he knows that his God will never leave nor forsake him, when involved in trouble or danger: but will strengthen him in the last conflict of life, will crown him with victory over all his spiritual enemies, and will conduct him safely to the regions of endless joy and happiness. This engages him to desire, that God would be his reconciled God, and that he might be made a partaker of his pardoning mercy and covenant love. And because the favor of God, according to the constitution of the gospel, is only to be obtained through an interest in the righteousness and merits of his son; he cordially acquiesces in that glorious scheme of salvation and receives Christ in all his characters and offices; looking upon him as “the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely;” and preferring a title to the benefits of his purchase above every worldly consideration. And as he chooses salvation through the atonement of the great mediator, he also desires to be sanctified by the spirit of grace, and to be made holy as God is holy, that he may be prepared for the enjoyment of his favor. This is all his salvation and all his desire; this he esteems *the one thing needful*, and is therefore willing to part with every thing that he holds dear in life, when it stands in competition with the favor and friendship of God. The language of him that truly knows the Lord in the sense of our text, is, Let unthinking mortals address themselves

to all the vain amusements of this world, and enquire with an anxious solicitude, who will shew us any good ; let them, with the luxurious monarch of old, propose a reward to any that could invent a new pleasure : yet the language of my heart shall be, “ Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me.” This puts more joy and gladness into my heart, than they can ever expect from the most plentiful increase of their corn, and wine, and oil. Let them dress up to themselves an imaginary happiness, with all the colourings of an over heated fancy, and then pursue the airy phantom that is constantly eluding their eager grasp. I envy them not of their labor or pleasure : I know the Lord to better purpose, and I have not thus learned Christ the redeemer. I am bound for the eternal world, and am pursuing an happiness, which both reason and revelation assure me, is becoming the dignity of my rational nature and equal to its immortal duration. O may I be quickened in the service of that God whom I choose for my portion ; and may I at last be brought to the “ mansions of my father’s house, even that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” This brings me to consider the second thing proposed, viz.

II. What we are to understand by serving the Lord.

If we would serve God, we must endeavour to live in the constant discharge of every duty that we owe to God, our neighbour, or ourselves ; remembering, “ that the grace of God, which has appeared unto us, teaches us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present world.”

We are not serving God, while we can allowedly indulge ourselves in the habitual omission of any known duty or constant violation of any of the divine commands. God requires the whole heart, gives no toleration for the least sin, however dear it may be to us, nor will he admit of a rival in our affections.

1. *Serving the Lord includes a careful discharge of all the duties of piety which we owe to God, whether of a private or public nature.*

The great ends of the private exercises of devotion in the closet and family, are to maintain an acquaintance and correspondence between God and our souls, and to recover those pious frames, and to recall those serious thoughts, which the importunate cares and pleasures of the world are apt to dissipate. And for this purpose, *reading the scriptures* is found by the universal experience of all christians, to be an excellent help. The sacred volume is able to make us wise to salvation, and is the usual means which the holy spirit generally makes effectual for the conversion of sinners, and for the comfort and support of believers, under all their difficulties and troubles. We are not to imagine, that this sacred agent miraculously conveys any new truths to the mind, different from what he has already revealed in his word, but he only engages the attention and powerfully affects the heart with the reality and importance of those truths, with which we were formerly acquainted. And believers he comforts under their trials, and animates, and assists, and strengthens for the performance of duty, by bringing the truths of his word to their remembrance,

enlightening their minds to understand them, and enabling them to apply the various promises of the gospel for their refreshment and support. Therefore, if we desire to be changed and renewed in the temper of our minds, or to be enabled to press forward in the service of God and to make advances in the spiritual life, we should carefully read the scriptures, and treasure up in our hearts the principles of the christian religion and a rich store of useful knowledge; and possibly it may be of considerable advantage in the private exercises of piety and devotion, to choose the more plain and practical parts of the scriptures; to read but a little at a time; to leave off when the attention flags; and above all, to read with a view of having our hearts warmed and mended, and of receiving instructions from God.— And to reading the scriptures we should join *meditation*, and consider what influence the several truths, which we read, have upon us, to correct our tempers and to reform our practice: For personal application gives life and power to every truth; and without it, the general knowledge which we have, makes little or no impression upon us. We should consider how we are affected with the great and interesting subjects of death and judgment, heaven and hell, the immortality of the soul, and the homage due to the adorable God, who has given us life and all things. We should think what we are likely to be a few years hence, when we must enter into the invisible world; what is the temper of our souls now; what preparation we have made for heaven; and what hope we have of an interest in the Redeemer. We should, in our private retirements, consider the sins to which we are peculiarly exposed from our constitu-

tions, our circumstances, or employments in life, and what advantages we gain over them. We should examine whether we are going backward or forward in the road to glory; whether we are more watchful, diligent and active, in the concerns of our souls, and more in earnest in the service of God, than ever we have been; or whether we are not degenerating into greater formality, lukewarmness, and indifference in duty. We should consider what sins are yet to be repented of, what corruptions to be mortified, what graces to be strengthened, and what mercies we stand in need of. We should survey the number and aggravations of our sins, that a recollection may inspire us with a generous disdain and abhorrence of them, with an unfeigned contrition and sorrow for them, and with the most determinate resolutions in the strength of Christ; to forsake every false and wicked way, and to turn unto the Lord with all our heart. For as sin, in the nature of things, separates between God and us, and obstructs our progress in the spiritual life, we should mourn before him for our daily imperfections and miscarriages, and determine to abstain from every appearance of evil, and to have no more to do with the unfruitful works of darkness.— And let PRAYER to God always attend these exercises of private devotion. He is the author of every good and perfect gift, and he bestows that holy spirit, without whose sacred influences, all our attempts to serve him will be in vain: for “without him we can do nothing” to purpose in religion. We should therefore look to him for the communications of his grace, to change and renew our tempers, to subdue our corruptions, to conquer our enemies, to strengthen us for every incumbent duty.

and to animate us to “fight the good fight of faith, that we may at last obtain a crown of life and glory.” For it is remarkable, that after some of the most absolute promises of the new covenant recorded,* “to take away the stony heart, and to give us hearts of flesh,” &c. this solemn declaration follows: “Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of *Israel* to do it for them.” As to the *matter* of our private prayers, it seems proper to make *that* the principal subject of our prayer, which most affected our hearts in our previous reading or meditation. For this will have an happy tendency to engage the heart further, and to make our prayers more fervent, devout, and profitable. As to the *form or expressions*, in which our prayers are clothed; we are not to be solicitous about it, if performed in secret or in our closets. It is the language of the heart and the inward frame of the soul, which God principally regards; and our holy and devout desires he will graciously answer, however poorly expressed, or if they cannot be expressed at all. We read of prayers in scripture, which consist of “groans that cannot be uttered;” and we are told that such proceed from the holy spirit, “who helps our infirmities.”† But if the prayer is to be performed in the family, and the master of the family is not so happy as to have that freedom, propriety, and enlargement, which is suited to edification, without a form; it ought by all means to be performed with one. And a judicious well composed form (of which there are many to be had) seriously and devoutly read in the family, is the least that is required; and I can-

* Ezek. xxxvi, 26.

† Rom. viii, 26.

not see how it can be dispensed with, by any head of a family, who is sincerely desirous of serving God himself, and of engaging others under his care to the same laudable practice, by his pious example. And here I would beg leave in one word, to recommend the importance of this duty, particularly to those, who by the providence of God have been lately called, or soon may be called to appear in this character at the head of a family. Because a neglect of it at first will render the performance of it much more difficult hereafter, and by degrees wear off a sense of its importance; though a total neglect of it is an unknown prejudice to the lower branches of the family, and diffuses its fatal effects far and wide into posterity. And the christian, when his heart is once habitually engaged in these devotional exercises of *reading, meditation, and prayer*, in his closet and family, will find that these stated seasons of retirement to converse with God and his own soul, are the most useful and delightful part of his time.

But besides these private duties of piety and devotion, there are others of a more *public nature*, wherein it is required of us to serve the Lord. He that sincerely desires to serve the Lord, will readily afford his attendance upon the *public ordinances* of his house, the word, sacraments and prayer, not only to give a public testimony of his ready obedience to all the commands of God, but also to engage others to it by his example.—Every truly pious man has a relish for divine ordinances, and finds delight and satisfaction in his attendance upon them. They are so far from being a tiresome burden to him, that he will encounter many difficulties, rather

than be deprived of the benefit of them. He will endeavour to stir up his heart and to guard his thoughts, that he may worship God in spirit and in truth, as he requires. He will take heed how he hears the sacred oracles, remembering that he must be either the better or the worse for his attendance upon them, and that he must hereafter give an account of all these sacred opportunities, which are so graciously afforded him for his spiritual improvement.

It is necessary just to observe further, that we ought to engage in all these duties of piety, whether private or public, with a special regard to Jesus Christ, who is the head of divine influences, who can make them beneficial and advantageous to our souls, and through whom alone we are allowed, by the constitution of the gospel, to approach the father.

2. *To serve the Lord implies further a careful discharge of all those duties, which we owe more immediately to our neighbour and ourselves.*

While we are endeavouring to promote and cultivate the human and social virtues in their proper extent and influence, we are as really serving God, as when we are engaged in the more immediate acts of worship. We are serving the Lord, when we endeavour to exemplify in ourselves and cultivate in others, a temper of peace, unanimity, meekness, moderation, candor, charity, benevolence, lenity, justice, and equity, which are the great duties enjoined on us as christians towards others; and when we are industrious in our several callings.

vigilant and sober in our christian conversation, temperate in the use of lawful pleasures, humble in our thoughts, patient in tribulation, contented with our lot, and daily striving to improve in every virtuous and christian disposition. For God has wisely appointed the various connections and relations which we stand in to one another, and he has given us rational and immortal souls, the provision for which he has made the *one thing needful*; and therefore, while we are endeavouring to fill up the duties arising from these relations, and are preparing by a course of holy living, for an endless happiness in heaven, we are acting agreeable to the wise constitution of God, and are of consequence, serving him. So that it is a very great and dangerous mistake, to think that religion consists wholly in the exercises of piety and devotion, or on the other hand, to confine it to them: For we are honoring the religion we profess and adorning the doctrines of the gospel, when we are serving our generation, by employing our time and talents for the benefit of mankind, and by promoting the interests of religion and virtue in the world, as well as when we attend upon the solemnities of public or private devotion; and the pious christian will carefully endeavour to have a due regard to both.

APPLICATION,

3. *Is it then so important and so extensive a duty to know the Lord? We are therefore called at this time by the Providence of God, to examine ourselves with seriousness and solemnity concerning this matter.*

And it is to be feared, that upon such a scrutiny, we shall find ourselves much more defective in this first

principle of all religion, than we might well imagine.— We believe that there is a God, and we profess to know him. We are persuaded that he is a being of almighty power and untainted holiness, of unsearchable wisdom and inviolable truth, of impartial justice and unbounded mercy and goodness. But let us examine ourselves, and ask our consciences, as in his tremendous presence, do we find in ourselves that temper and behaviour, which such sentiments of his adorable perfections demand? Does his power engage our trust in him, and his holiness excite our desires “to be holy as he is holy?” Does his wisdom encourage our resignation to all his providential dispensations, and his fidelity, our dependence upon the accomplishment of all his gracious promises? Does his justice make us afraid to offend against him, and his goodness and mercy powerfully constrain us to love and serve him? If not, alas! what good does our pretended knowledge of him do to us? Wherein does our knowledge of him differ from mere ignorance, unless it be in this, that it makes our future condemnation the more aggravated and intolerable. O let us then often recollect our notions of God, and think what we believe and profess to know of that tremendous being, who will either make us happy or miserable, according as we serve or disobey him. Let us often meditate on his glorious perfections, choose him for our God and portion, and with entire homage and devotion of soul, glorify him as God. But,

2. *Suffer me to urge the exhortation to know and to serve the Lord, upon all, and more especially on young persons, who must soon appear on the busy stage of life.*

Be persuaded then to take the solemn advice, which the pious father gave to his son Solomon in like circumstances. Whatever be the object of your ambition and pursuit, take care that you do not neglect religion, and live and die unacquainted with God. Whatever you desire to know, or be, or do in the world, be sure to know the God of your fathers and to serve him. Above all things, maintain and cultivate a constant intercourse and correspondenee with that almighty being, who is the author of yours, who has the disposal of those comforts and conveniences of life, which you most desire, and who can bestow them upon you, or take them from you, when, and howsoever he pleases. Whatever you do, dare not to step aside from the path of duty for the sake of any worldly profit or pleasure, those fatal snares that have ruined thousands of immortal souls. Be faithful to your God and conscience, and you will find these to be your best friends, that will never forsake you in adversity. Fear not, that you will be a loser even in your worldly interest, by a study adherenee to the obligations of truth and integrity. Despise therefore all the little low arts of fraud and dissimulation, as well as open injustice. They will but lessen your characters, make you more suspected, and are indeed unworthy of a man and a christian. Be it your first concern to approve your heart and conduct to God, and then to man, and endeavour to keep “ a conscience void of offence both to-

wards God and man." In a word, would you be loved and esteemed by God and man; would you live usefully and comfortably in the world, under the cheering prospect of immortal glory; would you prosper in this world and be prepared for heaven; cultivate that godliness, which has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Remember your pious ancestors, who have trod the same dangerous paths of life, upon which you are now entering, and have been preserved and conducted through all the snares of earth and hell. Be solicitous for the same grace and direction to bring you safe to glory. Imitate their pious examples, "who through faith and patience have inherited the promises;" and their God will be your God and guide even unto death; and after a short passage through this troublesome wilderness, you will be brought to their father and your father, to their God and your God, and be made unspeakably happy and glorious in his presence for ever and ever.

SERMON IV.

CHRIST THE SAVIOUR OF LOST SINNERS.



MAT. XVIII, 11.

For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.

THAT the human race are in a state of ruin and degeneracy, with respect to religion and morals, will be readily acknowledged by all, who have consulted the history of ages that are passed, or who attentively consider the conduct of mankind around them. The vices which have prevailed and still subsist in the world; the predominant lusts and passions of men, which have often drenched the world in blood; the crimes they are daily committing; the distempers under which they are continually groaning, and the trophies which the king of terrors is daily erecting over them, are melancholy proofs that the human race are in a ruinous and degenerate state. Was this the whole of our case, it would be a pitiable consideration indeed! or were we ruined beyond the hope of redemption; who could bear the melancholy sight! to see ourselves, our children, our dearest connections, nay, our whole species involved in one general destruction, and lost forever without a remedy. We might then sit down upon the ground, and weep with one another over our miserable condition.

The eyes of thoughtful persons might well become fountains of water, and the whole world one mournful valley of tears. But this, my friends, though it is in part, is not the whole of our case. "Glory to God in the highest," there is yet hope concerning us. In this we glory, and on this account is the voice of joy and salvation heard in our tabernacles, our families and public assemblies, where otherwise we should have been condemned to hear only the voice of "lamentation mourning and woe." Blessed be God; for "the son of man is come to save that which was lost." The whole world were involved in ignorance and folly, guilt and bondage. They had blinded their minds and obscured their understandings by the darkening influence of unruly passions and appetites, corrupted themselves, offended their supreme Lord and their best friend, and thereby lost the way to heaven and happiness. No conduct can be more foolish and mad than to neglect our eternal interests, and to forfeit the friendship of him, whose loving kindness is better than life and whose displeasure is worse than death. When Christ made his appearance in the world, they all, like lost sheep, had gone astray, living as if they knew not God, effacing the original law of righteousness, which he had written on their hearts, offering him a corrupted worship, unworthy of his acceptance, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, and wronging their own souls, by an universal neglect of them. Hereby they had degraded their natures, corrupted their principles of action, contracted vicious habits and spoiled the beauty and harmony of their moral constitution. This polluted and disjointed state of the mind must be neces-

sarily attended with an alienation of heart from God, from his laws and service and a consequential devotion of heart to the service of Satan, by promoting his dreadful interest. And when men have departed from God, and cast off the restraints of his laws and government, they subject themselves to divers lusts of the flesh and mind, and yield themselves servants to sin and Satan, to obey his will as their master. Hereby they become guilty before God, stand liable to condemnation, are delivered up to Satan, the executioner of the divine vengeance, to receive from his merciless hands the just wages of sin, even death in all its formidable extent. This was the mournful situation of man, when the father of mercies beheld him with an eye of compassion, when his bowels yearned over the ruined workmanship of his hands, and when he sent the son of his love into our degenerate world, to “rescue us from the bondage of sin and Satan, and to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison doors to them that were bound,” “that the ransomed of the Lord might return with joy upon their heads.” The great and ever blessed God, who might have glorified his justice and power in our deserved destruction is the author of this salvation. “For he so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes on him might not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Accordingly, in the fullness of time, the divine Redeemer came, to accomplish the eternal purposes of the father’s love, by saving them that were lost. He came to cure our ignorance and blindness, to give us understanding in our most important concerns, to reclaim us

from our wanderings, to rectify our errors of judgment and practice, and to make us wise to salvation.— Knowing that it was impossible for us, when revolted from God and grown averse to his service, and disaffected to his government, to be reconciled to his laws and restored to his friendship, until the moral disorders of our souls were rectified. He came as the great physician to heal our spiritual maladies, to cure our depraved natures, “to make us holy as God is holy,” and thereby unite us to the author of our beings and the fountain of our happiness. He came to strike off the fetters of our slavery, and to release us from the captivity and bondage of Satan. He has broken into the house of the strong man armed, by the amazing force of gospel light and truth, and put a stop to his progress in blinding and bewitching the minds of men. He has entered his strong hold and bound him in chains; he has called to the prisoners with an awakening voice, and sent forth his powerful word to break the chains of their captivity and to bid them go forth. He came to publish and seal by his blood, a pardoning proclamation and a covenant of grace. “He came to conquer death, and him that had the power of death, that is the devil,” and to give us the prospect of a glorious resurrection to eternal life. “Thus the son of man came to save that which was lost.” But I design not to leave this important article, which contains the foundation of all our hopes, thus generally explained; but to descend to a few particulars, by which it will more fully appear,

How Jesus Christ saves those that were lost.

1. *Jesus Christ saves us by making a complete atonement for our sins*

“In the fulness of time, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law.” He voluntarily submitted to the law of God, and paid an unsinning obedience to it in its most extensive requisitions, and thereby fulfilled all righteousness for us. So complete and perfect was his obedience to the law, that one of the apostles says, “he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;” and he himself appeals to his most inveterate enemies for the purity and integrity of his life. “Which of you convinceth me of sin.” He is every where represented as one, who was absolutely innocent and perfectly righteous in the whole of his conversation; “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” But he not only obeyed the law in our stead, but with equal cheerfulness he submitted to the penalty and paid down his life as a ransom for sinners. Hence he is said “to be wounded for our iniquities, bruised for our transgressions, to be delivered up for our offences, to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, to make his life an offering for sin, to die the just for the unjust, that we might live through him; to be made a curse for us, that he might redeem us from the curse or penalty of the law, and to have the iniquity of us all laid upon him by God, so that by his stripes we are healed.” The most plain and obvious meaning of all which phrases is, that Jesus Christ suffered the punishment that was due for our offences, and that he died in our stead as a substitute for us, that we might be delivered from the penalty of a

broken law, and obtain justification through the redemption that is in him. Now this doctrine of the vicarious sufferings of Christ in our room, is sufficiently confirmed in scripture by his being so often called "a sacrifice for sin," and "the lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world;" as the great antitype of the propitiatory sacrifices under the law, which had their complete accomplishment only in him. These piacular victims were of divine appointment, and although they could not take away sin or expiate its guilt, yet they were instituted as the types or figures of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, whose blood cleanseth from all sin. Now this was the proper notion of a sin offering; the guilty person laid his hands on the head of the devoted victim, confessed his sin and prayed that the life of the innocent creature might be accepted instead of his own. Hereby the sinner acknowledged the justice of God in punishing sin by his death, at the same time that he expressed his hope in the mercy of his judge. Accordingly, when Christ appeared in the end of the world, "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," he was cut off, but not for himself, but died "the just for the unjust." For the sacrifices which prefigured his death, were substituted in the room of the offender, and died instead of the sinners for whom they were offered. This notion of sacrifices prevailed over the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles. And therefore, as they could not purge the conscience nor expiate the guilt of sin, but were emblems of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we must conclude, that he died in the room of sinners, that they might be released from their obligations to punishment and be entitled to eternal life through the merits of his death.

Now, the son of God did not make himself an offering for sin in order to move and incite the father to entertain thoughts of pity and compassion for sinners, as though he had no tenderness for us, until he was prevailed upon by the atonement and intercession of Christ, to forgive our offences and receive us into favor: for he first loved us and gave his son to die for us. His compassion for the human race was the reason of his providing the ransom in his own bosom, and it was his love to us which engaged him not to "spare his own son," "but to lay on him the iniquity of us all." But we are to consider this wonderful exertion of love, as a wise and just consultation for the honor of his perfections and moral government of the world, and at the same time a necessary provision for the display of his pardoning mercy and grace, in consistence with the claims of justice and government. It does not suppose him cruel and implacable, until he is appeased by blood or softened by sacrifice, for goodness and compassion are essential to his nature: but as he is an holy God and the righteous governor of the world, the honor of his attributes, the wisdom of his government, and the authority of his laws, must be supported, while mercy and grace are exercised to his guilty subjects. The atonement of Christ is therefore to be considered as a glorious contrivance, of infinite mercy and grace, to open a way for the exercise of pardon in such a manner as would at the same time awaken in the minds of his rational creatures, an awful sense of his aversion to sin, and preserve a becoming reverence for his laws. And what could have a greater tendency to shew his abhorrence of sin, and his holy jealousy for the honor of his laws, and his regard to the happiness of his

moral creation, than that he would not forgive sin upon less difficult terms, than the son of God's giving himself a ransom for the world. We know not how far it might affect the state of other rational beings, give them disadvantageous ideas of the supreme lawgiver, and countenance a rebellion among them; to see a whole world of offenders, how long or how greatly soever they have sinned, admitted to his favor without any satisfaction or atonement. But to prevent these ill impressions, God has shewn that he so hated sin, that he gave his only begotten son, rather than not condemn sin in the flesh; that when man had sinned, nothing that mere man could do, was of sufficient efficacy to restore him again to the forfeited friendship of his Maker. He has laid the plan of our redemption in so amazing a manner, that creatures of another order could have no grounds to expect such favor, if they revolted from their allegiance to him; at the same time, that we have reason to admire and adore the condescension and mercy of our offended sovereign, who has accepted the sacrifice and atonement of his son for us, when he might have insisted on our suffering the penalty of his broken law, in our own persons.

2. *Jesus Christ came to save his people by shedding his blood on the cross, to confirm the truth of his doctrines and to seal a pardoning and justifying covenant.*

He sealed a covenant by his death, which frees, from eternal condemnation, "all, who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit;" all who are renewed by the spirit of grace, and consequently walk before him in newness of life. God hath made

us accepted in the beloved; “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”* This was the great power and right, with which Christ was invested at his resurrection. “For God hath exalted him to be a prince and a saviour, to grant repentance and remission of sins.† In this sense we are to understand, the sacrificial phrases, “our being washed from our sins in the blood of the lamb,” and “his blood cleansing us from all sin.” A free and full pardon may be obtained according to the tenor of the gospel covenant, which was ratified and confirmed by the blood of Christ. The authority of Christ to forgive sins is a plain and intelligible doctrine; as every king has the prerogative of forgiving offences against his government. But how the exercise of this power is ascribed to the blood of Christ, we may learn from what he himself says of it in the institution of his supper: “This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for the remission of the sins of many;”‡ in evident allusion to the confirmation of the covenant between God and the children of Israel by the mediation of Moses.§ Moses having repeated the laws and judgments of God in the hearing of the people, and receiving their consent to obey them, wrote them in a book; and after sacrifices of praise and friendship were offered, he proceeds to confirm the covenant, by dividing the blood of the sacrifices, and with the one half sprinkling the altar, to signify the confirmation of the covenant on the part of God, and with the other half sprink-

*Eph. i, 7.

†Act. v, 31.

‡Mat. xxvi, 28.

§Exod. xxiv, 8.

ling the people, or the heads of the twelve tribes, to signify their consent to it; he then proclaimed with a loud voice: "behold the blood of the covenant, Jehovah hath made with you." To this solemn transaction ratified by the blood of sprinkling, our Lord alludes, when he calls his own blood, the blood of the new covenant, which was ratified and confirmed by his death. So that the remission of sins is ascribed to the blood of Christ, as by the shedding of it, that gracious covenant was confirmed which ensures pardon and forgiveness to those that repent of their sins and turn from them to God and their duty. And when upon their repentance and conversion, their sins are pardoned, they are said "to be washed and made clean through the blood of the lamb, which taketh away the sins of the world."

But as the scriptures often represent this invaluable privilege of christians, the remission of sins under the notion of justification; we shall add that christ sealed a justifying covenant by his blood; by which we are delivered from our obligations to punishment, and are treated as if we had not sinned. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins."* Justification supposes that a person is charged with a crime in court, and that a plea is entered on his behalf, either by himself or his advocate. If he is not guilty of the charge, he is justified and not pardoned; if he is found guilty, he may

*Rom. III, 25,

be pardoned, but cannot be properly and strictly justified. This is easily applied in the affair of our justification before God. When charged by God or our own consciences with the violations of the divine law, we cannot deny the charge and plead not guilty, but must rely on the mercy of the judge for pardon and deliverance from condemnation. But, though we fly to mercy for protection from the sentence of the righteous law of God; yet this is not the whole of our plea. No: we plead an atonement made, a sacrifice appointed and accepted, a new covenant established by the son of God and sealed with his blood; and upon this plea pardon is dispensed through a mediator, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. So that gospel pardon is forgiveness upon a plea, upon a covenant and in a way that is honorable to the justice, wisdom and righteousness of God, and therefore is justification as well as pardon while a wicked man is unreformed by the methods of divine grace, perseveres in his wicked ways and is not brought to repentance and a cordial compliance with the gospel covenant, he cannot deny the charge brought against him by the law of God, nor can he be justified or pardoned by the tenor of that covenant, while he continues in his sins. But the reformed and penitent sinner can plead his repentance and compliance with the new covenant and the atonement that was made for his sins by the blood of Christ; and is therefore justified and pardoned. For when God, through Jesus Christ, has pardoned a sinner, on the terms of the gospel; he is in the eye of God and of the law a righteous person and will be treated as such, being free from condemnation and having obtained a

right to the justification of life. In a word, the son of God has so pleased the father by his active and passive obedience, that he has in consequence of what he has done and suffered, “exalted him on high, to be a prince and a saviour, to grant repentance and remission of sins;” and has given him authority to pardon repenting sinners and to justify the ungodly, upon their conversion to God, and to bestow upon them eternal life, as the free and gracious reward of their fidelity to him till the close of life.

3. *Jesus Christ came to save those that were lost, by delivering them from the dominion of sin and Satan, by his word and spirit.*

He employs his gospel to break the power of sin in the soul, and to turn the heart from the love and practice of sin, to the love and practice of holiness by a thorough conversion to God. When the gospel, that divine word of truth and power, enters the heart and changes its principles and temper, it escapes from the dominion of sin, and being made free from the law of sin and the bondage of Satan, the man becomes a servant of righteousness; and subjects himself to the laws and service of God! Now the truths of the gospel are calculated to effect this glorious change, as they are the most important and interesting truths with which we can be acquainted; and such as have a tendency to open the blinded eyes and to make us wise unto salvation. The gospel of Christ sets before us, in the most striking point of light, the method by which alone we may escape from that destruction, which hangs over our

guilty heads; together with the most alarming motives and considerations to engage us to fly from the wrath to come. And when the truths of the gospel enlighten the mind and change the heart, Jesus Christ thereby delivers the soul from the bondage of corruption to serve God in newness of life. Such persons are then said "to know the truth, and to be made free by it." "If the son make you free, then are ye free indeed."* This is certainly the noblest freedom and the most honorable liberty that any of the fallen sons of Adam can boast, by which a man is delivered from the power of evil inclinations and vicious habits, through the instrumentality of the gospel shining in the heart and transforming it into the divine image. But to render the word of God effectual to our salvation, Jesus Christ has also purchased the holy spirit to be poured out upon us, that he may bring the truths of the gospel home to the conscience with divine power. It is the office of the holy spirit in the œconomy of redemption "to take of the things of Christ," his precepts and doctrines, "and to shew them unto us" in such a clear and affecting point of light, that they may prosper to the end, where-to they are sent, pulling down the strong holds of sin and Satan, and bringing our hearts and lives into the obedience of the gospel. When men's eyes are opened by the spirit of God attending the truths of the gospel they are by the sacred influence of it turned from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan to serve the living and true God. And that this was the gracious design of Christ's appearing in the character of a pro-

*Joh. VIII, 36.

phet and teacher sent from God with the words of salvation in his mouth is evident from * “the grace of God, that is the gospel, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching them, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live godly, soberly and righteously in the present evil world, looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearance of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

4. *But Christ also came to save those that were lost with an eternal salvation.*

All his sufferings in life and at his death, together with all the methods of his providence and grace, have their full and final accomplishment in the salvation of our immortal souls. As it is his efficacious and holy will, that those whom the father hath given him, should be with him where he is, that they may behold his glory and be happy in the manifestation of his eternal love, he has promised that he will come again and receive them to himself, when he has sanctified them by his grace and made them “meet for an inheritance with the saints in light;” and that their salvation might be complete, he has also promised to unseal the prison of the grave, to call forth their sleeping dust from the house of corruption, and rebuild the whole man in a glorious immortality and ineffable joy. When he expired on the

*Tit. II. 11.

cross he conquered "death and him that has the power of death, that is the devil." And hence, at the appointed hour, when he will come in the glory of the father, with his holy angels, he will issue the sovereign orders which shall be heard through all the silent repositories of the dead; "and he shall send forth his angels to gather his elect from the four winds of heaven." Cloathed with the Redeemer's spotless righteousness and made perfect in his glorious image, their mortal part shall put on immortality, and they shall hear the transporting sentence pronounced by the mouth of their judge, "Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world." And when the grand solemnity is concluded, he will lead them forward amidst the joyful acclamations of their elder brethren, to those mansions of joy and rest, which he has purchased for them with his blood. Millions, and millions of ages shall roll on, while they are continuing to enjoy the smiles of his countenance, and when they are past and gone, their happiness is but beginning, is as far from a period as it was at the first moment of their introduction into the paradise of God. "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive either the dignity or duration of their future inheritance." It is a portion large as their most extensive wishes, durable as their immortal souls, and worthy of a God to bestow. This is the salvation which the son of man came to procure, for the degenerate posterity of Adam.

APPLICATION.

See now, my friends, and behold and admire the stupendous scheme of divine mercy and grace through a

Redeemer. A world of rational and immortal beings rescued from overwhelming misery and distress, a world made happy—everlastingly happy, if their own impenitence and incorrigibleness in sin prevent it not. And say, what sentiments it ought to inspire. Why, sentiments of gratitude too big to be uttered, too fervent to be concealed! We think no language too harsh, no usage too severe for the degenerate person who could be guilty of base ingratitude to a generous friend and father of his country, who only lives to serve and would gladly die to save it from destruction. But what are all the heroes and patriots that ever lived, in comparison with the great deliverer of mankind? Or what are all the blessings which they have procured for their generation, in comparison with “glory, honor, and immortality?” Lighter than vanity and nothing, when laid in the balance with a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;” the greatest blessing that man could receive or even God bestow. Behold with an eye of faith, a spectacle, worthy to be beheld by God with pleasure, and by angels with wonder and astonishment; a spectacle more august and awfully glorious, than was ever exhibited on the theatre of nature before. Behold the adorable son of God, whom angels and arch angels are commanded to worship, pouring out his sacred blood for rebels to his crown and dignity; bearing the insults of the wretches he came to save, expiating the sins of an ungrateful world, and procuring the happiness of a rank of beings involved in ruin and misery, beyond the power of language to express! Behold him bleeding a sacred victim on the accursed tree, to make an atonement for our sins, and groaning under the weight of his father’s

wrath, which we had deserved to feel in our own persons, until at last he bows his sacred head, and shuts up the solemn scene with these comprehensive words:—*“Father it is finished;”* the great, the stupendous work is done; the universal sacrifice is completed, whose virtue and efficacy extends from the foundations of the world to the final conflagration, from the birth of time to its period; and which both angels and men shall contemplate throughout eternity with awful joy and gratitude. And can we, my friends, the favored subjects of these astonishing endearment, hear of this prodigious expence of goodness, with a cold insensibility and a stupid indifference? Can we ever turn our thoughts to this marvellous contrivance of wisdom and grace, without hearts overflowing with gratitude and love to him, whose bowels of mercy yearned over us with divine compassion and provided the Saviour; and to him, who being in the form of God, humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross, to raise us to the exalted privilege of becoming the sons and daughters of the most high God. If we find ourselves affected with endearing sentiments of love towards virtuous characters, which we read of in ancient history; if, while their story is represented in our view, we feel our hearts interested in their favor, if we honor and esteem even the distant patriot, with whom we have no connection, and from whom we can derive no advantage, how much more should we esteem and honor and love the great Redeemer, the benefit of whose actions and sufferings reaches to all ages and all nations! What are the heroes of antiquity to us, or we to them, who might have been an honor to the age in which they lived, but are of no service to us; like the

sparkling stars in the midnight sky, which are the sources of light and heat to their own systems, but whose feeble rays do scarcely reach this distant world, to give us notice of their existence. But our Saviour was a person born for the whole world; and his birth was "glad tidings of great joy to all people, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel." "O! the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, which passeth knowledge!" Hard and obdurate indeed must that heart be, which can attentively meditate on this amazing scene, the redemption of our ruined world by Jesus Christ, without feeling the most lively emotions of gratitude, without being constrained by the powerful efficacy of his love to live to him, "who first loved us and gave himself for us; that he might purify us to himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Let us, my friends, ever remember that our Saviour came into the world to save us from our sins, as well as from the penal consequences of them in the future state. In vain do we expect to be saved by his death, as a complete satisfaction for sin, unless we are sanctified by his spirit and made holy as he is holy. He came not to make our repentance and obedience to the divine laws unnecessary, but to make them accepted of God. We are not our own, we are bought with a price, even the precious blood of the son of God. Let us therefore serve him with our souls and our bodies, which are his.

And now, my friends, suffer me in the conclusion, to urge it upon your consciences, with all the earnestness

and importunity which a matter of so much importance demands, to enquire with impartiality, whether the design of Christ's coming into the world, has taken place with respect to your souls; whether the birth of a Saviour has been "glad tidings of great joy to you:" or whether his labors and sufferings have convinced you of your need of a Saviour and brought you to a cordial compliance with the gospel covenant. No doubt, you hope favorably concerning yourselves: but do your tempers and lives lay a solid foundation for your hopes. Remember, that it is the idlest dream that ever imposed upon the human understanding, to hope that you may be interested in his death and sufferings, while you do not imitate his example nor live by his gospel. How inexcusable therefore must we be, if, under all the glorious advantages we enjoy by the coming of a Saviour, we nevertheless continue impenitent and die in our sin at last. Shall the blessed Jesus set so high a value on an immortal soul, as to think it worth all his labor and pains to rescue it from eternal destruction? And shall we, notwithstanding, plunge ourselves into remediless ruin, by our neglect of this great salvation, and a foolish attachment to things, which in this comparative view, are lighter than vanity? Shall we thus requite "the God that made us and the Lord that redeemed us with his own blood."

You may indeed think of these things as you have often done, with a cold indifference and neglect: but believe it, you must one day appear in the presence of that Saviour, who came to save them that were lost, to account for all your delays and carelessness, your mis-

pent Sabbaths, your abused ordinances, your slighted calls and broken covenants : for “ he will be revealed in flaming fire, to take a dreadful vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his son.” These are not visionary notions, this is not an empty harrangue : there is a glorious reality in the gospel to all those who cordially comply with the design of Christ’s coming into the world, and it is full of amazing terror to all that neglect this great salvation. Let us then labor above all things, to secure an interest in that great salvation, which he came to purchase for us with his blood. Let us depend on the merits of his atonement for the pardon of our sins, and on the grace of his spirit, to enable us to comply with the gospel covenant ; and let us make it the constant business of our lives, to adorn the doctrines of God, our Saviour in all things, “ walking as becomes those that are redeemed by the blood of Christ.”

SERMON V.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE COMFORTER.

JOHN, XIV, 16,

And I will pray the father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the spirit of truth, &c.

UPON a slight survey of our situation and circumstances in the present world, the light of nature alone is sufficient to shew, that we are weak and indigent creatures, surrounded with innumerable wants and infirmities, and exposed to dangers of every kind, and from every quarter. We are neither able to supply our returning wants, nor sagacious enough to foresee approaching dangers, nor powerful enough to ward them off. So blinded are our minds by prejudices, and so enslaved by the darkening influences of various contending passions, that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Notwithstanding all the boasted refinements of philosophy, so sensible were the wiser Heathens of their weakness and ignorance, that they earnestly desired divine illumination and assistance from above, and acknowledged that their situation was such, that it was worthy of a God to interpose for their relief. The feeble light of nature, when cultivated by

the most sedulous care, they found insufficient to preserve them from daily errors in sentiment and practice, or to support the mind under the various troubles and perplexities of life.—But it is a glory peculiar to the christian religion, that it is capable of yielding light and direction in the path of duty, and even joy and triumph to the mind, in the midst of calamities, in which the strength of nature and philosophy can hardly afford arguments for patience. These boasted aids are like a candle in a tempestuous night which is frequently extinguished in the midst of the storm, and instead of directing and cheering the weary traveller, leaves him on a sudden in darkness, horror and fear. But the gospel is “a light to our feet and a lamp to our paths.” It directs us where we may find an ample provision for all our wants of a spiritual kind, and at the same time excites us by the most convincing arguments to repair to that unwasting fountain for that purpose. It teaches us, that in our blessed redeemer are lodged all the rich treasures of wisdom and grace, and gives us encouragement from the unbounded compassions of his heart, to expect from him all that gracious supply, which our various cases require. He has purchased the holy spirit, with all those sanctifying, comforting, and strengthening influences, which are necessary to subdue our corruptions, to support us under trouble, to assist us in the performance of duty, and to prepare us for the joys of a happy immortality. And as all fulness dwells in him, whereby he is able to satisfy the largest desires of his children, such also is his tenderness for them, and his continual desire to promote their happiness, that he ever manifests the greatest readiness to

communicate of his fulness, to answer the various purposes of the spiritual life.

These observations are abundantly verified by the consideration of the circumstances in which he made the encouraging promise in our text, to his disconsolate disciples. In the context, touched with the most tender concern for their comfort, he is preparing them to bear his removal from them, which was now approaching, with patience and resignation. He informs them, that he was going before them to prepare a place for their reception in the mansions of his father's house, and that "he would come again and receive them unto himself, that where he was, they might also be." This was one ground of consolation, which he afforded them. Another was, that although he was necessarily absent from them, for a little time, yet they should not want any supply of wisdom and strength, which their circumstances required; for whatsoever they should ask in his name, he would procure it for them from his heavenly father. And in the last place, to shew them that he could not be unmindful of them, when surrounded with all the glories of his exaltation at the right hand of the majesty on high, he assures them that he would "pray the father, and he would give them another comforter, that he might abide with them forever, even the spirit of truth." The presence of this comforter was of so much consequence to them, that he tells them in another place, that it was expedient for them, that it was for their interest, that he should go away from them, for otherwise the comforter would not come to them. By this he signified to them, that his own presence with

them would not counterbalance the loss they should sustain by the absence of this comforter.

In this consolatory discourse with his disciples, we behold not only the general care which the blessed Redeemer exercises over all his children, which is sufficient to engage them cheerfully to trust him for providential supplies, while they are engaged in his service : but also the most affectionate discoveries of his very heart, overflowing in every sentence with the kindest concern, not only for the safety but also for the comfort of all his people, who, through the preaching of his word in the succeeding ages of his church, should believe on his name. Herein we see a lively image of that tenderness with which he will another day, “ wipe away all tears from their eyes ;” and particularly from the gracious promise of our text, the disconsolate believer who is mourning under a sense of his remaining corruptions, and the consequent apprehensions of his heavenly father’s displeasure, may derive abundant support through the tiresome pilgrimage of life, and encouragement to hope, that being sealed by the spirit of promise he shall be safely conducted through all the troubles and storms of the present state, and brought at last to the mansions of his father’s house above. For surely when he spoke these reviving words, he was also solicitous that our hearts should not be troubled, and therefore provided a noble cordial, the strength of which shall continue to the remotest ages : for this comforter shall abide with his children forever.

As we propose, this day, in humble obedience to the command of Christ, to sit down at the Lord’s table, and

to commemorate the death and love of our absent Redeemer, we could not fix upon a more proper way of employing your attention on this solemn occasion, than by leading your thoughts into a particular survey of this gracious promise, which he designed for the comfort and encouragement of all his children. While we are discoursing on this refreshing subject, we hope that you will accompany us with your ardent aspirations to heaven, that this sacred comforter would draw near to us by his gracious influences, that we may know and feel the rich import and glorious extent of this animating promise.

For the sake of your memories, we propose, through divine assistance, to throw our thoughts on this subject into the following method. We shall consider,

I. Who this Comforter is who is sent by the father and the son?

II. For what purposes he is given?

III. What is our duty in consequence of such a gift?

I. Who is this Comforter who is sent by the father and the son?

There can be no doubt, but that the third person of the adorable trinity, is here intended as the office ascribed to him in our text, is the part which the sacred oracles ascribe to him in the œconomy of our redemption. He is described under various characters in scrip-

ture, such as “the holy spirit,” “the holy ghost,” “the eternal spirit,” “the spirit of God,” “the spirit of Christ,” “the spirit of truth,” of grace, “of glory and of power.” He is stiled the spirit of God, not only because he is sent by the father, but also in a sense more sublime and peculiar. He is the spirit of God in as intimate a sense, as the spirit of a man is the man; as is plain from the apostle’s comparison: “the spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God: for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him; even so the things of God knoweth none, but the spirit of God.”* This makes it evident, that there is such a close and intimate union subsisting between God and the spirit of God, as that he is privy to his most abstruse and hidden counsels, in the same manner as the human spirit is conscious of all the thoughts and intentions of the man. The incommunicable perfections of the adorable God, are frequently ascribed to him in sacred writ, such as eternity, omniscience, omnipresence. “Whither shall I fly from thy spirit,” says the Psalmist.† It cannot be easily conceived, how all christians through the world could be directed to expect his influences, without supposing him to be possessed of that divine perfection, omnipresence. We can by no means apprehend it possible, that a finite being could have access to all minds at once. These things shew that he is God equal with the father and the son, and the third person of the sacred trinity, the great object of the christian worship. How he has obtained the peculiar title of the holy spirit, in contradistinction from the father and the

* 1. Cor. xi.

† Ps. cxxxix, 7.

son, we may learn from considering, that he is described every where in scripture, as conversant with human minds, assisting them with his divine and holy inspirations, invigorating and empowering them by his strengthening influences, and enabling them to think and act with more energy and power, in the knowledge of truth and the practice of holiness, than what belongs to the spirit of a man or a mind purely human.

But it is in a very different sense that he is stiled the spirit of Christ. We know that Jesus Christ is said to be "full of the holy ghost," to be "anointed with the holy ghost," and to have the "spirit without measure."—Whatever he did is said to be done by the holy ghost: he was led by the spirit, cast out devils, and did other miracles by the spirit of God: he gave commandments to his disciples through the holy ghost, and offered himself upon the cross through the eternal spirit. This may seem a sufficient foundation for his being stiled the spirit of Christ: but if we stop here, we shall come far short of the scripture notion of this appellation. Christians are also said to be "born of the spirit," to be "led by him," to be "full of the holy ghost," to work miracles, speak divers tongues, prophesy, and to do all good and holy actions, by the spirit of God; and yet this sacred person is never called the spirit of David, of Peter, or Paul.

To comprehend this more fully, let us consider the character which Jesus Christ sustained on earth, viz. the representative of the whole human race, the great exemplar of the human nature restored to its primitive

integrity. According to this, it is familiar with the apostle Paul, to consider the whole assemblage of christians through the world, as his body, and individually as members of this body, doing whatsoever they do, and receiving whatsoever they receive in him. Hence, we are chosen, adopted, sanctified, crucified to the world, raised from the dead in him. Hence is the edifying of his body, till we come to a perfect man, “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;” that is, till the christian body be completed by the union of all its members, which will then be commensurate to the fulness of Christ; so that the loss of a single christian would be the loss of a member of Christ’s body, which would render it imperfect. As the whole assembly of christians therefore, is represented as the body of Christ, and as they are all actuated and led by the holy ghost, this sacred agent, for this reason, is called the spirit of Christ. He is also stiled the spirit of Christ, because, by his meritorious death and sufferings, he purchased the sacred influences of the spirit, which were therefore treasured up in his hands, to be communicated by him to his members, for their support and refreshment in the spiritual life.

This serves to explain what our Saviour says to his disciples, when conversing with them concerning the coming of this comforter, and concerning the necessity of his own ascension to heaven, previous to their receiving this promise of the father. “If I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you: but if I go I will send him unto you.” For since the holy ghost was the

spirit of Christ, who possessed him with all his sacred influences, in fulness and without measure, to be afterwards diffused by him in various measures and proportions, through his mystical body; it seems at least probable, from the whole œconomy of redemption, that while our blessed Redeemer remained on earth, and the work assigned him was not yet compleated, the influences of the holy spirit were in a great measure confined to his sacred person, and no farther communicated by him, but occasionally and in a certain degree, to his apostles and disciples, for particular purposes. Hence the evangelist observes, that “the holy ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”* But when the work of redemption was compleated, and he ascended up on high, to enter into his glory, then he distributed the several gifts of the spirit to his disciples, to qualify them for the propagation of the gospel through the world; and larger measures of the sanctifying and illuminating influences of the spirit, were imparted to christians for the various purposes of the spiritual life. For we are not to imagine, that the extraordinary and miraculous powers, which appeared in the first ages of christianity, were the only influences of the holy ghost: for there is no grace, no virtue, not even so much as a good thought or pious resolution, but what in the scripture account of things, is owing to the kindly suggestions and efficacious operations of the spirit of grace.— This brings me to consider,

II. For what purposes the holy spirit is given.

* Joh. vii. 39.

1. *The miraculous gifts of the spirit were designed to give sufficient attestations of the truth of a divine revelation.*

This sacred agent acted as a spirit of prophecy under the first dispensation. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the spirit of God."* "The spirit of Christ was in them testifying the things which they delivered."† In the primitive ages of christianity, his extraordinary influences were very surprising and extensive. By him the apostles and first publishers of the gospel, were enabled infallibly to make known the will of God for the salvation of the world, being endowed with such supernatural qualifications for the services to which they were called, that their enemies "were not able to resist the spirit by which they spake."‡ The holy spirit gave many miraculous attestations to the truth of christianity, by the gift of tongues and by many other signs and wonders. These were peculiar to the first age of christianity and necessary for the laying the foundations of the gospel church, but not designed to be continued in after times, as the revelation of the divine will was then completed, and sufficient provision made for conveying the same down to the succeeding ages of the church.

But although these miraculous operations of the spirit ceased, when there was no further occasion for them, yet there are the common and sanctifying influences of grace, which are absolutely necessary for the beginning

* 2. Pet. I, 21. † 1. Pet. I, 11. ‡ Act. vi. 10.

and progress of the spiritual life in the soul, which are still bestowed upon christians in various proportions.— Therefore we add, that

2. *The spirit of God is given to illuminate the mind in the knowledge of Christ, and to renew and change the heart.*

The melancholy condition of all men by nature is, that all the powers and faculties of the soul are miserably perverted by sin. Our understandings are darkened, our wills stubborn and refractory to the divine commands, our consciences are hardened, our affections and passions are set upon wrong objects, and our resolutions and attempts for a reformation are too often weak and ineffectual. But the influences of the holy spirit are communicated to remedy this fatal disorder of the soul. He enlightens the darkened understanding and brings the truth of the gospel home to our consciences, with divine power and energy, by representing them in such a striking point of light, and engaging our attention to them, that our hearts are brought under the influence of them, Thus he “takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us,” “shining into our minds to give us the light of the knowledge of the glorious God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Thus he gives us new apprehensions of the adorable God, as being of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and yet as exercising through a Redeemer the unsearchable riches of his grace and mercy to our degenerate race, in perfect consistence with the various claims of his justice, wisdom and truth, and with the rights of his moral government of the world. Thus he convinces us that we

have ruined ourselves, that we have exposed ourselves to the just resentment of an offended God, and that we are unable to recover ourselves from the ruins of our fall, or from the guilt and bondage of sin. Thus he persuades us that we stand in need of the interposition of the great Redeemer of mankind, and that he is both able and willing to save.

By the sacred influences of the holy spirit, the soul is brought to see the suitableness of the Redeemer's characters and offices to its own condition, and to value an interest in his death and righteousness, above every worldly consideration, as a miserable captive would prize a deliverance, or a condemned malefactor would esteem a pardon. By these means the stubbornness of the will is removed, so that every high thought that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ, is brought into subjection to him, and we are made willing in a day of his power, to accept of him in all his characters and offices, on the terms of the gospel. Hereby we are brought to choose God for our portion and happiness, Jesus Christ for our saviour and redeemer, and the holy spirit for our sanctifyer and comforter. By this sacred agent our hard and stony hearts are melted down into a penitential sorrow for sin, and a cheerful readiness to comply with every commanded duty. Our affections which are too much engrossed by lying vanities and empty shadows, are in some good degree disengaged from worldly attachments and set upon things above.— It is he alone that strengthens our weak resolutions to forsake every false and wicked way, and animates our feeble endeavours to turn unto the Lord our God, with

all our hearts. In a word, it is by his continued influences that we are enabled to die unto sin and to live unto holiness. Thus we are said "to be born of the spirit, to be renewed in the temper of our minds, to be transformed into the divine image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." Thus the soul experiences that saving change, whereby all old things are passed away and all things are become new. But this is not all,

3. *The spirit of God is also given to make us fruitful and progressive in holiness.*

We are indebted to the spirit of grace not only for the implantation of grace in the soul, but our progress in the road to eternal life is also to be ascribed to the operations of the same almighty agent. When his divine influences are communicated to the christian, they enable him to bring forth the fruits of holiness; and the soul, which was before justly compared to a barren wilderness, which produces nothing but thorns and briars and other useless shrubs, is now like a watered garden, which abounds with a rich variety of the most useful and agreeable productions. By our vital union to Jesus Christ, which is effected by the operations of the spirit of grace, working faith in us, we are enabled to bear much fruit. "I am the vine," says our Saviour, "and ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing." The christian, that is in any eminent degree actuated by the spirit of grace, is daily growing in grace, adding something to his spi-

ritual stature, and making advances in the various branches of the christian character. Far from resting contented with former attainments, he “forgets the things that are behind, and presses toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Daily aspiring after perfection and going on from strength to strength, he studies to have his passions more mortified, his corruptions more subdued, his graces more confirmed, and himself made more active and cheerful in religion. Although all do not arrive at the same perfection in holiness, yet, because it is essential to the nature of true grace to grow, all true christians will make more or less proficiency in the road to eternal glory in proportion to the measure of grace bestowed upon them, and to their own activity and diligence in the spiritual life. This will more fully appear by attending to the following particulars.

4. *The holy spirit is given to assist us in the performance of the various duties incumbent upon us.*

He enables us to discern and recollect what is our duty in the various circumstances of life, and how it may be acceptably performed. How many of our duties lie in the middle between the culpable extremes on both sides, which perplex our judgment and practice. In the duty of self examination, for instance, how difficult is it to set the marks of true grace neither too high nor too low, that we may pass an impartial judgment upon our own spiritual state, without too much favour towards, or unreasonable prejudices against ourselves. Into this duty, in particular, the apostle introduces the agency of the holy spirit, “witnessing with

our spirits, that we are the children of God," if indeed we have passed from death unto life. Does not the extensive and difficult duty of prayer require such intenceness of mind, such fervour of affection, and such diligent preparation, that the most experienced christians find it a matter of great difficulty to collect their scattered thoughts, to restrain their wandering affections and to maintain upon their spirits that solemn awe and reverence, which becomes us, when we approach the throne of the most high God? And does not the inspired apostle make the regular and acceptable discharge of this solemn duty to depend upon the spirit's helping our infirmities, and making "intercession for us with groans that cannot be uttered;" in as much as "we know not what we should pray for, as we ought." Is not the path of duty often embarrassed with many perplexities and intricate circumstances, so that it is extremely difficult to discern the will of God in various dispensations of his providence? Is not human wisdom often at a loss to discover the time and place, the nature and kind, the measure and method of each duty arising from our various connections in the social life, where providence has allotted us an extensive sphere of usefulness. Puzzled with these difficulties, do not the wisest of men often wish for and earnestly seek a superior direction from above? Acknowledging that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;" do they not often breathe out their ardent desires in the language of the pious Psalmist, "shew me thy ways O Lord, teach me thy paths." Now, is it not the express office of the spirit of truth in the œconomy of redemption, to take of the things of Christ, and to shew them unto us, and to lead

us in the way everlasting, and to bring to our remembrance the things that Christ has said for our direction in the intricate mazes of life. And can we not appeal to the comfortable experience of many christians, that in many seasons of life, when surrounded with perplexities and involved in darkness, they have found counsel and direction from God? Can they not recollect the time, when they found a ray of divine light darting into their minds on a sudden, or a surprising and unexpected concurrence of circumstances, conspiring together to point out the way of duty with comfortable satisfaction and evidenee? Have they not often in this manner heard, as it were a word behind them, saying, "this is the way, walk in it." How often will the observant christian find reason to acknowledge himself indebted to the sacred agency of the spirit of truth, for many seasonable hints, and pious suggestions, enlarging the mind with a clear and easy perception, of what belongs to the due performance of many duties, when his views before had been much confused and contracted, and his attempts clogged with discouraging difficulties.

But besides the knowledge of our duty, the holy spirit assists us in the performance of it, by affording a practical experimental knowledge, and a lively and abiding sense of those divine truths that are the grand motives to all duty. How frequent are the complaints of exercised christians, that the great and wonderful things contained in the law and gospel of Christ, appear to them strange and insipid, that after all their endeavors to quicken their attention and to engage all the active powers of their souls in religious duties, yet they can

derive but little or no vital warmth of affection from them. They hear and read of them, they converse with them in their devotions in private, and meditate on them in public; but alas! it is without any clear views of their transcendent lustre and glory, without any heart-felt relishes of their sweetness, and without any powerful impressions left on their minds. But at other times when the spirit of God opens their eyes to behold the wonderful truths of his word, the same divine truths, whose force was so feeble and languid before, now break into the mind with such marvellous light and glory, as to fill the burdened soul with holy rapture and wonder, and spread their quickening influence over all the powers of their nature. It would be injustice to the sacred agency of the holy spirit, not to ascribe this blessed effect, to his bringing the truths of the gospel with power and energy to the conscience, and his shining into our minds to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus it is that he inspires us with readiness and alacrity in the performance of duty. It is God, by his spirit that works in us to will and to do, of his own good pleasure, quickening us to the several duties of our respective callings and employments in life, and disposing and preparing our hearts for religious exercises. It is he, who excites holy motions, inspires with humble, yet lively resolutions, and preserves them warm and steady in the soul, thereby effectually inclining us to the appointed work by the sweet and powerful constraints of his marvellous grace. And many christians can testify to the honor of free grace, that when they have found their good dispositions wear off, and a list-

less inactivity overspreading their souls, they have experienced this sacred agent awakening their drooping spirits, reviving their languid affections, and maintaining in them a suitable frame for patient continuance in well doing. This he effects by impressing the mind with appropriating views of the great and precious promises of the gospel, with the comfortable assurance of his upholding and strengthening presence, by reviving the recollection of former manifestations of his love in the ordinances of the gospel, and by affording immediate foretastes of that glorious state, where we shall be able to serve our God without heaviness or distraction. It is the spirit of God, by his wonderful working in the hearts of his people, that suppresses evil inclinations, that weakens the power of evil habits, that lays our lawless passions and appetites under the restraints of his grace, that quickens those holy affections and gracious principles into lively exercise, which ought to accompany the performance of every religious duty. It is the spirit of faith, of love, and joy, which helps our infirmities in all our comfortable approaches to God in the ordinances of his house. When we are enabled to pour out our hearts before God, in awful yet delightful adorations of his sublime and incomprehensible glories, in a lively flow of penitent affections and genuine contrition for our sins, in warm and fervent breathings after spiritual blessings, in an easy resignation of all our temporal concerns to his will, in the various pleadings of faith, and in the lively emotions of love, of gratitude and joy, when we acknowledge his benefits; the spirit of grace and supplication has been previously poured out upon us, has been moving upon our hearts, and affording this glorious liber-

ty, and enlarged emanation of spiritual affections and graces. Thus “he makes his children perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.”*

We might easily go on in expatiating upon this copious and delightful subject, until the very design of preaching would be defeated by the length of the discourse. We shall therefore be contented to mention another particular, at present, viz. that

5. *The Holy Spirit is given to comfort us under the various troubles of the civil or religious life.*

The mourning christian experiences an holy joy and triumph in the communications of grace, in the instances already mentioned: for what can be more refreshing to the weary traveller, fainting under the scorching rays of the sun, or ready to die for thirst in the sandy desert, than a draught of cold water? And yet this is but a faint emblem of that spiritual refreshment which the humble christian derives from the spirit of God, who raises his views to the eternal Jehovah and enables him to consider him as his indulgent father and his everlasting friend. It is the spirit of God who strengthens his faith, and leads him to see that his Redeemer liveth and reigneth at the right hand of the majesty on high, conducting all the operations in the kingdoms of nature and grace for the benefit of his children. It is by the inward witnessing of the holy spirit, that he is led to see

*Heb. XIII, 21.

his sins pardoned through the atonement of the son of God, himself rescued from hell and destruction, and interested in the great and precious promises of the gospel, and all the glorious blessings of the new covenant that was ratified in the Redeemer's blood. Storms of temptation may indeed arise and threaten to overwhelm his soul; they may assault him with such violence as to shake his confidence in God, and almost reduce him to despair. Principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world, may associate their combined legions and lead him for a season captive at their pleasure; the world may spread her alluring charms before him to captivate his affections, and the great remainders of corruption that still lodge in his bosom, may through his neglect, lead him astray from God and his duty; and in righteous displeasure, the spirit of God may withhold the comfortable manifestations of his presence, so that he will go mourning under the hidings of his father's face. Yet his heavenly father remembers the covenant of his love, and although he corrects him for his transgressions, "his loving kindness he will not utterly take from him, nor suffer his faithlessness to fail." He sends his spirit to awaken him to repentance, to give him the victory over his spiritual enemies, and to revive his drooping spirits with such gracious consolations as these: "Son, daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;" for "in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." Thus does the spirit of God afford him joy and peace in believing. And what can be a more sound foundation for "joy, unspeakable and full of glory?" The pleasure

and delight which arises from the communications of grace, are a fund of happiness which is independent of the body and all the vicissitudes of this changing scene, and which the world, with all its enjoyments, can never equal. What calamity or affliction can befall the christian, that can rob him of this happiness? In what trouble of body, mind, or estate, can he be involved, in which this sacred comforter cannot have access to him, to support him with his refreshing influences? In poverty, these can enrich his soul, in sickness they can relieve him, in solitude they can cheer him, nay, they can make him smile at the persecutor's lawless rage, and triumph even in the midst of surrounding flames. For having the witness within himself, the earnest of the spirit of grace, "by whom he is sealed unto the day of redemption," he can look beyond the grave to his glorious inheritance among them that are sanctified.

APPLICATION.

1. *Is the spirit of grace sent by the father and the son for all these gracious and important purposes?*

I hope, my friends, you have been endeavoring to examine your own hearts, to see whether you have experienced these saving and sanctifying influences of grace, transforming you into the divine image and preparing you for glory and happiness. What has been said is sufficient to alarm the thoughtless sinner, who has no grounds to believe that he is led by the spirit, but has been striving against his kindly influences all his life. It should give him an awful conviction of his utter inability to do any thing that is truly pleasing to God.

whatever professions he may make, or whatever religious services he may attend. Sensible therefore of your danger, while destitute of the saving operations of the spirit of grace, let me beseech and entreat you, as you value an interest in the blessings of the redeemer's purchase, and as you prize the salvation of your own souls, that you suffer yourselves to go no longer in a round of dead and spiritless duties, but earnestly implore the gift of the spirit, from that God who gives it with infinitely more readiness, than the most indulgent earthly parent would give bread to a starving child. Is he not even now striving with your consciences? and can you still persist in rejecting his salutary suggestions, until he is provoked in righteous displeasure, to withdraw from you, and you hear from him no more.

But charity forbids me to suppose this to be the miserable condition of you all. There are many of you, I trust, who have rational grounds to conclude, from the fruits of holiness discoverable in your hearts and lives, that you have experienced the renewing and sanctifying operations of the spirit of grace. I hope we shall ever retain grateful sentiments and apprehensions of that adorable God and redeemer, who have sent this sacred agent to "work in us, to will and to do of his own good pleasure." I hope we shall endeavor to express our gratitude by consecrating ourselves to his service, "walking in the spirit in newness of life." Sensible of our remaining corruptions, and persuaded that of ourselves we can do nothing that is spiritually good, let us daily look to the great head of divine influences for renewed communications of grace and strength, for

the various purposes of the spiritual life. Let us be diligent in our attendance upon all these sacred ordinances, in which we have encouragement to expect his renewing and sanctifying grace. Particularly let the consideration, that the holy spirit with all his divine and salutary operations, were procured for us by the death and suffering of our divine redeemer, engage us to approach him at his table, which he has appointed for the comfort and refreshment of his children in their tiresome pilgrimage of life. Are you desirous of the tokens of the redeemer's love, and of the influences of his grace? Behold, he is now inviting you in the language of tenderness and love, to come to him in that sacred ordinance for the supply of all your wants. "Eat, O my friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O my beloved." "Wisdom hath built her house, hath mingled her wine and furnished her table, she hath also sent her ambassadors to you, saying, come eat of my bread, and drink of my wine, that I have mingled." He is now inviting you, who is your saviour and your friend, who loved you and gave his soul a ransom for you, and who now remembers you with the tenderest affection at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider the glorious provision that is here made for your support and comfort. "It a feast of fat things, full of marrow, and of wine on the Lees well refined." It is a spiritual entertainment for enkindling in your breasts the sacred flame of devotion and love to your God and Redeemer, for promoting your joy and comfort in this valley of tears. Many a christian can testify to the honor of this sacred institution, that while he was admiring the wonders of redeeming grace, and commemo-

rating the dying love of his divine redeemer at his table, he has been comforted and refreshed with the influences of his grace. Many a christian, who has sat down at the Lord's table with a cold unaffected heart, who has poured out his soul to God in the most bitter complaints, that he loves him no more, that his faith is so weak and feeble, that he is so soon tired with spiritual exercises, that he is so much borne down with remaining corruptions, has, notwithstanding, met with Christ in that holy ordinance, and has experienced divine refreshment and strength before the sacred solemnity was concluded. Let me therefore charge it upon your consciences as your duty, as well as your privilege, to *do this* in remembrance of your absent Saviour, depending on his grace, that he will come into you, and sup with you, and you with him in all the holy endearments of mutual love and friendship. Give not way to unseasonable scruples and fears; be not afraid of your unfitness, nor wait for the full assurance of faith beforehand, but come with sincere and humble desires to remember your dying Saviour, and you may depend upon a hearty welcome. Survey the multitude of your wants and complaints, and spread them before him at his table and be assured that he, "who is able to save to the uttermost, is also able to do exceeding abundantly above what you are able to ask or think." Extend your desires to the utmost bounds, that are consistent with reason and religion, and in him you will find a copious supply. Thousands have been refreshed at this overflowing fountain in all ages of the church, and yet there is room for the most needy and weakest of all his humble followers, and a gracious welcome "to come and take of

the waters of life freely." Despise not therefore your own mercies, but endeavor to wait upon God in the way of his sacred appointment, in humble dependence on the influences of that holy spirit the comforter, who can prepare you for the service of your God in this imperfect state, and for the enjoyment of him in those regions of eternal day, where you shall behold with endless wonder and delight, the unrivalled glories of your incarnate Saviour.

SERMON VI.

CHRIST'S DOMINION OVER BOTH WORLDS.

REV. I, 18.

I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, amen : and have the keys of hell and of death.

THE context informs us that it was our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave this sublime description of himself to the apostle John, whom he employed to write and convey his epistles to the seven churches of Asia. When he heard a voice of the son of God behind him, saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and what thou seest write in a book, and send it to the seven churches, which are in Asia;" he turned about to see the person that spoke with him. Being turned about, he saw "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like to the son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters, and his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength." Expressions, which denote not only the glory and majesty of his person, but also his supreme

authority and his vigilant providence, the steadiness and justice of his exalted administration and the extensive diffusion and glorious efficacy of his gospel. No wonder that the apostle should fall down as dead at the sight of such astonishing glory. But the blessed Jesus gently raised him from the ground, and assures him that he was the very Jesus, with whom he has conversed so familiarly in the days of his humiliation, and that notwithstanding the majesty and splendor of his exalted state, he still retained the same compassion and tenderness for his people. "Fear not," says he "I am the first and the last; he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, amen: and have the keys of the invisible world and death."

What can be a more rational employment than to meditate on the unrivalled glories of our exalted redeemer, to adore the riches of his grace, and to celebrate the praises of God our Saviour? Do not the angels of God stoop down from their radiant thrones, to study the mysteries of redemption, and the general assembly and church of the first born, sing the praises of God and the lamb? And shall it not also be a delightful exercise to us, who are redeemed by his blood and acknowledged by him, under a variety of the most endearing relations, to contemplate the glories of his nature and to consider the blessings derived from his unbounded munificence and love? May not the meditation on the essential and acquired glories of our divine redeemer be highly beneficial to us? Did sinners seriously consider the unlimited power of him, who is the "Alpha and Omega," the almighty, they must

soon be convinced that it is the height of madness and folly in them to provoke his wrath and abide in the camp of his enemies. Did they know the glory and majesty of his nature, they would not rush against the "thick bosses of his buckler," but without delay would prostrate themselves at his feet and submit to his righteous government. Were they acquainted with the compassions of his heart, they would fly to him as their impregnable fortress and shelter from the storm of divine vengeance. Had they ever experienced the happiness and security of his subjects, the enchaining vanities of the world would not have such a fatal influence, to divert them from their obedience to him. And did his children more frequently meditate on the riches of his grace, they would not so often sink under the difficulties of the christian warfare, nor be so often filled with desponding fears, that they shall one day fall by the hands of their spiritual enemies. Upon these accounts it may be neither an unpleasant nor unprofitable exercise, to both saints and sinners, to spend a few moments in meditating on the sublime description which the adorable son of God gives of himself in our text. To assist your meditations therefore on this subject, we propose, through divine assistance,

I. To explain the various parts of the description as they are found in the text.

1. *I am he that liveth.*

Jesus Christ is the living and true God. For he hath life in himself and consequently an inherent power of

communicating it to others. "As the father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the son to have life in himself." Hence, "the first Adam is said to be a living soul, but the second Adam, the Lord from heaven is said to be a quickening spirit," that is able to communicate life to his creatures, having an undivided principle of life and an independent self-existence in himself. He lives in a manner peculiar to himself; so that he calls himself, "he that liveth," by way of eminence, and as distinguished from all his creatures which have derived their existence from his almighty word. We are confirmed in this interpretation of the phrase, from the character he assumes in our context, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last;" an expression evidently quoted from the prophet Isaiah, (XL, 4, & XLIV, 6,) and applied by him to the only true God, as a description of his incommunicable glory and unchangeable eternity. "I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no other God." So full a testimony is this passage to the proper divinity of our blessed Saviour. But this fundamental article of our faith rests not on this single testimony. He asserted his own self-existence and immutable permanency of duration in a conference with the Jews, when he answered their question, "hast thou seen Abraham?" by saying, "before Abraham was, *I am*." Now had he only said, before Abraham was, *I was*, which would have been sufficient to answer their question; this much at least might have been concluded from it, that he had an existence before Abraham, although he was born in the world after him. But in as much as he said, "before Abraham was, *I am*," something farther must have been intended,

which may be readily understood from the original use of the expression, as it is recorded in Exod. III, 14. Where God himself made choice of it, to express his own self-existence and absolute independence, when Moses enquired after his name. He answered him, "I am that I am," thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, "I am hath sent me unto you." This is possibly the most express and direct assertion of the self-existence of the supreme God that is to be found in the sacred oracles; as all that are acquainted with the Hebrew language know that this phrase denotes absolute being and underived existence. Now, why should our blessed Saviour use and apply this expression to himself, if he was not the self-existent God? He well knew that it had never been applied to any but the true God, and therefore he never would have arrogated this honor to himself, had he not been possessed of the incommunicable glories of the only living and true God. Nay, he is expressly called in various places of the sacred writings, "God over all, the Lord of Lords, the Almighty, the searcher of all hearts, the Alpha and Omega, who is the same yesterday, to day and forever; whose goings forth were of old from everlasting, who has created all things visible and invisible, and upholds them by the word of his power." Nay, "the fulness of the godhead dwells in him bodily, and he thought it no robbery to be equal to God." In a word, all the incommunicable attributes of the supreme God, and all his distinguishing works of creation, providence, and judgment, are ascribed to him by the sacred writers, in the very same language in which they are ascribed to the only true God; and therefore, he must be as truly

God as he is really man. The same worship was paid to him that was paid to the father, and by the express command of that Jehovah, who will not give his glory to another; and therefore we conclude, that he had an underived and unquestionable title to the essential glories of the divine nature, "being in the form of God, the brightness of the father's glory, and the express image of his person." Who but the supreme God could send forth the almighty word, and immediately the universe, with all its endless variety of creatures, emerged out of nothing? Who but God alone can govern the stupendous fabric of nature by a single act of his will, direct its complicated motions and actions with uninterrupted harmony and design, preserve them in their proper subordination to one another, and rule, with uncontrouled dominion in the armies of heaven, the inhabitants of earth and the powers of hell, frustrating the designs of the enemies of his church, supplying the wants of his numerous family, and conducting his children to glory and felicity? And who but God is able to doom the wicked to everlasting darkness, and immediately execute the irreversible sentence, and with uncontrollable authority, open the everlasting gates of heaven for the admission and reception of his faithful servants?—Must not Jesus Christ be God, to be qualified to govern and judge the world that he made? Yes, certainly; and he will one day appear in all that incomprehensible glory of the godhead, when all the inhabitants of both worlds shall be summoned before his bar, the earth shall be moved at his dread command, and the heavens shall flee away from the insufferable brightness of his presence.

2. *The next part of our blessed Redeemer's character mentioned in our text is, that he was dead.*

But how was it possible for him to die, who had in himself an underived principle of life and self-existence? The divine nature cannot suffer and die: But he was as truly man as he was really God; and the human nature which he assumed into personal union with the divine, was made subject to mortality, suffered and died for our redemption. This is the great mystery of godliness—"God was manifest in the flesh." That "eternal word, who was in the beginning with God, who was God, and who created every thing that was made, was made flesh and tabernacled among us." Thus it is said in the language of inspiration, that the prince of life was slain, that the Lord of glory was crucified, and that the church was redeemed by the blood of God.

There were great and important purposes, worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God, to answer, by the son of God's dying for us. He died to make an atonement for our sins, being substituted in our place as our expiatory sacrifice, not to move the divine compassion for us, or excite an offended God to exercise that mercy and pity towards us, which are inseparable from the divine nature, but to open a consistent method, whereby his essential mercy and grace might be extended towards us, without casting any reflection on his unspotted holiness and impartial justice; or as an inspired penman expresses it, "to open a way, whereby God might be just and the justifier of them that believe on Jesus Christ." This is evident from all those passages in the sacred

oracles, where he is said to suffer for our sins, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; to suffer for us in the flesh; to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; to give his body to be broken for us, and his blood to be shed for the remission of sins; to be bruised for our iniquities; to be wounded for our transgressions; to have the chastisement of our peace laid upon him; to make his soul an offering for sin; to give himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice for sin unto God; to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; to be offered to bear the sins of many; to taste death for every man; and to be made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him.” He that was under no necessity of dying, “being holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,” voluntarily assumed our nature, “humbled himself unto death, even the accursed death of the cross, that he might make an atonement for the sins of the people, and pay down his life as a ransom for us.” He cheerfully submitted to be made a curse for us, that we might be delivered from the curse of God’s violated law, and have a sure foundation laid in point of merit and purchase, for our eternal deliverance from death and hell, and our restoration to the favor and friendship of God. Hereby all the important ends of God’s moral government, that could have been secured by our dying forever, are as effectually obtained by his dying for us, “the just for the unjust.” Hereby he has obtained eternal redemption for us, and “is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God through him;” so that his blood having cleansed us from all sin, “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in him.” Hereby he

has magnified the law and made it honorable, having fulfilled all the requisitions of its precepts and penalty in their utmost extent. And hereby he has in his unparalleled sufferings and death, exhibited such fearful displays of the divine abhorrence of sin, and of his love to holiness, and of his inflexible determination to vindicate the authority of his laws, and the rectitude of his moral government, as are sufficient to deter his rational creatures from presuming to trample on his laws with impunity. Hereby he has confirmed the laws which he came to give us for the regulation of our conduct, having sealed them by his blood. Hereby he has taught us "to die unto sin and to live unto God," not suffering sin to reign in our mortal bodies, seeing he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. And hereby he has taught us to triumph over death and the grave, having "destroyed death and him that has the power of death, that is the devil."

3. *The next part of the description which the blessed Jesus gives of himself in the text, is, behold! I am alive forevermore amen.*

He lives forever, not only as the eternal word, possessed of that underived life and glory, which he had with the father before the world began: but also with respect to his human nature, which by virtue of its union with the divine, was rescued from the dominion of the grave and dignified with the glorious privilege of immortality. Hence he is the "first born from the dead."—As it was not possible for him to be holden by death, he burst the prison of the grave and rose from the dead on

the third day, according to the scriptures. That good shepherd who laid down his life for his flock, resumed it again by his own power and shewed himself alive from the dead to a multitude of his disciples, to confirm their wavering faith by this incontestible evidence, that he had finally vanquished all his enemies, was placed beyond the reach of their malice and rage, had accomplished the arduous work of our redemption on earth, and was therefore declared to be the son of God, with power in his resurrection from the dead. Hereby God testified his entire approbation of all that he had done and suffered, and that he had fully executed the important commission he had received from the father. Hereby he is become the first fruits of them that now sleep; his resurrection and immortal life being the pledge and earnest of our resurrection and complete immortality. He lives forever, to give his children assurance, that he will continue to bestow with a liberal hand, those various gifts which he received for men when he "ascended up on high and led captivity captive," which he purchased with his blood "for the perfecting of his saints, for the work of the ministry and the edification of the church, the body of Christ." He lives to prepare a place for his people, to take possession of the mansions of his father's house in his own and in their names, as their forerunner; having entered into heaven for this purpose, in virtue of the atonement which he made on the cross for our sins; having consecrated a new and living way into the holiest of all by his own blood. There he ever lives to make intercession for his people, and to pursue the great ends of his glorious undertaking, until he shall have completed the salvation of all that come unto God

through him. And if he could say in the days of his flesh, "Father, I know that thou hearest me always;" much more may we now assure ourselves, that he cannot fail of success when pleading in the court of heaven, in virtue of his meritorious sacrifice, for those things which he purchased for his people with his own blood, and which his heavenly father stands engaged by covenant to bestow. There he obtains the acceptance of our persons and services, and receives for us all the necessary supplies of grace, which he communicates to us with a liberal hand, to fit us for our duty in this imperfect state, and to prepare us for reigning together with him in glory and immortality, through eternal ages. He who once condescended to empty himself of the glory which he had with the father, before the world began, now ever lives to receive the homage of adoring Seraphim and Cherubim, and the worship and praises of all the heavenly inhabitants. Every creature in those joyful abodes, with sounding harps and divine songs, celebrate his glorious triumph, saying, "blessed be the lamb that was slain; blessing and honor, and glory and power, be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the lamb forever and ever." This brings me to consider,

4. *The fourth article of this sublime description, which he gives of himself; and have the keys of the invisible world.*

Some commentators understand by the word *Ades*, which is here translated hell, the place of the damned, as it is sometimes used in this sense; as in (Mat. xvi, 18.) "The gates of hell shall not prevail against the

church." Others think that the word *Ades* signifies the grave, and that the meaning of the phrase is, "I have the keys of the grave and can call men from the sleep of death in their dark and silent abode." But both these seem to fall far short of the true extent of the word, and to lessen that glorious authority, which our exalted Redeemer claims in our text; and therefore, I would choose to understand the word in its largest and most usual acceptation, as comprehending the whole of the *invisible world*, both the habitations of joy, and the abodes of torment. Because the word properly signifies, a *place removed from sight*, and when spoken of the body, it means the grave, and when of the soul, it signifies the whole invisible world: because this interpretation agrees better with other passages of scripture, which speak of the unlimited extent of Christ's dominion; and because it agrees better with the other part of the description, that he has "the keys of death." He not only rules in the invisible world, but also commands the entrance into it by death; a key being the common ensign and symbol of ministerial authority, is here used by our Lord to express his government and dominion over them. All the inhabitants therefore of the invisible world, are either his voluntary subjects, or under his absolute controul. The angels of light are under his government. These sublime and exalted spirits, 'who excel in strength,' and ever stand ready to fulfil his pleasure, account it their honor and happiness to obey his sovereign orders, and to be employed in the execution of his gracious designs. They are 'ministering spirits under him,' and sent forth by him to minister unto the 'heirs of salvation.' Even these principalities and pow-

ers, thrones and dominions, amidst all the glory and splendor of their exalted stations, in the angelic hierarchy, bow the knee to the Lord of glory, in the profoundest homage and adoration, and "acknowledge him for their Lord, to the glory of God the father." With inconceivable readiness and alacrity, they fly to the remotest corners of our Lord's dominions, to execute his commands, adoring and rejoicing that they are counted worthy to serve the prince of angels, who is exalted far above all principality and powers, might and dominion.

The apostate legions of hell also are within the bounds of our Lord's universal empire and subject to his absolute government. He that could 'bind the strong man armed,' and dispossess him at pleasure in the days of his humiliation, has not now, when exalted to the right hand of the majesty on high, lost his power to restrain and subdue that 'roaring lion,' with all his confederate hosts.—He that triumphed over principalities and powers on the cross, and 'led captivity captive,' in his glorious ascension into heaven, still retains them "in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." They are his captives: they cannot move but by his leave, nor execute the least of their infernal schemes but by his permission. Their usurped dominion over the nations is limited by the great head of the church, who can preserve it from all the assaults of hell, can make even Satan himself, with all his rebel angels, subserve his gracious designs; and having the keys of the bottomless pit, can, by a single act of his will, confine them to their flaming prison.

To our Lord's dominion over the invisible world, also belong the souls of departed men, who either yield him a voluntary obedience or a constrained subjection to his incontroulable authority. To him who has 'the keys of the invisible world,' it belongs to assign us our distinct abodes after death, and accordingly as we are prepared or unprepared for our great change, either to open to us the gates of the heavenly paradise, and to admit us into the regions of the blessed; or to open to us the gates of the infernal prison, there to be detained as the miserable captives of his justice, unto the judgment of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He, before whose august tribunal we must all make a general appearance at the last day, will, at death, begin some preparatory exercise of his judicial power, in sending our disembodied spirits to their distinct abodes for which they are prepared. He will appoint his ministering angels to wait on the departing spirits of his children, to convey them in safety to the mansions of rest and glory, which he has prepared for them; and leave those who would not submit to the sceptre of his grace, in the merciless hands of that apostate spirit, who works in the children of disobedience, to be dragged by him to the regions of everlasting despair, and to be tormented with him in 'the lake that burns with fire and brimstone'. When their distinct abodes are fixed by his irreversible sentence; his servants shall serve him day and night, with unknown alacrity and fidelity, without the least remaining tincture of that languor and distraction, that infirmity and corruption, which marred the lustre and destroyed the merit of their best obedience on earth; while the miserable outcasts of heaven shall feel the

gnawing "of the worm that never dies," and know by doleful experience, what 'a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God;' while they are confined through eternal ages to that place of torment, where the cries of their misery and despair shall never reach the throne of mercy, but return in doleful accents to add even to the horrors of hell.

5. *But our Lord has also the keys of death.*

He commands this passage into the invisible world, and therefore determines, in his own infinite wisdom, when, and how we shall die. Our removal hence is not a matter that depends upon our own pleasure, nor the fortuitous concurrence of unforeseen accidents or unguided chance. "He is exalted to be head over all things for his church," and the administration of the kingdoms of nature and grace is committed into his hands; so that nothing can frustrate his determinations, so as to continue the period of human life beyond the term, which he has assigned in his wise providence. It belongs to him, who can give us a space for repentance, to limit the season of grace, and when impenitent sinners have filled up the measure of their iniquity and refuse to be reclaimed, to call them to account for their conduct at his bar, and receive from him according to their works. To him also it belongs, to give his servants a final discharge from the warfare of mortality, to put an end to their labors and sufferings for his name, and when he has prepared them by the various methods of his grace, for the business of the heavenly world, to give them rest in the Lord, and translate

them, by death, to more exalted stations and employments in his kingdom above.

But he not only determines the season and manner of our removal by death into the invisible world, but it also belongs to him, as the Lord of the living and dead, to open the doors of the grave, to unlock the silent repositories of the dead, and call forth the sleeping dust from the house of corruption. He that could not be held by the pains of death, but broke its bands, and rising from the grave became "the first fruits of them that slept," is able and determined, at the appointed hour, to give our bodies a release from the prison of the grave. At his command, the great arch angel shall sound the trumpet, that shall be heard through the most distant regions of the dead, and "all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the son of man, and come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and others to the resurrection of damnation." Then shall death and the invisible world give up their dead; the one, the bodies, and the other, the spirits retained under their dominion, that being reunited, they may stand together before his impartial bar, to receive from his righteous sentence, according to the deeds done in the body.

APPLICATION.

1. *Was he, that lives, dead? Let us then adore the unparalleled condescension of the Son of God.*

It was entirely on our account that he who has life in himself, and has communicated it to every thing that lives, did assume our nature, and become subject unto

death, that he might rescue us from the power of death and hell, and raise us to a glorious immortality. Surely, when we consider, on the one hand, our own situation, not only unworthy of his notice or regard, but enemies and rebels, that deserved his everlasting abhorrence and displeasure, under sentence of eternal death and unable to emerge from the destruction, which we had brought upon ourselves; and when we reflect, on the other hand, on the incomprehensible glory of the eternal word, tabernacling in human flesh; we cannot sufficiently admire and adore the riches of his grace and condescension, that "he who was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God," should, for our sakes, "make himself of no reputation and be found in fashion as a man;" nay, that he should "humble himself and become obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross." "Great indeed, is the mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh;" but still greater, if possible, is the mystery of his dying in that nature as our substitute and sacrifice for our sins, and propitiation for the sins of the world. O let us then, as often as we turn our thoughts to this wonderful theme, and especially as often as we are called at the table of the Lord, to behold the lively representations of Christ crucified amongst us, endeavor to raise our hearts to the most adoring thoughts of the "height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus," which indeed far 'surpasses our knowledge.'

2. *Is he, that was dead, alive forevermore, amen?*

Let us learn to rejoice in God our saviour, for the assurance that we have, from this consideration, that what our divine redeemer did and suffered, was sufficient for our redemption. Had not his death been a sufficient expiation for the guilt of our sins; had it not fully repaired the honors of God's injured justice, and secured the great ends of his moral government, our blessed Lord had still continued the captive of death, and had not been discharged from the arrest of justice or the prison of the grave. But it was not possible for death with all its iron bands to detain him a prisoner in the grave; for he fully paid the debt he undertook to discharge, and answered all the demands of the broken law and injured justice of God. Having made a complete atonement for the sins of the world, God himself, the righteous judge, has testified his acceptance of it, in his raising him from the dead and setting him on his own right hand, far above all principalities and powers. Blessed be God, that he has established our hope of salvation through his son, upon such an immovable foundation!

3. *Let us learn to rejoice in Jesus Christ, who ever lives to carry on the great design of our salvation here with success, until it be finally compleated in glory.*

Let us call upon our souls to magnify the Lord, who *ever lives* to make intercession for us, who is therefore able to recommend all our prayers and services to the audience and acceptance of his heavenly father; who

is able to wash our guilty souls in his own blood, and by that all prevailing plea, to obtain for us the pardon of all our daily offences, and all those communications of grace and strength which our various circumstances require. Why then should our souls starve in the midst of plenty? Why should the trembling christian be discouraged with the views of his corruptions or the weakness of his graces, while Jesus Christ, his glorious head is able to diffuse vital spirits to all the members of his mystical body, for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; and while he is both able and willing to maintain and increase their spiritual life, by the constant communications and influences of his quickening spirit. Rather let us triumph, with the apostle, "who shall condemn? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, and there makes intercession for us." Rather let the humble christian say, I know that the blessed Jesus lives, and that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily, that of his fullness I might receive grace upon grace. I know that he lives; and because he lives I shall also live, and see him as he is, and behold that incomprehensible glory which he has obtained as the reward of his meritorious death. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and the worms shall destroy this mortal body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; for he has the keys of death, and though my body be detained a prisoner of the grave for a season, yet at the appointed hour he will unlock these silent dormitories of the dead, and raise up my sleeping dust to immortal life and glory.

1. *Has the blessed Jesus the keys of the invisible world and of death?*

How deservedly is he entitled to our esteem and love, our reverence and subjection, our trust and confidence? How vast and extensive is his dominion, whose authority reaches to both worlds, and who has all power in heaven and earth? All the inhabitants of this world are subject to his controul; and if we survey the worlds above, how spacious are the regions in which our Lord presides? If this diminutive globe on which we breathe, swarms in every part with living inhabitants, and all governed and supported by his infinite understanding and power, can we suppose that the immense regions above us are a solitary uninhabited desert? And how astonishing is that almighty power that sways the sceptre over worlds above worlds, and systems above systems, ranged in endless gradation through the unlimited regions of space! How amazing is that wisdom which directs all their motions and operations, and how diffusive that goodness which supplies the wants of every thing that lives, through the unseen territories of our Lord's universal empire! O what admiring and adoring thoughts should we entertain concerning the majesty, the grandeur and authority of our exalted Redeemer! and how humbly should we join with all in earth and heaven, in bowing the knee to him and in confessing him to be Lord, to the glory of God the father! O let us cheerfully embrace every opportunity of recognising *his* authority over us, as our Lord and Redeemer, who has not only made and preserved us, but who has also redeemed us by his own blood. Let us reverence him as the Lord of

both living and dead, submit to the sceptre of his grace, and resolutely engage in a course of unfeigned obedience to him; remembering, that as he has an unquestionable right to our subjection, so he has the keys of the invisible world, and can reward our fidelity to him by opening the gates of the new Jerusalem for our reception, or punish us for our obstinate rebellion against him, by opening the gates of hell and consigning us to that burning tophet, which is kindled by the breath of the Almighty and the fury of his vengeance. With what cordiality and affection should we therefore open our hearts for his reception, who stands at the door knocking for admission, by the calls of his providence and the solicitations of his spirit, with infinite compassion and long suffering? How ungrateful and dangerous is it to neglect his importunate invitations by frivolous excuses and tedious delays; seeing he has the keys of death, and can at his sovereign pleasure, dislodge our souls from their clay tenements, and change our state of trial for a state of final retribution.

With what confidence, may we, my friends, who have received him as the Lord our Saviour, by a living faith, and sworn allegiance to him as our king in Zion, commit the keeping of our souls and bodies to him, who stands engaged by covenant to support us in the spiritual warfare, “by the right hand of his righteousness;” and who having all power in heaven and earth, is both able and willing to preserve us “by his mighty power through faith unto salvation.” With what confidence may we depend upon him who is alive forevermore, and has the keys of the invisible world and death, for all the necea-

sary supplies of grace and strength, and a complete victory over all our spiritual enemies. What can destroy those that are protected by that almighty hand, that sways the sceptre over universal nature? And with what confidence may we commit our departing spirits into his hands, to whom it belongs to open the everlasting doors of the celestial Paradise for our reception? O! let us never then provoke him to withdraw his protection from us, and leave us in the power of our enemies: but let us adhere with unshaken fidelity, to his cause and interest in every circumstance of life. Let no other lords have dominion over us: let not the world, nor sin, nor the dearest comforts on earth, usurp the dominion of our hearts; but let us preserve them sacred to the Lord of glory. Let us follow the lamb wheresoever he leads, that he may charge his watchful providence with our preservation in every danger in life, and that when he turns the key of death to bring us into the invisible world, we may be ever with the Lord, and behold his glory and see him as he is.

SERMON VII.

THE HAPPY TENDENCY OF CHRISTIANITY.

LUKE, IX, 46.

For the son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

As our blessed Saviour passed through Samaria, in his way to Jerusalem, to celebrate the passover there, he sent some messengers before him to provide entertainment for himself and his attendants. But there was an inveterate hatred subsisting between the Jews and Samaritans ever since the latter had forsaken the temple and worship of God at Jerusalem; which ran so high, that they would have no dealings with one another. For this reason, they would not receive him; because "his face was, as though he would go up to Jerusalem;" but denied him even the common offices of humanity and civility. This inhuman treatment so inflamed the spirits of James and John, two of our Lord's disciples, that they desired nothing but his consent to inflict some exemplary punishment upon them; and therefore said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?" The action of Elijah, here referred to, is particularly related in 2 Kings, 1st chap. But these disciples did not attend to the different dispensations under which Elijah lived, and which our Saviour was

about to introduce; nor did they consider that things done by an extraordinary spirit, should not be drawn into precedents in ordinary cases; nor how inconsistent with the genius of the gospel, that temper of theirs must be, which could dictate so much cruelty. Therefore, notwithstanding the zeal, which they discovered for the honor of their master, and although they endeavored to justify it by the example of so great a prophet, yet our Saviour was so far from approving such a motion that he rejected it with the utmost abhorrence. He turned and rebuked them, and said, "ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." You little consider how impossible it is for me to approve of your proposal, as it flows from a spirit quite inconsistent with the salutary design of my coming into the world, which is not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; not only to purchase eternal life and glory for them in a future state, but also to make them as happy in this, as the present constitution of things will admit. That the design of our Saviour's coming into the world is not to be confined to his procuring eternal redemption for us from ruin and misery and eternal happiness in the world to come, but also extends to the promoting our happiness in this imperfect state, appears from its being opposed to the temporal destruction, which the mistaken zealous disciples would have brought upon the Samaritans for their inhuman treatment of their master.

And indeed it might well be expected from the appearance of our Saviour amongst our degenerate race,

in the character of a messenger sent from God, and the founder of a religion, which was to be propagated through the world; that he would have a particular regard to the present welfare and happiness of men. For it is not to be supposed, that God, who created and continually preserves us, that he might communicate the effects of his benignity and love to us, and who has formed us with such capacities and mutual dependencies, as plainly point out our duty to contribute to each other's happiness in this world; should send his son as our saviour, who, notwithstanding, should be unconcerned about our comfort and happiness in this state of mortality and sorrow. The natural apprehensions which we have of God, lead us obviously to conclude, that our Saviour would not only secure our greatest and most extensive happiness in another world, but also would take care to provide for that part of it, which was to be enjoyed in this life. Accordingly, when our Lord appeared in the flesh, he soon made it ardent that he had that kind and beneficent intention towards us, which might have been reasonably expected in him; that the policy of this world was not the spring of his actions; that he came not to promote any little selfish ends of his own; but his design was noble, generous and friendly to mankind; to redeem them from the ruins of their fall; to confirm them in the joyful expectation of a happy immortality; to render their condition here easy and comfortable, and to diffuse a spirit of peace, harmony and love through human society. This will appear by considering, the conduct of our Saviour, while on earth, and what he has done to promote both our temporal and eternal happiness.

1. *He died to deliver us from the curse of a broken law and to make our peace with God.*

Reason as well as revelation assure us, that mankind were originally created pure and upright, and that we have lost our primitive rectitude and innocence; so that human nature is universally and unexceptionably corrupted and degenerate. The natural consequence of this is, that we are disaffected to God and his ways; or as the apostle expresses it, are enmity against God, and are not subject to his laws, nor indeed can be, until we are renewed and changed by the spirit of God. Hence we became liable to suffer the threatened punishment of sin, which destroys all hopes of happiness, until we were delivered from it. But for this benevolent purpose, Christ came as our Redeemer to interpose for our relief, by submitting to bear in his own person, the punishment due to our sins. Hence he is said "to be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; to be delivered up for our offences; to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; to be cut off, but not for himself; to die the just for the unjust, that we might live through him; to be made a curse for us; to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; and to have the iniquity of us all laid upon him by God, so that by his stripes we are healed." The plainest and easiest construction of all these and many such scriptural expressions must be, that Jesus Christ suffered the punishment that was due to our sins, and died as our substitute in our stead; that thereby we might be delivered from the curse or penalty of a broken law, and be justified through the redemption that

is in him. And this doctrine of the vicarious sufferings of Christ in our room, is sufficiently confirmed by his being so often called in scripture, a “sacrifice for sin,” and “the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world ;” as the great antitype prefigured by the propitiatory sacrifices under the law, which only had their accomplishment in him. These piacular victims were of divine appintment ; and although they could not of themselves take away sin or expiate its guilt, yet they were instituted as types and figures of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, “whose blood cleanseth from all sin.” Now these sacrifices were substituted in the room of the offender, and died instead of those sinners for whom they were offered ; and this notion prevailed through the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles ; and therefore, as these propitiatory sacrifices could not purge the conscience and remove the guilt of sin, but were emblems of the sacrifice of Christ, we must conclude that Christ in the same manner died in the room and stead of sinners, that they might be released from their obligations to punishment, and entitled through the merits of his death and sufferings, to eternal life and glory.

Thus our title to the joys and happiness of heaven is secured by Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a “propitiation for our sins, through faith in his blood.” But in order to make our salvation complete, our disaffection to God must also be removed by the sanctifying influences of his holy spirit ; and therefore, Christ has appointed various ordinances and institutions, and required the performanee of certain duties, that by these means of grace we may have the natural enmity of our

hearts against God removed, and our tempers and dispositions formed after his own image, and prepared for glory and happiness. And while we are considering these we shall have an opportunity of seeing, that while Christ, by the appointment of them, is making us meet for the inheritance with the saints in light, he has also consulted for our comfort and happiness in this imperfect state. Therefore we may add, that he has not only died for us, but also that,

2. *He has given us the completest system of rules and precepts, which when observed, tend to promote both our temporal and eternal happiness.*

“The grace of God, which has appeared bringing salvation,” or the gospel of Christ, teaches us “to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world.” There is not an irregular practice or wrong affection countenanced or tolerated in the gospel. It connives at no vice, and permits us to gratify no sordid and irregular passions. It is its peculiar and distinguishing glory, that it either expressly or implicitly commands every virtue that has a tendency to perfect human nature. In general, “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, virtuous or praise-worthy, we are commanded to think on these things and to excel in them.”* Let any one read the gospel with the least attention and impartiality, and he must see that the great design and business of it is, to inculcate all those virtues

* Phil. iv. 8.

which are the sources of public and private, of temporal and eternal happiness. It strictly enjoins all the branches of piety towards God; an awful veneration of his majesty, the strongest love and gratitude for his mercies, a perfect resignation to his will, and a firm confidence in his almighty power and unlimited goodness. It indispensably requires an exact performance of those duties of justice, fidelity, compassion, charity, and benevolence towards men, which are essentially necessary to our happiness in a social state; and it does not permit us to gratify our private desires to the prejudice and detriment of others. It requires magistrates to provide for the safety and welfare of the communities in which they govern, by a steady and impartial administration of justice; and subjects to honor, support and assist them in the execution of their offices, as being persons set over them for their good. It commands all men to fulfil the duties of their several relations; to be laborious and diligent in their respective callings and employments, that they may be not only no burden to the community, but also able to communicate to its indigent members; to be perfectly honest and equitable in all their transactions with one another; to cultivate an extensive spirit of humanity, meekness, forgiveness, and benevolence; not to confine our good will to one party or denomination, but to do good unto all as we have opportunity. Again, are there certain affections which tend to make us comfortable and easy in ourselves, which have a more peculiar reference to the cultivation and improvement of our own minds, which yield us a lasting and substantial pleasure, and which prepare us for the joys of the heavenly world? It is also manifest, that the gospel strictly re-

commends and insists upon these as essential to the character of christians, and absolutely necessary to our happiness in the world to come. Hence are those exhortations to deny ourselves, to crucify the flesh, to set our affections on things above, and to have our conversation in heaven, and the like. In a word, the gospel insists upon our constant and unremitting endeavours to glorify God, to conform ourselves to his image, and to imitate all his imitable perfections. This is the constant strain and tenor of our holy religion; these are the things which it inculcates in the most earnest and affectionate manner, as the great end and business of life, which must be performed as ever we would answer the obligations laid on us by the infinite love of God and Christ, and as ever we would obtain their favor and the happiness of the coming world.

Now, when these things are carefully considered, may we not justly conclude that our blessed Redeemer has consulted both for our temporal and eternal happiness, in giving us such an excellent and compleat system of rules and precepts for the regulation of our conduct? Are not these things the very source, from whence public and private happiness immediately flows; which never fail to make societies flourish in prosperity and glory, and which prepare us for the pure and unmixed joys of heaven? What can contribute more to our comfort and happiness here, both as individuals and as members of society, than a virtuous temper and disposition, attended with a correspondent course of action; a supreme love, reverence, gratitude and submission to the author of our beings, together with a regular con-

fidence in his power, wisdom and goodness; a careful observance of the various offices of love, justice, benevolence and humanity towards our fellow men; a just moderation of our appetites and passions, and a due subjection of them to the higher powers of the soul, according to the dictates of reason and revelation? Every one, upon the least consideration, must acknowledge, that the exercise of these dispositions and affections affords the most noble pleasures of any with which he is acquainted; that they affect him in the most lively manner; are steady and permanent in their nature; are of constant use to support and revive him under every calamity of life, and to give him the most ravishing prospect of eternity. Thus has Christ, by his coming into the world, consulted, for our comfort and happiness in time and through eternity, by the precepts and directions which he has given us. And this argument would still receive additional weight, had we time to consider the institutions of Christ, and the various discoveries made in the gospel, which all tend to encourage and establish the practice of piety and goodness in all its branches, and consequently, to lay a more lasting foundation for comfort and happiness. Such are the clear and full representations of the divine nature and perfections, and of the worship due to him, the more certain discovery of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, of the resurrection of the body, and the final judgment, together with the various doctrines relating to the incarnation, birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of Christ. But barely mentioning these, we proceed to shew farther, that Christ came not to destroy, but to

save our lives, and to consult for our happiness here and hereafter; when.

3. *He left us the most perfect example for our imitation, and commands us to conform ourselves to it.*

Whosoever reads over the history of his life, transmitted to us by the Evangelists, must soon be convinced that his behaviour was not only innocent and inoffensive, but also highly beneficent and useful. His conversation was perfectly agreeable to the doctrines, which he taught, and he fully answered the character given of him, that “he went about doing good.” If we would form a just notion of the unbounded compassion of his heart, and the extensive usefulness of his life, we should follow him, healing the sick and curing the most obstinate diseases; having compassion on the hungry, and feeding thousands with miraculous bread; giving speech to the dumb, and unstopping the ears of the deaf; restoring sight to the blind, and strengthening the limbs of the maimed and lame; and raising the dead, to shew himself the Lord both of the living and of the dead. Such was the compassion of our Saviour to the bodies of men, that he gladly embraced every opportunity of relieving them from pain, and of rendering them healthful and sound. Nor have we a single instance of his rejecting any, that ever applied to him with a suitable disposition of mind, or of his sending them away without a blessing. Though he was in such poor and mean circumstances, that he could not in the ordinary way relieve the outward distresses of the miserable objects, which daily met him and applied to him;

yet he did not fail to use his divine power to supply this deficiency, working miracles for their relief. To ask of him was the certain way to receive the blessing and to believe that he was able and willing to confer it, a never failing recommendation to his mercy. Nay, we often find him bestowing blessings unasked, and when there were no objects remaining in any particular place, that needed his assistance, he went to others more remote, that he might find fresh instances of misery and distress, to whom he might extend his compassion and help.

But the goodness of our blessed Redeemer was not confined to the bodies and outward circumstances of men: He came to procure nobler blessings for their immortal souls, and “to seek and to save them that were lost.” Hence we find him, with inexpressible affection and tenderness, addressing sinners, and directing them into the ways of salvation and peace. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” was the kind invitation of this friend and lover of men. And “whosoever comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out,” was the glorious encouragement, which he gave, to trust in him, and accept his offers of peace and pardon. He went about with unwearied diligence from place to place, using the most earnest persuasives and arguments to every thing, that has a tendency to make men happy, in time and through eternity; kindly reproving sinners for their vices; exhorting them to return to a better temper and conduct; encouraging their faith and repentance, by the promises of mercy and the offers of everlasting glory; and mourn-

ing over the ingratitude and obstinacy of impenitent sinners. His love to men engaged him to submit to a life of labor and fatigue ; for as he was touched with a feeling of their infirmities, he declined no pains or trouble to remove them, and accounted his own sufferings repaid by making others happy. In these good offices he continually employed himself, and took so much delight in them, that he could never be diverted from them ; by all the ungrateful usage, which he met with ; by the perverse constructions that were put upon his most generous and disinterested actions ; nor by all the hatred, rage and persecution, which he foresaw his persevering in them would draw upon him. Though he was exposed to all kinds of evil treatment, and was more injured and abused for his good offices to mankind, than any man that ever lived ; yet he never discovered any thing of a malicious and avengeful disposition ; he had indeed a very lively sense of the indignities offered to him, but never rendered evil for evil, or railing for railing ; but on the contrary expressed the greatest goodwill for his enemies, by endeavoring to correct their tempers and conduct, and by hearty prayers to God for their forgiveness. This was the amiable and beneficent conduct of the founder of our religion ; this is the example, which he proposed to our imitation, and which he has obliged us all to follow ; telling us that he had left us an example, that we should do as he had done ; that we should learn of him ; and love one another as he had done. From all, which we may rationally conclude, that our blessed Redeemer consulted not only our future, but also our present happiness, by coming into the world ; because he not only made it the busi-

ness of his whole life, but also has by the influence of his example and authority made it the duty of his followers to do the same.

But that Christ has consulted both for our temporal and eternal happiness by coming into the world, appears from this; that,

4. *He has given us the most powerful arguments, motives, promises and assistances, to engage us in such a course as will effectually secure this end.*

Under the gospel we are addressed by every argument that can be drawn from love, reverence and gratitude to God and Christ; from the expectations of an inconceivable happiness in the world to come, which God has connected with our obedience to his laws, and from that awful destruction which awaits the obstinate and impenitent sinner. Every argument is used in the gospel, that is calculated to move the human heart, or that can be drawn from the consideration both of the present and coming world, in whatsoever light they are viewed. We have exceeding great and precious promises made to us, that we might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust; and that this is the great end of them, the apostle assures us when he says, "Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." And on the other hand, all the awful and terrible things that are threatened in the gospel, were denounced against sinners, that they might

be engaged to live as becomes the gospel, in holiness and happiness, and to fly from the wrath to come. For this salutary end, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.” And to take away every objection that can be made against the practice of holiness from the present weakness and imperfection of our natures, or from the strictness of the precepts of the gospel; it gives us the greatest reason to expect all necessary assistance in the performance of duty. The most cogent reasonings and eloquent harangues of the ancient philosophers, were found ineffectual for conquering the natural corruption of our hearts, for subduing the passions, and for inspiring the people with the love of virtue. But we have reason to expect a more powerful method of persuasion, even the inspiration of him, who is the God of the spirits of all flesh, who formed the soul of man within him, and who, by a thousand secret ways, can convey truth to the heart, can enlighten the darkened understandings, and rectify all the disorders of the soul. Christ has promised his humble followers, that “his grace shall be sufficient for them, and his strength made perfect in their weakness.” And the apostle Paul assures us, “that through Christ strengthening him, he could do all things.” The holy spirit is promised to christians, to sanctify and guide them through life; to be a principle of divine life in them; to comfort and support them in the performance of every duty. Now, whosoever impartially considers the excellence and tendency of the precepts of the gospel, the amiable and attractive example of the blessed Redeemer, together with the cogent arguments and motives used to engage our compli-
ance

with them, and the powerful assistance of the spirit of grace to enable us to do so, must be convinced that Jesus Christ, by coming into the world, has laid a sufficient foundation for the practice of universal righteousness, in all its amiable branches, and consequently has consulted both for our present and future happiness.—For “godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.”

APPLICATION.

1. *Has Christ then come to save us from ruin and to provide for our happiness here and hereafter? How should this engage us to esteem that institution which he has appointed for this gracious and benevolent purpose?*

There is certainly no man, who has any regard for his own salvation or the happiness of mankind, but must heartily value and esteem the gospel of Christ, which is so well calculated for the reformation of human nature, and for promoting our perfection in holiness and happiness. The intrinsic goodness and useful tendency of the gospel, is a sufficient foundation for our entertaining the highest esteem for it, and for making our hearts overflow with love and gratitude to its adorable author, who has visited us in our miserable condition, and has ordered us such an excellent institution for engaging us to forsake every sin, and to return to God and our duty, that we may be forever happy. The ancient patriarchs and prophets desired earnestly to see and hear the glorious discoveries that are now made to us in the gospel: but God has reserved these glorious bles-

sings for us. We must then be extremely stupid and insensible, if grateful impressions of these things do not remain on our hearts. O! how should our souls magnify the Lord, the God of our salvation, who has visited and redeemed us, and raised up for us, a mighty Saviour, “who is able and willing to save to the uttermost.”

2. *Has Christ come to save and not to destroy us? How careful should we be, that our immortal souls be not lost amidst such advantages of salvation.*

Suffer me, my friends, to urge you in the most solemn manner, to enquire with impartiality, whether the design of the gospel has taken place with regard to your own souls; or whether all the labours and sufferings of the blessed Redeemer, have had any effect upon you, to convince you of your need of an interest in him, and of his ability and willingness to save all that come unto him, and to bring you to a cordial approbation and acceptance of the offered method of salvation. No doubt, you hope well concerning yourselves: but do your tempers and lives lay any solid foundation for your hopes? Remember it is the idlest dream that ever imposed on mankind, to hope that you are interested in the righteousness of Christ, while you do not imitate his example and live by his gospel! To live in the habitual practice of any sin, whether secretly or openly, is absolutely inconsistent with being born of God and renewed in the temper of your minds, without which you cannot be saved. Christ came to save us in a way of holiness and faith.

How inexcusable then must you be if under all the advantages and obligations you continue impenitent and wicked.

But are there not some now hearing me, who, notwithstanding all that Christ has done to save you, yet continue negligent and careless about your temporal and eternal happiness? But what can engage you to be so cruel to yourselves, and to ruin your precious souls, when you are under no necessity of doing it; when Christ has done so much to prevent it, and when thereby you must be guilty, not only of the most consummate folly and madness, but also of the basest ingratitude to Christ, our best benefactor? Shall Christ think it worth his labor and pains to submit to inconceivable sufferings in his body and soul, and even to the wrath of God and the accursed death of the cross, in order to provide for our redemption from the everlasting torments of hell and for our eternal happiness in the world above? And will you, notwithstanding all this, plunge yourselves into irretrievable misery, through your own careflessness, or attachments to things, which in this comparative view are but vanity of vanities? Shall the blessed redeemer point out to you in the plainest manner, the road that leads to eternal life, and beseech you, by his dying groans, by his agonies on the cross, when he made his soul an offering for sin, by all the horrors of eternal despair, and by all the glory of the heavenly state, to walk in the ways, that he has prescribed for you; and shall you still, ungratefully reject, his kind invitations, and walk in the ways of your own hearts, dreaming from day to day, till you drop into that horrible pit, from whence there is no redemption. How

can you thus requite the God that made you, and the Lord that redeemed you with his gracious blood? May God awaken you to consideration before it be too late. Consider how you will look upon your careless or wicked life, when you are standing on the confines of the invisible world, and ready to launch into the shoreless ocean, without any thing to support you under the agonies of dissolution, or the far more intolerable forebodings of a guilty conscience? How will you account for this conduct at the impartial bar of your judge? Will you not tremble and be covered with inexpressible confusion, when he will open the books, and read over the records of your ignorance and sloth, your carelessness and delays, your mispent sabbaths, abused ordinances, slighted seasons of grace and broken covenants with God and man? How can you endure it, that all the glories of heaven are forever lost, through your own obstinacy and sloth; that your soul, which should have been your principle care, is now sinking into eternal flames, and that you must hear that doleful sentence passed upon you: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels;" passed upon you, by that compassionate Redeemer, who died to save you, and who is yet stretching out the arms of his mercy, beseeching you by every argument that can move human nature, to come to him for salvation and happiness. You may think of these things, as you have often done, with indifference; but as surely as Christ died to save sinners, this will be the condition of every careless impenitent offender. And are you not guilty in your own consciences? And do not your own consciences say that it is infinitely better, to secure a title to that salvation,

which Christ came to procure for you, before it be too late? And can you after all this, leave the house of God this day, without any resolutions of greater care and diligence for the future? “O! that you were wise, that you would consider your latter end; that you would mind the things of your peace, before they are hid from your eyes.” These are not visionary notions; this is not empty harangue, there is a glorious reality in the gospel, to all those who cordially comply with the design of Christ’s coming into the world; and it is full of amazing terror to all that neglect this great salvation. These are matters in which our souls, our immortal souls are nearly interested. O let us then be persuaded to labour above all things, to secure a title to that salvation, which Christ came to purchase, and which is so freely offered in the gospel. Let us abandon our sins and follies, and apply to him for a pardon through his blood; and let us make it the constant business of our lives to adorn his doctrines, and to live as becomes those that are redeemed by the blood of Christ.

SERMON VIII.

THE FATAL TENDENCY OF LICENTIOUS PLEASURE.



1. TIM. v, 6.

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

YOUNG persons are the hope of every society, whether civil or religious; and surely it must be natural for those, who regard the prosperity of the public or the interests of christianity, to be solicitous that they should be instructed in those principles, which tend to make them useful members of the community in which they live, and ornaments to the religion which they profess; and that they be warned against such practices as would frustrate both these important purposes. And when we consider the numberless snares and temptations to which they are exposed, and particularly how apt they are to be led astray by sensual pleasures, at that season, when they have the keenest relish for them; it surely cannot be unseasonable to spend a few thoughts upon the fatal tendency of a life of licentiousness, in which some things may occur, that may not be altogether useless to those of more advanced years.

Pleasure in its own nature, abstractedly considered, is not unlawful. We are naturally desirous of it, and evidently designed to enjoy, not only those pleasures,

which, being of a moral kind, greatly exalt and ennoble our natures: but also these, which having a more immediate reference to the body, alleviate the burdens and soften the cares of life. We are under no necessity of denying ourselves of these entirely: for there is an allowable and laudable satisfaction to be enjoyed even in worldly and sensible goods, while we keep within the bounds prescribed by reason and revelation. Our only danger lies in excess: but the danger being imminent and the consequences fatal and destructive beyond description, we cannot be careful enough to guard against them. Those that give themselves up to a life of licentious pleasure, vanity, and debauchery, whether of one sex or the other, are, according to the judgment of the inspired apostle, “dead while they live;” dead to all the valuable purposes of a rational and virtuous life: though naturally alive, yet they are morally and spiritually dead; though they have the appearance of men, and breathe and move, and enjoy animal gratifications, yet the more amiable affections and higher powers of their souls, which distinguish our species from the inferior creation, are so far extinct, that they are as little sensible of their dignity as men, as little mindful of the great purposes for which they were endowed with these rational powers, and as little careful to act as becomes men and christians, as if they did not exist at all. Or at least, the phrase, *being dead*, must imply a very high perversion of our moral powers, and a very deep insensibility to all the valuable purposes of a rational life. This, no doubt, appears a very strange position to those, who have a keen relish for what is commonly called a life of gaiety and pleasure: who think that they, of all men.

have the justest estimate of life, and that others of a different turn, are dull and insipid mortals, cramped and enslaved with precise and superstitious notions, and do not enjoy, but only drag through and endure life. But the judgment of God, delivered by the inspired apostle in our text, is of infinitely more weight, as will appear by considering,

I. The fatal consequences of a life of licentious pleasure.

1. *Sensual pleasures inflame the passions more and more, without affording that satisfaction which we expect from them.*

Every extravagant passion rises in its demands by indulgence, until it is confirmed into a vicious habit, and we are sunk into the most ignominious slavery and bondage. There are degrees in the degeneracy and corruption, which proceeds from a life of licentious pleasure. The first beginnings of it generally communicate but a comparatively small degree of infection to the soul, which might soon be cured by watchfulness and care: but when men are at no pains to make a timely retreat, or to restrain their desires, but go on headlong in their libertine course; they soon lose their liberty, and their passions grow impetuous and domineering. So that what was at first perhaps, a gentle and soothing solicitation to gain our consent, becomes by degrees a preremptory command, which can neither be safely complied with, nor resisted with ease. We are at first won upon by flattery and falshood, but afterwards ruled with a tyrant's rod, and find our slavery to be both unavoidable

and intolerable. And thus irregular passions, by frequent indulgence, establish themselves in such an absolute dominion in the soul, that nothing but the powerful operation of the sacred spirit, can ever conquer or subdue them. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? then may ye also, that are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.” And what do these criminal gratifications give us in exchange for our liberty? Do they ever afford that satisfaction which they promised? Does not universal experience prove, that the objects which raised the most eager and impatient expectations, as frequently have disappointed them? But the next airy phantom that presented itself was to make amends for the former disappointment. But how often has this bubble also broken when the experiment was repeated? How often has the expected joy vanished when the unhappy devotees to pleasure were ready to grasp at it? And now, who that has any sentiments truly becoming his rational nature, does not feel his heart glow with indignation at such an inglorious bondage as this, for which there is nothing given in return but vexation, disappointment and shame? This is one of the fatal consequences of a life of licentious pleasure.

2. Sensual Pleasures are always attended with anxiety and pain on every recollection.

Even the lawful pleasures of sense are so inadequate to the desires of an immortal soul, and so fleeting and transitory, that we soon disrelish and despise what lately we eagerly pursued, and look back with contempt or indifference on what we viewed in prospect with delight and impatience. But criminal pleasures are always at-

tended with remorse and shame, until we have made such fatal advances in the road to destruction, that “our consciences are seared as with an hot iron,” and the voice of reason and revelation is buried in the tumult of disorderly passions and irregular appetites. For it is wisely ordered by God, for the advancement of virtue and religion among mankind, that shame and vexation should be necessarily connected with the practice of sin and a sense of guilt; so that no man can live in open rebellion to the laws of God, without feeling at certain intervals, the severe remonstrances of a condemning conscience. And this alone is sufficient to embitter all the joys of life and to fill us with uneasiness and terror, whenever we give ourselves an opportunity of serious recollection; and to involve ourselves in a hurry of business or a tiresome round of diversion and gaiety, is but a fatal and fruitless expedient to silence the voice of conscience.— We cannot fly from ourselves. This indwelling tormentor of the guilty sinner, always accompanies him. Or if he should be so unhappy as to stifle its remonstrances for a season: yet it will one day awake with redoubled fury, proportioned to the soundness and duration of its sleep, either in this or the coming world. And nothing but the long suffering, patience and forbearance of God prevents those, who go on in a course of sin, from feeling the severe and intolerable reproaches of a wounded spirit, which are sufficient to make them a terror to themselves and to all around them; and to force them to cry out, in the agony and bitterness of their souls, with Cain, “that their punishment was greater than they could bear.” And painful as the review of criminal indulgencies must be, how many abuse the patience

and mercy of God, which should lead them to repentance, and eagerly pursue the same imposture which has often imposed upon them, and which has been as often detected by them ; though in direct contradiction to the repeated admonitions of their best friends, to their own experience and conscience, and to the most solemn warnings of God in his word and providence. But this is not all :

3. *An addictedness to sensual indulgencies has ordinarily a destructive influence upon our health.*

It would be endless to enumerate all the hazards and accidents to which an eager pursuit of pleasure exposes those, who have lost the government of themselves, and have given the reins into the hands of their passions to carry them wherever they will, at all adventures. Youthful passions urge and stimulate each other, and prevent the salutary influence, which tender seasons, the admonitions of parents and friends, the precepts of the gospel, or our own good resolutions might have, to work a reformation. Sensual pleasures have attractions fatally successful against the united force of all these, until they lead us on from one stage of wickedness to another ; nor do they lose their force and power before they have shattered the constitution and destroyed the health. So irresistible are their delusive charms when united with the power of example, number and importunity, that unless the grace of God deliver us from their tyranny they soon overbear the most sober purposes ; although universal experience proves that they are followed with such a train of diseases, as

will soon bring on the dissolution of the clay-tabernacle. Thus health, that most invaluable of earthly blessings, often falls a sacrifice to lawless pleasures. And what more properly calls for our indignation and pity; or what more miserable objects can we behold, than persons, who have rendered themselves incapable of enjoying those pleasures that are rational and innocent, possessing the iniquities of their youth, sinking under the weight of diseases, which they have brought on themselves by their own extravagance and debauchery, and dying martyrs to their own lusts?

4. An open course of sensuality fixes an indelible reproach upon our characters.

Bad as the state of the world is, vice has never got the ascendant over virtue, so far as to be accounted honorable by mankind. The good and virtuous love and esteem those that act agreeably to the voice of reason and revelation; and they are secretly esteemed and revered by the abandoned and profane. The care and vigilance which the wicked use in order to conceal their vices from the eyes of mankind, the anxiety which they endure for fear of being detected, and the confusion and shame expressed upon the discovery of their vices, is an open testimony of their inward esteem of virtue and of their consciousness of the odious nature and deformity of criminal gratifications of any kind. None have desired their vices to be enrolled among their titles of honor, nor would be willing to be characterized by them. And even the commonness of a vicious practice cannot wholly remove the just odium

which it deserves, or secure the sinners memory from reproach. The wise man observes in general of the wicked, that “their names shall rot,” and particularly of those that are addicted to sensual pleasures, that “a wound and dishonor shall they get, and their reproach shall not be wiped away.”* Thus, a life of licentiousness and debauchery stains our characters, entails disgrace and reproach on our names, and destroying our reputation, deprives us of that good opinion and confidence of others, which is necessary to our success in any calling or employment. Which brings me to add, that,

5. *A life of sensual pleasures ruins our temporal interests in the world.*

The prosecution of lawless pleasure is a costly thing, which branches itself out into innumerable expences, by which estates gained by honest industry and increased by prudent œconomy, have been speedily squandered. It is the observation of the royal preacher, that “the drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty;” and that the sensualist “shall be brought to a piece of bread.” And almost every day presents us with miserable objects reduced by their own extravagance to the most deplorable poverty and want. So that it is no wonder, to hear in the parable that the young prodigal soon wasted his substance by riotous living. Besides, an addictedness to sensuality naturally produces a complication of other vices, which have a natural tendency to

*Pro. vi, 33.

ruin the profligate sinner, and which separately are sufficient to reduce him to the lowest degree of wretchedness and want; and much more so, when they come upon him with united violence, like an armed man. And what is worse, being still unsatisfied, they cleave to him until at last they plunge him into infamy and contempt, or perhaps drive him headlong into some desperate measures, which bring him to some untimely end or public punishment. Besides, the prosecution of criminal pleasures occasions a lamentable waste and havoc of our precious time, which was given us for the important purposes of life, and the infinitely more important ones of eternity. It takes off our attention from our principle business; fills our heads and hearts with the vain amusements of life, and occasions us to lose opportunities of usefulness, which others improve. and thereby to come behind them in every valuable attainment. And we may farther observe under this head, that the just providence of God often censures in heightening the misery of the profligate sinner, and in making him feel the bitter fruits of his extravagance and riot. It is a righteous thing with an offended God to strip such of the common blessings which they abuse; and to bring those who have spent their substance in riotous living, to know the worth of those mercies which they misimprove, by the want of them, and many times by the severe necessity of begging a morsel of bread. Thus we hear, that a famine arose in the land, when the prodigal had wasted his substance, to heighten his misery by cutting off all hope of supporting himself, by his future labor or by the charity and compassion of others.

But what is worse than any thing that has yet been mentioned, is,

6. *That a predominant love of sensual pleasure kills the soul, as to any valuable purpose of life, and effectually prevents our improvement in virtue and religion.*

Whosoever considers the constitution of human nature, must soon be convinced that he has implanted in him a principle of reason, to discern the nature and tendency of actions, and a conscience, which approves or condemns every action which we perform, as it is agreeable or repugnant to the laws of God. Now, as these were evidently designed to regulate and govern the lower passions and appetites of our nature; the conduct to which they lead is briefly this. With respect to God that we worship and serve him with the most profound veneration; the sincerest love and gratitude; with the most stedfast trust and confidence, and the most humble resignation to his will; and that we express our inward sentiments and dispositions towards him in proper acts of prayer and praise, and in vigorous endeavours to comply with his will and to imitate his imitable perfections. With respect to mankind, our reason and conscience point it out, as our indispensable duty, that we abstain from all injuries, treat every man according to the strict rules of justice, righteousness and equity, and according to the dictates of compassion and humanity; that we cultivate an extensive and unconfined love and benevolence for them; and that as we are members of society connected together by the divine appointment in a variety of the most important relations for our mutual

happiness, we should endeavour to promote the public interests of the community and nation to which we belong, as well as the more private advantage of those that are dependant on us, or nearly related to us. And with regard to ourselves, the same principles teach us, that we ought to enrich our minds with religion and goodness; that we should endeavour after the highest degrees of love to God and man as the foundation of our greatest perfection and truest happiness; and that we desire and use all external benefits with a reference to this great end of our being, and thus make them subservient to our progress in the spiritual life. This is the conduct which our reason, and which the revelation of the divine will requires of us; if we would obtain the approbation of our own minds, or of the supreme judge of the universe. Now, from this we can easily see the inconsistency of a course of licentious pleasure, with a sound and vigorous state of mind, with our principal business, and truest happiness as men and christians. For when the higher powers of the soul are degraded, and passion and appetite assume the prerogative of being guides of life, and are grown strong enough to check and controul the superior faculties of the mind; we are said in scripture to be "dead in trespasses and sins," to be "the servants of sin, and to be held in the most shameful captivity to the law of sin and death." For nothing brings greater desolation into the mind, or more effectually extinguishes all the principles of the spiritual and divine life in us, than an habit of gross debauchery and a course of unbounded lawless pleasure. How is it possible that the love of God, and those other sublime affections, which we are to exercise towards the

most excellent and adorable being, should dwell in a soul sunk under the power of sensual desires and gratifications? As soon may light and darkness agree together, or a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter, as that dispositions of so contrary a nature should be prevailingly found in the same subject. And as to the offices, which we owe to society; how can that man be capable of serving the public with any punctuality, whose ruling passions all terminate on pleasing himself, with sensual gratifications; and who may easily be diverted from an employment, in which he could receive but little satisfaction. And moreover, as we have already seen, that a riotous and luxurious method of life tends to destroy the most opulent fortunes; he may, of consequence, reduce himself by his extravagance, to such circumstances, as will put it out of his power to be as beneficial to the public, as he might have been; and sometimes to such circumstances, as will dispose him to neglect not only the offices of charity and benevolence, but also of justice and equity. And as to the improvement of our minds in religion and virtue, it is certain that nothing can be a greater hinderance to this than a voluptuous dissolute course of life. For it suppresses and stifles every thing that is generous and noble in our natures, fills us with the meanest notions and views of things, sinks us into the most abject slavery, deprives us of the most exalted and durable pleasures, and in their stead affords only painful pleasures, that last but for a moment. It cramps and destroys those affections and powers, which alone make us capable of enjoying the most substantial pleasures, and exalts those desires and passions to the throne, which thereby be-

come our greatest ignominy and reproach and the source of unspeakable misery to us. The amiable graces of meekness, humility, benevolence, a generous contempt of the world, an ardent love to God and man, an uniform desire of being and doing good, and of advancing in every branch of the christian character, are not likely to flourish in a soul immersed in sensuality and sin. Our moral and intellectual powers cannot expand and gather strength but by repeated exercise and application to such subjects as are adapted to enlarge the mind, and by avoiding every thing of a contrary tendency. And surely grovelling in sensual pleasures must effectually frustrate this most important end of life? There is great need of watchfulness and care, lest we be defiled by our necessary intercourse with sensible objects, while we are passing through this ensnaring world; and how much more should we abstain from all fleshly lusts that war against the soul? It is retirement meditation and contemplation on spiritual and divine subjects, and especially, frequent converse with the father of our spirits, that qualifies us for the sublime and refined employments and delights for which we were originally designed, and after which it is our honor to be constantly aspiring.

Now from such a view of this fatal perversion of the noble powers and faculties of the soul, occasioned by a life of licentious pleasure, and of its lamentable tendency to hinder our improvement in those graces and virtues, which are our highest ornament and happiness, and which make us a comfort and blessing to those with whom we are connected; have we not reason to

conclude, that those that live in sensual pleasures “are dead, while they live;” dead to all the valuable purposes of living? Our Saviour has given us a very lively representation of the fatal tendency of a life of immoderate pleasure to wound and destroy the soul, in his parable of the prodigal; who by abandoning himself to riot and debauchery soon lost the heart and understanding of a man, and brought himself into the most miserable state, in which human nature can here be involved. And our Lord speaking of his recovery from this deplorable condition, represented it under the idea of a spiritual resurrection: “He was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

These are some of the woeful fruits of a life of licentiousness and sensuality, and the fatal consequences of it to our liberty, comfort, health, characters, interest and usefulness to ourselves and others; all which it evidently tends to destroy. And these are such, as are of themselves sufficient to alarm our fears, and to engage us to avoid it with the most sedulous care. But all these taken together, grievous and distressing as they may be, are but slight inconveniences when compared with that intolerable anguish and misery, which awaits the unhappy deluded sensualist in the world to come. For “we were born for eternity;” and it is in this state, that our souls must be trained up for heaven and purified from all uncleanness, before we can be prepared for it. Therefore, those that are sunk in sensuality, having no relish for the pure and unmixed delights and pleasures of heaven, can never expect to enter there, but must hear that awful sentence pronounced upon them,

“depart from me ye cursed into everlasting burnings, prepared for the devil and his angels.” There they must reap that everlasting harvest of shame and anguish, the seeds of which they have sown in this life: there they must feel the severe reflections of an accusing condemning conscience, and the “gnawings of that worm, that never dies:” there they must reflect with horror and despair upon their past extravagance and folly: there they must associate with tortured devils and damned spirits, for whom they have rendered themselves fit companions: there their enraged desires and passions must forever torment them, being deprived of every object that could gratify them: and there they must be tormented in those unquenchable flames, which their impure desires have kindled on earth, without so much as one drop of water to cool their scorched tongues. This is beyond all peradventure, the certain issue of a life of sensual pleasure persisted in without reformation.

APPLICATION.

1. *And what now remains, but that we should all be persuaded to avoid and guard against all criminal gratifications of every kind.*

And, my young friends, let me beseech and entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, who died for your precious and immortal souls, to guard against such a dangerous course with the greatest solicitude. He well knew the awful misery in which it would involve you in time and through eternity, when he submitted to the overwhelming agonies of the cross, to redeem you from a vain conversation and the tyranny of ungoverned passions and appetites, and “to purify you to himself a pe-

culiar people zealous of good works." And can you bear the thoughts of doing every thing in your power to frustrate so benevolent, and to you so advantageous, a design? Could you thus requite the dying groans of the friend of mankind, the Lord of glory? You have a strong relish and an insatiable desire for pleasures; and why can you not pursue those that are substantial; those that would exalt you and do you honor; those that are worthy of the pursuit of immortal beings; those that will endure when every earthly comfort is gone; those that will be continually increasing through the boundless ages of eternity? Is it not more preferable to choose that course of life, which will make you comforts to your parents and relatives; honored and beloved by all good men; blessings to the society in which you live; approved by your God and judge, and inconceivably happy in his presence forever; than by a life of sensuality, to enslave yourselves to the vilest passions; to ruin your health and reputations; to become curses and plagues to mankind; hated and despised while you live; and when you die, be condemned to take up your habitations in everlasting burnings? O! be persuaded frequently to consider, that you are more exposed to temptations from this quarter, than those of more advanced age; and let not that formidable phantom, *custom or fashion*, frighten you out of your reason and the best principles of your religious education. Look on those who would solieit you to join with them in such base and unmanly practices, as acting the part of the great enemy of God and man, who lies in wait for your precious souls. Frequently consider, that a few years will alter your judgments of these pleasures, that are so

highly valued and so eagerly pursued by those that have given up themselves to vice and extravagance. Frequently think with yourselves, the sorry exchange you would get for the ravishing joys of eternity, and the rivers of pleasure that flow from the throne of God; and live daily under the habitual impression of this thought, "that the eyes of an holy God are ever on you, and that he will one day call you to give an account for all the deeds done in the body." And lastly, pray to him daily, that he would guide you through the slippery paths of youth, and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom.

2. And as for you, my friends, who are advanced in years, I trust that you have tasted so much of the pleasures of religion, that when you recollect the divine entertainments of retired hours, of solemn ordinances, and sacramental transactions, you feel a sacred indifference to the fleeting and unsatisfactory enjoyments of this world, an utter abhorrence of carnal pleasures, and a tender compassion and pity for those unhappy mortals, who are dead in sin and the servants of corruption.— And let us all aspire more earnestly after those sublime and unspeakable joys that are at the right hand of God; and let the enlivening prospect animate us to bear the burdens of mortality with patience and resignation, and quicken and encourage us in our preparation for the inheritance with the saints in light.

SERMON IX.

THE PROSPERITY OF FOOLS, THEIR DESTRUCTION.

PRO. I, 32.

The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

THE primary design of God, in his rich and gracious blessings conferred upon us, is to engage our supreme love and affection for himself, and to constrain us to serve him “with a perfect heart and a willing mind.” Hence, the apostle Paul says:* “the goodness of the Lord leadeth to repentance;” as it is the most natural consequence that can be drawn from the divine clemency and bounty. Thus the Lord draws us “with the chords of love and the bands of a man.” The mercies of God should melt the human heart into an humble penitent frame for sin and a sincere and speedy resolution to return to him, from whom we have revolted, and who is hereby declaring that he is ready and willing graciously to receive us. But it is melancholy to observe, how many wickedly abuse the divine goodness, and pervert his rich and unmerited blessings to the contrary purposes of encouraging themselves in a bold and impious neglect of God, and in an ungrateful rebellion against his throne and

*Rom. II, 4.

government. While prosperity presents innumerable pleasing and attractive scenes to the carnal mind, the thoughtless sinner is captivated with the gay delusion; the voice of conscience is silenced, and he has neither time nor inclination to attend to the affairs of his soul and eternity. Thus sinners abuse the divine mercies to pride and vanity, to idleness and luxury; are hardened in impenitence, and grow regardless of the divine displeasure, until death puts a period to their seasons of grace.—Others, who are not sunk into such a deep and dangerous insensibility, yet are intoxicated with the good things of this world, which insensibly draw off their attention from the concerns of another world. They overvalue worldly comforts, and please themselves with an imaginary happiness in them, until their hearts are at last alienated from the adorable God, the only source of happiness to a rational creature. Instead of delighting in the favor of God, and the communications of his love, they place their supreme happiness in the enjoyments of time and sense; which is a melancholy symptom of an unrenewed, unsanctified soul, and a doleful presage of eternal ruin.—Others again, being surrounded with riches and honors, power and influence, forget that they were not made only for themselves, and that they were entrusted with these advantages for the benefit of others; and therefore, instead of being rich in good works, are barren and unfruitful in the service of God and their generation; ungrateful to God and unprofitable to men.—And others, instead of employing their prosperity and power for the glory of that God, who bestows these blessings upon them, and for the advantage of those, with whom they are connected,

are improving these talents for the hurt and oppression of their fellow men, whom it would be their glory and honor, as well as it is their duty to relieve and support. Thus the unsanctified prosperity of foolish sinners, is perverted to their ruin. Although prosperity may be improved for the most valuable purposes of living both in this and the coming world, yet through the corruption of their hearts, it becomes one of the greatest obstacles to the conversion and reformation of sinners, and one of the most dangerous engines in the hands of our great enemy, for the destruction of immortal souls. Thus "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them," not from any thing that is in prosperity, when rightly improved, but from the abuse of it. As we shall have an opportunity of shewing more fully, when we shall consider,

I. How abused prosperity tends to destroy the wicked.

II. The certainty and dreadfulnes of their destruction.

I. How abused prosperity tends to destroy the wicked.

1. *Abused prosperity leads the carnal unsanctified heart to a careless disregard and neglect of God.*

The world with its desirable and pleasing things, gaining the full possession of the hearts of men, banishes all serious thoughts and warm affections towards God. It is more especially the character of the men of this world, in their prosperity, that "God is not in all their thoughts." Their prosperity, which should lead

them to a thankful acknowledgment of that bountiful hand, from which all their mercies flow, often tempts them to an impious disbelief or disregard of his providence, and swells them with pride and confidence in their worldly enjoyments. Nebuchadnezzar transported with a flush of vain-glorious joy at the view of his magnificent buildings, breaks out in these lofty and insolent expressions: * “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” It was charged upon the prince of Tyre, “that his heart was lifted up because of his riches.” † The carnal heart, in the midst of a full fruition of this world’s goods, is apt to ascribe every success to human contrivance and endeavours, without any grateful acknowledgment of the divine liberality and beneficence. And hence, an eminent saint prayed, “give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?” ‡ And it was the advice of Moses to the people of Israel, when they should be possessed of the promised land, not to forget the Lord their God. “When the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land, which he sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildedst not, and houses full of good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive-trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware, lest thou forget the Lord, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from

*Dan. iv, 30.

†Ezek, xxviii, 5.

‡Prov. xxx, 9.

the house of bondage.”* This caution given in such circumstances, strongly intimates, that there is a sinful disposition in the carnal heart, to neglect God in the midst of affluence and prosperity. And there are not melancholy instances wanting of persons, whose superiority of rank and elevation of station give them many advantages above others, and who, notwithstanding, are the most remiss in the duties of religion, and most indifferent to all the obligations of christianity. They seem to look upon themselves too great to be good, and so high, that religion itself is below them. Because of their dignity, power and opulence, they seem to claim an immunity from the common obligations of religion, and an exemption from those rules of righteousness, to which others are bound to submit; little considering, that with regard to the affairs of their souls and of another world, they stand upon the same level with the poorest; and that all their wealth and grandeur will avail them nothing when they shall be judged by him, who is no respecter of persons. Hence the apostle exhorts the rich in this world, “not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God:” which farther shews, how apt we are in our prosperity, to depend upon riches for reputation, protection, and the provision of necessaries and comforts, to the neglect of God, the author of every good and perfect gift. Notwithstanding the evident instability of all mortal things, and their insufficiency to support or satisfy an immortal spirit, many make gold, their trust and their God, and “say unto fine gold, thou art our confidence.”† Prosperity lulls

*Deut. vi, 10, 11.

†Job. xxxi, 24.

sinner into a carnal security and hardens them against the apprehensions of the divine displeasure. Because “they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.”* They are as secure and fearless, as if the tenor of their prosperity were invariable, and no evil could disturb it; or at least, they put the evil day far off, and with the profane scoffers of old, mentioned by the prophet, they say, “the vision he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of times afar off.” And thus when the fear of God is extinguished in the soul, the divine precepts and threatenings are disregarded; and like Jehurun or the rebellious Israelites, they, “waxing fat,” and abounding in the good things of this world, “kick against God,” grow intractable and refractory to the divine commands, and “lightly esteem the rock of their salvation.”† Thus prosperity often leads the thoughtless sinner to an ungrateful neglect of God, and an impious rebellion against the throne and dignity of heaven.

2. *Sinners often abuse their prosperity, so as thereby to render the ordinary means of salvation ineffectual for their conversion.*

The holy spirit can undoubtedly, without the instrumentality of the word, so enlighten the mind and influence the will and affections, that the sinner shall be converted from the error of his ways. And we have in scripture some instances recorded, in which the spirit of grace has displayed his saving power in the immediate conversion of sinners, who were so far from being in the

*Ps. LV, 19.

†Deut. xxxii, 15.

appointed way to salvation, that they were posting on in the full career of wickedness. But God has appointed the reading and preaching of his word as the ordinary means which he will bless for the reformation of sinners; and hence the gospel is said to be “the power of God to the salvation of them that believe.” But unsanctified prosperity renders it ineffectual for this purpose. Hence the apostle, under the conduct of inspiration, observes, “that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called;”* which is explained by what another apostle says: “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.†” And our Saviour himself assures us, that “it is easier for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man, “that trusteth in his riches, to enter into the kingdom of heaven;” which shews that the riches and prosperity of sinners, expose them to some peculiar and dangerous snares. And the reason is, because pride, an unteachable temper, and the cares of the world, which are too often the attendants on prosperity, are diametrically opposite to that meekness, humility, and consideration, which are necessary for the gospel’s reception and efficacy on the heart. We are directed to “lay aside all filthiness, superfluity of naughtiness, and with meekness to receive the ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls.” A serious humble sense of our want of divine grace, together with an earnest desire to receive it, must be found in those, who can rationally expect the divine blessing to attend his word.

* 1. Cor. I, 26.

† Jam. II, 5.

For “he fills the hungry with good things, while he sends the rich empty away ;” and “gives grace to the humble, while he resisteth the proud.” And the prosperity of sinners is often abused, for the fatal purpose of encouraging them in unbelief, and a contemptuous disregard of divine truths ; so that the word preached “does not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that hear it.” Let eternal things be represented with the clearest evidence of reason and enforced with the warmest affection ; let the glories of the heavenly world be painted in the most engaging and attractive colours, or the threatnings of the law and gospel be denounced in all their terror : yet they have no efficacy on the prosperous sinner, who treats them all as vain imaginations. And we find that this temper directly leads to the forsaking of the house of God, and the assembling of ourselves together ; which sets man at a still greater distance from a reformation, as it puts them out of the appointed way of recovery : so that it is indeed a miracle of divine grace, if ever the prosperous sinner is recovered from the error of his ways, while he slights and neglects the ordinances of the gospel. But if he attends upon the word preached and read, yet if the impressions, that are at any time made upon his heart, are not cherished and kept alive by serious and frequent meditations, they will soon wear off ; and the prosperity of the sinner, which is usually attended with a multiplicity and hurry of worldly business, or worldly amusements at least, has a dangerous tendency to erase all these divine impressions. And thus the voice of conscience and the suggestions of the holy spirit, are stifled and disregarded ; and at length the spirit of grace ceases

to be a monitor to those who continue to resist his motions and counsels, and ungratefully rebel against him; and then nothing remains, but the sinner must daily grow more hardened in sin, until his conversion becomes extremely difficult and almost hopeless. Thus prosperity is often abused by sinners, so that the means of grace are rendered ineffectual for their conversion and reformation.

3. *Prosperity is dangerous and fatal to many, as they are thereby greatly exposed to the temptations of Satan, which they are not careful to discover, and resist and conquer.*

It is happy for many, that the means of gratifying their sensual and carnal appetites lie out of their power. For where the materials for exciting and inflaming the passions and appetites are ready at hand, Satan, the god of this world, is diligent in employing his infernal skill and experience, in preparing them in the most alluring manner, to captivate the affections, until he has established his dominion in the heart. And his power and art, whereby he tyrannizes over the children of disobedience, lies principally in the spacious representations and fallacious promises of happiness from the enjoyment of worldly things. Some of his temptations are to crimes of so black a complexion and so horrid a nature, that the soul starts back and shudders at the thought; and the tempter cannot succeed until by other temptations, that are more agreeable to the sensual and carnal affections, he leads them captive at his will, from one stage of wickedness to another; and thus they are at last easily over-

and many servile spirits are base enough to encourage their superiors in their vices, by representing the mere shadows of virtue as substantial virtues; and palliating the deformity of vice under honorable names. Thus their sordid penury and covetousness is termed frugality, and a commendable care of their families and friends; their revelling and intemperance is called good nature and fellowship; their lewdness and debauchery, gallantry and politeness; their extravagance, generosity and liberality: The deformity of their ambition and envy is covered under the respectable name of patriotism and public spirit, while their profaneness is stiled pleasantry, and their infidelity, free-thinking. The conversation of such under agents to the great enemy of our souls, must be extremely dangerous and corrupting; and thus sinners are often destroyed by their prosperity.

5. *The prosperity of sinners shall destroy them, when they neglect or abuse the opportunities of usefulness which it puts into their hands.*

Every worldly advantage which God bestows upon us, is a talent committed to our trust for the benefit of ourselves and others; and we must give an account of our improvement of it at his bar: As we were not born for ourselves alone, but also for others, whenever we have the power or opportunity of doing good, that circumstance is the voice of God to us to improve it, in acts of beneficence; encouraging merit, protecting oppressed innocence, establishing right and justice, diffusing happiness around us, and contributing to the temporal or eternal welfare of mankind in any other way,

as far as our influence shall extend; and whenever we neglect to improve our prosperity and the divine bounty towards us; for these and such like laudable and benevolent purposes, we evidently contradict the design of God in bestowing these talents upon us. It is an unjust monopolizing of the divine favors to ourselves, when they were designed for others also; and an embezzling of our Lord's goods, instead of being faithful stewards of his bounty, distributing to every one his portion in due season. This conduct is highly displeasing and provoking to God, and must, if persisted in, involve the selfish authors of it in eternal misery; and if so, how much more aggravated shall the destruction of those be, who use their prosperity and power for the hurt and oppression of others? The Lord of that evil servant, that begins to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, "shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites:" which is frequently represented in scripture, as a pattern and standard of the most aggravated and intolerable destruction. Thus the prosperity of foolish sinners shall destroy them.* This brings me to consider,

II. The certainty and misery of the destruction of foolish sinners.

It is irreversibly established by the divine ordination, and declared to us in the word of God, that if we live after the flesh, we shall die. All the dreadful threat-

* Mat. xxiv, 48-51.

nings denounced in the sacred oracles, shall be executed in all their fearful extent, on the impenitent sinners, who neglect God, abuse the bounties of his providence, and choose their portion in this world. When the mercy of God, which is over all his works, has been affronted and exasperated by the continual abuse of his benefits, when it is renounced and forfeited by sinners, their destruction is irreversible. The mercy of God is designed to lead sinners to repentance, and to induce them to a willing and cheerful obedience to his wise and good laws: but when it is perverted to encourage them in sin, they have reason to tremble for fear of that dreadful threatening in our context. “Because I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh: when your fear comes as a desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish comes upon you: then shall ye call upon me, but I will not answer.” This awful denunciation in our context, is pointed against the very persons, of whom we have been speaking: foolish sinners, that abuse their prosperity. Then shall those, who now shut their eyes against danger, be forced to open them and behold the fearful face of death attended with judgment, and judgment with an everlasting hell. And what can be more just and reasonable? Is it not the highest ingratitude to the adorable God? And is not ingratitude a crime of so black and detestable a nature, that all men, without exception, universally condemn and abhor it? It is an universal concession that springs from the light of nature; so

that to be defective in our observance and thankful regards to a benefactor, is unnatural and base: but to pervert the blessings of God to wicked purposes, and to render evil for good, is so direct a violation of the plainest dictates of human nature, and so contrary to the obligations which are laid upon us by the goodness of God, to serve and obey him, that it must be highly provoking to him. And must not those foolish and unwise persons expect an aggravated destruction, who presumptuously abuse the divine liberality and patience, to make them more secure and careless of their souls and eternity; to fortify them in their rebellion against their sovereign Lord and king; and to ruin his moral creation? Are not the gifts of a friend slighted, when they are employed for base and unworthy purposes? And does not God himself look upon his goodness as despised by ungrateful mortals, when instead of leading them to repentance, it is perverted to encourage them in sin? And will not a righteous and holy God visit for these things, and take a dreadful vengeance on all those that thus ungratefully requite his goodness and mercy? Yes: justice will certainly exact all the arrears of abused mercies. Judge with yourselves; would not every man despise and abhor the person, who being raised by his prince to the highest honor and trust, was not only unfaithful to his commission, but also employed his power to the oppression of his fellow subjects, or betrayed the arms and magazines of his master into the hands of his enemies? Would not all pronounce such an abandoned person worthy of death? And can it be supposed that the adorable God, who is tenderly concerned for the happiness of his creatures, and is doing so much to promote it. will not resent the

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unfaithfulness and ingratitude of those servants, who are daily abusing their prosperity either in negligence or sloth; or in corrupting themselves and others, by their example and influence and power? They are “treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath;” and will certainly sink under a heavy condemnation, proportioned to the various aggravations of their complicated guilt. Miserable indeed must their condition be, who abuse their prosperity and the patience of a merciful God, when death awakes them from their fatal slumbers. That inexorable messenger of the supreme judge, will speak to their astonished souls in thunder, with a force which they will feel, and a terror which they cannot resist. He will dart the keenest reflections to the heart, will storm the weak intrenchments which the world has vainly cast up against his assaults, and will lay their precious souls in deplorable desolation and ruin. And this scene, terrible and distressing as it is, is no more than a slight presage of that inconceivable horror and misery, which awaits them at the bar of God, when sentenced to depart from his blissful presence into the unquenchable flames of hell. O! what consternation and amazement must overwhelm their guilty souls, when they shall find that they have had all their good things in this world; that they have bartered away their souls for those lying vanities, the remembrance of which, like a “worm that never dies,” will pain them to the heart through the boundless ages of eternity! This, this is the dreadful destruction in which the abused prosperity of sinners will certainly involve them, without any possibility of redemption forever and ever.

APPLICATION.

1. *These observations should excite us to lament over the folly and madness of many of our fellow men, with regard to the present and coming world.*

It is melancholy to observe, how many sully and contradict their christian profession by a vain or sensual conversation; by bending their whole thoughts and endeavours, to the acquisition of mortal and fatal pleasures; to the seraping together deceitful riches, or to the attaining to exalted stations of honor and power; while at the same time they neglect the interests of their immortal souls, and discover but little humanity and goodness in the use of these advantages. It cannot but pain us to the heart, to see such a fatal inconsistency between the conduct of many, and their obligations arising from their connexions with mankind, or from the religion of Jesus Christ, who died to redeem them from a vain conversation: Especially when we consider, that however they may boast themselves in the multitude of their riches and power, and fondly imagine that their mountain stands so strong that it cannot be moved; however they may put their confidence in these things and forsake the unwasting fountain of all good; yet they shall find themselves miserably mistaken, when the judge of all the earth shall call them to an account for the improvement of their talents. Is it not a mournful consideration, that many, who have a price put into their hands; who are favoured of God with many invaluable privileges and opportunities of doing good to mankind; of deriving upon themselves the blessing of them that are ready to perish, and (what is of infinitely

greater advantage) of securing the blessing of an unchangeable God, in time and through eternity, are notwithstanding; neglecting all these precious opportunities, or are only using them for corrupting their own hearts, and confirming their own vicious habits into a greater inveteracy; or for the ruin of other immortal souls, by their influence and example?

2. *From this discourse we see how little reason there is to envy those that are in prosperity, or to be discontented with our own conditions.*

Happiness in this world, is distributed by God with a more equal hand, than most, upon a superficial view, are apt to imagine. Both prosperity and adversity have their temptations and advantages; but the snares of the former are generally most dangerous to our souls, because the mind is then most off its guard. Little, therefore, do those consider, either how much advantage they may reap from sanctified afflictions, or how difficult it is to guard against the temptations of prosperity, who are discontented with their own condition, or envy the lot of those, who are placed in a higher sphere of life. Little do they consider how much prosperity exposes men to a dissolute and careless temper, to intemperance and worldly-mindedness, and to a fatal dependance on the fleeting enjoyments of time. We ought therefore, to leave the appointment of our conditions in life, to that God, who consults for our happiness in the various dispensations of his providence, and who best knows what is most for our advantage: And no doubt, but many will see abundant reason, at the

conclusion of the mysterious plan of divine providence, for gratitude to God, who has mercifully delivered them from such snares and temptations as would have proved fatal to their souls. Remember that the love or hatred of God is not now known by his present promiscuous dispensations; and let us consider, that if our more prosperous neighbours misimprove their prosperity, their riches may be to their hurt, and their prosperity may destroy them; and if they are good men, God, who knows what is best and safest for every one, may know that it is safer for them to be entrusted with such talents, than it would be for us; that they may be great mercies to them, and yet might prove too strong temptations for us; and that we have many more blessings than we deserve, and more talents than we rightly improve. These things should teach us resignation to the will of God in every condition, without envying the lot of others that are exalted above us.

3. *Let us from this discourse be exhorted to improve the prosperity we enjoy for the purposes, which God justly expects from his bestowing these advantages upon us.*

Let us guard against pride and arrogance in prosperity; against all undue conceptions of our own worth and importance; and cultivate an humble sense of our meanness and unworthiness in the sight of God. Let us frequently recollect that we depend upon his unmerited bounty for every blessing that we enjoy; and that we have the greatest reason to be humbled for the poor improvement that we have made of the many talents committed to our trust. Remember he gives grace to

the humble, while he resists and abhors the proud; and he rewards those that are fruitful in his service, by making them farther instruments of more extensive usefulness in the world. Let us call upon our souls and all that is within us, to bless the Lord, and not be forgetful of his benefits. Let us employ our understandings to consider the various arguments that we have for praise and gratitude, and to esteem and admire the divine goodness; our memories, to recollect and record his benefits; and our wills and affections, to love him for his mercies, and to ascribe to him the glory that is due unto his name. Let the various mercies with which he crowns our years, and in which he is daily passing before us, constrain us to love and serve him; and to use our utmost endeavours to spread comfort and happiness around us, as far as our influence extends; that others may share with us in the same bounties of divine providence, and join with us in united ascriptions of praise and gratitude to the adorable author of all. Let us remember that we are stewards appointed by our great master, to distribute his favors to those around us, who stand in need of them; and that if we monopolize them to ourselves, we unfaithfully pervert them from the gracious design of the bountiful Donor. Consider that God has wisely ordered it, that there should be various degrees and conditions among men; that this inequality might give an opportunity for the mutual discharge of good offices: And it is a peculiar honor conferred upon some, that they are made the treasurers of the supreme Lord of all, to distribute his favors and benefits to the indigent or distressed members of his family. And it is injustice mixed with ingratitude, not

to pay that tribute, which he has appointed others to receive ; and not to be rich in good works, when from his free and special favor he has enabled some to honor and to imitate *him*, who is rich in mercy.—And while we are blessed with prosperity, and experience the goodness of God in the comforts and enjoyments of this life ; let us be careful that our hearts be not too much attached to them. Let us consider that they are unmerited favors, which the sovereign author has a right to resume, when and howsoever he pleases. Let us view them as accommodations of our journey through this wilderness, which we must soon leave behind us, when we enter upon that state, where they can make no part of our happiness. And let us be careful that we do not rest satisfied with them, as an adequate portion of our immortal souls ; but be constantly aspiring after, and labouring to obtain those spiritual and eternal blessings, which Christ has purchased with his blood, and which are freely offered to us on the terms of the gospel. Let the goodness of God in the communication of temporal blessings, animate our zeal and fidelity in the service of our God and our generation, and encourage our dependence upon the head of divine influences, for grace and assistance in duty here, and for a glorious reward of all our labours in the world to come. Thus may we hope that our prosperity will be sanctified to us ; and thus may we expect that glorious welcome from our exalted Redeemer : “ Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joys of your Lord.”

SERMON X.

THE ADVANTAGES OF AFFLICTION.

PS, CXIX, 71.

It is good for me, that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.

UPON a general survey of the miseries and calamities of human life, together with all the alleviations of mercy, with which they are mixed, we have abundant reason to conclude with Job, that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."* The frailties of our bodies, the injuries of the world, and the changeableness and vicissitude of all mortal things, are fruitful sources of a variety of pain. And although some drink deeper of the bitter cup than others, yet none can reasonably expect an exemption from the common lot of mankind. Nay, even the true christian, whom his heavenly father loves with infinite compassion and tenderness, is so far from being excused from sufferings in this present state, that his adherence to the cause of Christ exposes him to many sorrows, which never affect the men of this world. And whence is it, that all without exception, are born to pain and misery? Do our troubles spring from the dust? Or rather are they not all appointed by

*Job. v, 7.

a wise and holy God, whose providence extends to the most minute occurrence in life? “The very hairs of our heads are all numbered by God; and not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without his notice.” And if even our afflictions and troubles are the dispensations of our heavenly father, who is tenderly concerned for our happiness, must they not be for our advantage? Yes, doubtless; however no affliction is joyous, but grievous for the present, yet when rightly improved, “it shall work the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them, that are exercised thereby.” From the infinite compassion of God and Christ, we may reasonably conclude, that our heavenly father corrects us, that he might do us good in the latter end. And daily observation convinces us that there is too much dissimulation remaining in the best of christians, whereby they neglect the calls of God, in his milder dispensations, and will not be allured, by the various instances of goodness, which they receive, to the faithful performance of duty. There is too much of a carnal temper; too strong an attachment to sensible objects; too great an unconcern about their souls and eternity; to cure and rectify which, our heavenly father appears in merciful severity against us. Although God does not afflict us willingly, (for judgment is his strange work,) yet seeing it is absolutely necessary for us, he graciously uses this method for the reformation of sinners. So that this is to be esteemed the merciful invention of heaven to work that blessed effect, which neither the kind admonitions of his word, nor the milder discoveries of himself in his providential dispensations can usually attain. And this is verified by the happy experience of

thousands, who can say, with the Psalmist, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.”

To impress our hearts with a sense of this truth, so that we might be engaged, to make a right improvement of afflictions, to submit with patience and resignation to the allotments of divine providence, without murmuring and complaint is the design we have principally in view in our present discourse ; and for this purpose, we intend, through divine assistance, to shew,

I. Some of the advantages of afflictions and crosses.

II. How we should improve them so as to derive these advantages from them.

I. Some of the advantages of afflictions.

1. *Afflictions serve to awaken our attention to the great concerns of our souls and eternity.*

When men enjoy an uninterrupted flow of worldly prosperity ; when they sail along a smooth and unruffled surface, with easy and gentle gales ; reason, which should sit as a vigilant pilot at the helm, is often lulled into a careless security. But adversity rouses the mind from its indolence, and puts it upon thinking closely. Those, who have met with no adversity to engage their attention to divine things, are apt to indulge a thousand gay ideas, a swarm of fantastic images, which, like insects, flutter and wanton in the warm sunshine of pros-

perity, but disappear upon the first inclemency of the season. It is indeed surprising, that men in the fulness of health and prosperity, when every thing smiles around them, should sink into a stupid carelessness about God and Christ, heaven and hell, time and eternity; until sickness and afflictions are sent to awaken them to serious consideration. While the prodigal's fortune lasted, and he could indulge himself in rioting and debauchery, he entertained no thoughts of returning to his father's house. But when he was reduced to want and misery, he began to consider how many of his father's servants had bread enough and to spare, while he was perishing with hunger. Then he formed the resolution to arise and to go to his father and say, "father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."* And Joseph's brethren appear to have been thoughtless of their former conduct towards him, and insensible of their cruelty and inhumanity, until they met with crosses, disappointments and hardships in Egypt. Then they were brought to that painful confession: "verily we were guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." And daily observation furnishes us with many instances of persons, who living in a pompous worthlessness, and fondly imagining that "to-morrow would be as to-day, and much more abundant," had been utterly undone forever, had not some reverse of fortune, some unexpected calamity awakened their

*Luk. xv, 17, 18, 19.

attention to the concerns of their souls and eternity. This puts men upon reviewing their conduct, upon considering their condition, and upon securing some lasting and invariable foundation of hope. This brings me to take notice of another advantage of afflictions.

2. *They tend to wean our affections from the world, and to fix them on God, the only source and foundation of happiness.*

Riches and affluence too often beget in us a fondness for the present scene of things and a deadness of affection towards God and heavenly things. An uninterrupted flow of worldly bliss, is a very dangerous thing, which has proved the destruction of thousands, and which few are able to bear. It is a melancholy indication, of the obliquity of the human heart, that the very gifts and bounties of our heavenly father's hand, which were designed to engage our supreme affection for him and our ready obedience to his laws, are often the very things, which draw off our affections from him. How many, instead of loving him more, love him less, for the distinguishing benefits he bestows on them? How many abuse his choicest favors for his dishonor, and presumptuously place their confidence in the unmerited gifts of his hands, without any grateful regard to the author of their mercies; as if the same almighty hand that bestows could not resume the blessing? This is egregious folly and madness, and one of the most fatal disorders of the human heart, entirely owing to the intoxicating nature of worldly prosperity, working on our corruptions and rendering us vain thoughtless.

and inattentive to our true happiness. This makes us forget, that we are pilgrims and sojourners in this valley of tears, and at a distance from our native country and our father's house above. Now, the discipline of adversity is designed to correct this vanity and to cure this moral disorder of our hearts, by discovering the emptiness of the world and its enjoyments, the folly of such false dependencies, and the necessity of fixing our hope and our trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God. When God embitters our cup, or deprives us of any mercy that we have enjoyed, we learn to disengage our hearts from mortal things, and to seek an interest in the favor and friendship of that God and Redeemer, who has promised that he will never leave nor forsake us. For afflictions naturally make us fly to God for security, protection and relief, when we apprehend ourselves forsaken and abandoned by the world; when we look around us, and there is none to help us, none to deliver us from impending danger and ruin. When our feeble reed is crushed and fails, then we seek a stronger support; when our broken cisterns are drained, we repair to the fountain. Convinced by melancholy experience of the insufficiency of worldly comforts, and finding ourselves disconsolate in a barren land, wherein is no water, we desire those rivers of pleasure, which flow without interruption in the paradise of God. Then with fervour and earnestness we pour out our complaints before our heavenly father, who despises not, nor abhors the afflictions of the afflicted, and from whom all our help and all our consolation must come. Then we address the hearer of prayer for help, to support us under our afflictions, and for grace

to improve them for our advantage here and our happiness hereafter. Thus afflictions tend to wean our affections from the world, and to engage us to fly to God for refuge, and to choose him for our portion and happiness. Thus they leave us disencumbered in the pursuit of spiritual and eternal joys.

3. Another advantageous fruit of afflictions is a more warm and active zeal and diligence in the service of God and our generation.

When a tedious and severe distemper confines us to beds of languishing, weakens our animal and mental powers, deprives us of every capacity of active usefulness, and throws us wholly upon the friendly care and assistance of others; it is natural in such circumstances to reflect upon the many talents and opportunities of usefulness, with which we have been favored, and of which we are now deprived, and possibly under the sad apprehension, that they will never more return. Then we begin to mourn over our former sloth and negligence, to consider how many favorable opportunities we have misimproved, how much more good we might have done in the world, and what account we could then give of our stewardship. Then we begin to form the most serious and solemn resolutions to redeem our time, and to make a better improvement of future advantages than ever we have done; and although many of these impressions and resolutions vanish and pass away "like the morning cloud and early dew," when God in answer to our prayers, graciously restores us to our former comforts and capacities; yet some do actually issue in greater

zeal and diligence in the service of God, and all may enjoy this advantage from them, and it is their own fault if they do not thus improve seasons of affliction. And the remembrance of opportunities lost, and of good resolutions formed in a time of adversity, must have a natural tendency to excite us to greater watchfulness and diligence in employing these talents, of which we have so precarious a possession, and of which we must render a strict account at the bar of God. Especially if we allow ourselves time to consider, with how dreadful a weight it must oppress our spirits at the hour of our dissolution, to think that our talents have been repeatedly misimproved, notwithstanding repeated warnings and resolutions to improve them better. Besides a sense of gratitude to God, with which every good man is actuated, in such a case as this, should powerfully constrain to greater diligence in our respective stations in the world, and to greater zeal and sincerity in every branch of duty towards God and man. The pious grateful soul, just delivered from some pressing calamity, thinks he can never do enough for the glory of that God, who so seasonably interposed for his deliverance; and the language of his heart will be with that of the apostle Paul, after his conversion, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" And when he is thus affected with a deep sense of the divine goodness, it is apparent how much he must be excited hereby to greater assiduity, and care in all the important duties of his character.— And besides all this, afflictions qualify us for more eminent services, and for more extensive usefulness in the world. They teach us wisdom, fortitude, and firmness of mind, to prepare us for the sublimer and more diffi-

cult duties of christianity, and for doing and suffering hard things in the cause of religion, and for the testimony of Jesus. The Heathens themselves, who knew nothing of the conduct of divine providence, but by the faint glimmerings of the light of nature, were nevertheless so sensible of this truth, that they laid it down as a certain maxim, "that there never was a great man without great afflictions and sufferings." And must it not then be of great advantage to us, that this severe discipline hardens and strengthens the mind for the most difficult duties, and prepares us for distinguished usefulness and redoubled zeal, and activity in the service of God and our generation?

4. *Another happy fruit of affliction, is tenderness and compassion for those that are in distress.*

Those who are inured to ease and delicacy, and abound in the comforts and pleasures of this world, are too often regardless of how many thousands are wearing out life in a sad variety of pain, or are dying perhaps of poverty or a broken heart; at the same instant they are expending their fortunes in luxury and folly. But those who are acquainted with grief, are thereby softened into humanity, and melted down into commiseration and tenderness for the sufferings of their fellow men.—This breaks the fierceness and insensibility of their tempers, and teaches them to sympathize with the distressed. Hence, when the apostle would encourage us to hope, and trust in the tenderness of Christ as our great high priest, and convince us that he is capable of being touched with a sympathetic feeling of our infirmities,

he argues at large from this consideration: that he was in all points tempted as we are; "so that as he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able more compassionately to succour them that are tempted;" and he farther assures us, that "it behoved Christ thus to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God."* Now this must surely intimate to us, that it is not in human nature, even in its most perfect state in this world, so tenderly to commiserate any sorrows, as those, which our own hearts have felt; as we cannot form a perfect idea of any bitter draught, by the most exact description until we have ourselves tasted it. And if it is our perfection to resemble our blessed Redeemer, and our honor and duty to sympathize with, and to succour, the sons and daughters of distress; afflictions, which tend to produce such a happy effect in our tempers and conduct, must be for our advantage.

5. *Afflictions tend to mortify our pride, and to beget and cultivate humility.*

Pride is a rank weed, which often springs up and rises high in the sunshine of prosperity, and when it has taken root in the heart, it is very hard to be eradicated and subdued by the storms and troubles of adversity. However, afflictions have this happy tendency, and may be improved for this salutary purpose. Because the world being as it were excluded, and its comforts embittered by adversity, the soul is set upon the closest and most impartial enquiry into its own state and con-

*Heb. ii. 17, 18.

dition. Then it takes a larger view and scope in its meditations, and examines things seriously from the bottom. It turns its thoughts every way with a solicitous desire to find some solid foundation of hope and rest. Now the natural result of all this deep research and examination is in the language of Job, "behold I am vile." Then we discover more amiss in our hearts and tempers, than we ever saw before, and more deficiencies and transgressions, than we before imagined ourselves guilty of, for want of this inward scrutiny and self-examination. Then we see many things to excite our shame and self-abasement; but nothing to cherish our pride. These mortifying views of our own frailty and corruption have a powerful efficacy, by divine grace, to humble us in the dust. And this is one of the most advantageous fruits of afflictions; because when this heavenly grace of humility has once taken possession of the heart, it banishes all those vices, which are the offspring of pride, and disposes the self-emptied soul to receive the greatest good, the best instruction and the sweetest counsel. It disposes the soul to give up all dependence on our own righteousness, and cordially to receive salvation on the terms of the gospel.

6. *Afflictions tend to improve and cultivate patience and resignation to the will of God, which keeps the soul at perfect rest.*

Patience is a grace peculiar to a state of discipline, for which we shall have no occasion, when we arrive at that world of perfection and pleasure, where all sufferings shall be at an end, and all fears shall be wiped away from our eyes. But it is of great advantage to us here,

as it disposes us to bear afflictions in the best manner, and to receive spiritual advantage and improvement from them. And therefore, as afflictions tend to strengthen and improve this christian grace, they must be good for us. We would have no opportunity of knowing what advances we make in this virtue, if we had no disappointments and sufferings to put it to the proof. For this, as well as all the other graces of the spirit, is best improved by frequent exercise. "For tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."* And when patience has had its perfect work, when it is displayed in all the strength and glory of meekness, and remains unconquered and invariable to the end, it appears lovely and amiable in the eyes of God and man; while it strengthens the heart to bear every affliction, with resignation to the sovereign will of God, it even lightens the burden and makes it more tolerable. And surely there is no imaginable situation of mind so delightful and so reasonable, as that which we feel, when we humbly refer ourselves in all things to the divine disposal, seeing and owning the hand of God, and bowing before it with filial acquiescence, and imitating the distinguished example of our blessed Redeemer, who, under the greatest sufferings, could say, "O my father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done!" He was made perfect, in this as well as in other respects, by sufferings; and so must all his humble followers, who through many tribulations must enter into glory.

*Rom. v, 3.

7. *Afflictions are good for us, as they tend to strengthen our faith.*

As faith enlarges our prospects, teaches to see farther, and enables us to judge better, it must have a mighty influence to support the soul under afflictions, while itself is more confirmed by the exercise. It brings the happy period of all our troubles near in view, and transports the soul with the ravishing prospect of that world of bliss and joy, with which it assures us that the present light afflictions, that endure but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared. This effectually teaches us those important lessons, which we so hardly receive under afflictions, that they are all designed in mercy; all for our good; all the effects of our heavenly father's love; all the indications of his steady regard to our truest interests; that he has chosen better for us, than we could do for ourselves; and that we would have chosen the very same lot, which he has appointed for us, however grievous and afflictive, could we but see clearly the final issue and consequences of things. And while faith thus supports us under afflictions, they at the same time prepare and dispose the soul to stretch its prospects beyond the grave to another world, which prospects we are too apt to confine to this state, in a time of prosperity. When the soul finds itself stripped of the pleasures and joys of the present life, it will naturally reach after some more permanent and substantial good, and contemplate the glories and felicities of the future state. Tired of the present world, it will long for a better; will live with heaven more steadily in its eye, and will look upon pre-

in their connection with the far more important concerns of another world. And by these sublime exercises of the mind, the christian's faith is greatly confirmed and strengthened under afflictions.

Upon the whole then, if afflictions are designed and calculated to rouse us from our insensibility, and to awaken our attention to the concerns of our souls and eternity; if they tend to wean our affections from the world, and to fix them upon God and divine things; if they promote a more warm and active zeal in the service of God and our generation; if while they train us up for eminent services and difficult sufferings, they teach us compassion and tenderness for the distressed: if they tend to mortify our pride and to beget and promote in us an humble temper of mind; if they teach us patience and resignation to the will of God; and if they strengthen and confirm our faith, and enable us to live with our eye fixed on the invisible world; I say, if we may reap all these advantageous fruits from our afflictions; have we not reason to say with the Psalmist in our text, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." But we also proposed to consider,

II. How we should improve afflictions, that we may reap these advantages from them.

It is certain that all do not receive these advantages from afflictions. Wicked men by their obstinacy and want of thought, often defeat the good design of providential dealings, and even grow more hardened by those

very means, which were calculated to soften and to reclaim them. And even some good men are but little mended by them. Their good impressions made on the mind by afflictions, too often vanish “like the morning cloud and early dew.” Afflictions are only to be considered as means in the hand of the holy spirit, to reform the heart and conduct; and therefore must be properly improved by us, if we expect them to answer the desirable purpose. The best means must be ineffectual, if neglected or misimproved. How then should we improve afflictions?

1. *Would we then receive spiritual advantage from our afflictions; let us endeavour to realize the hand of God in them.*

He rules in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of this world with uncontroulable sway, and orders and disposes of all things to his own glory. Every one of our allotments is the operation of his hands, and nothing can befall us without his wise permission and determination. Therefore we should be careful, that we do not lose the view of God in any second cause, which might have immediately occasioned our sufferings. We should, under the consideration, that it is the hand of the Lord, say, “let him do what seemeth him good.” We should humble ourselves before him, that he may exalt us in due time; should acknowledge that he is just in all that he has brought upon us, has punished us less than we deserve. And as the Lord gives and takes away, we should compose ourselves to bear his hand with patience, to glorify his name by an

humble submission to his will, and to wait the issue with resignation.

2. *A constant watchfulness, both under afflictions and after they are past, is necessary to our receiving spiritual benefit from them.*

Adversity as well as prosperity has its peculiar temptations, to deprive us of the command of our tempers; and our affections and frames are very inconstant and variable. Hence, there is need of a constant care to keep them even, undisturbed, and regular, to cultivate an habitual contentment and a meek resignation to the will of God; and to prevent any thing that might excite the contrary dispositions. If we carefully watch every turn and change of our bodily distempers; have we not unspeakably more reason to watch and observe the more dangerous workings of the moral disorders on the soul? And when God has graciously restored us to our former comforts and capacities of usefulness, we should seriously examine what benefit we have already received from our afflictions; what lusts or corruptions they have subdued; what graces they have improved and strengthened; what resolutions we have formed; and how we have put them into execution. And the result of this examination should be renewed with watchfulness and care, lest we again fall into those sins, which lay with so great a burden on our consciences under afflictions, and which we have resolved in the strength of divine grace to guard against. We should be careful, that we do not “return with the dog to his vomit, or with the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

3. *Would we enjoy spiritual advantage from afflictions, we should endeavour to know the design of God in sending them, and comply with it.*

God is as really speaking to us by his providential dispensations, whether merciful or afflictive, as by his word and spirit; and an obstinate reluctance to the apprehended design of God in any visitation, is highly offensive to him. It provokes him to give men up to themselves, to follow the devices of their own hearts, and to say to them in wrath, as he formerly did to his ancient people, "why should ye be stricken any more; ye will revolt more and more."* We should therefore examine our hearts and review our conduct, to know why the Lord is pleading a controversy; that we may hearken to the voice of the rod, and of him who has appointed it. Does he design by this discipline to awaken us to a closer attention and a more diligent prosecution of those things that belong to our peace? We should be careful that we do not sink into our former insensibility, but make it our principle business in life, to lay up our treasures in heaven, and to prepare for our removal from this world. Does he embitter the comforts of life to us, that we might be engaged to choose him for our portion and happiness? Let us be careful to live above the world, as travellers to the heavenly country, and not put our trust and confidence in the uncertain, unsatisfactory enjoyments of time, but in the living God. Does he call us to greater diligence and activity in his service? Let us remember that we

*Is. I, 5.

sent things in the light of eternity, and consider them are indebted to him for life, and all our comforts and talents, and consecrate our souls and bodies a living sacrifice to him, and work with renewed zeal and application while it is day, that we may be able to give an account of our stewardship with joy, at his bar. Does he send afflictions to mortify our corruptions, and to strengthen our graces? let us make it our constant study to “die unto sin daily, and to live unto righteousness;” to grow in grace, and to hold on in our way growing stronger and stronger. Thus may we expect the peaceable fruits of righteousness from our afflictions, while we are thus concurring with the operations of the holy spirit, who is hereby training us up for glory and ripening us for the honors of the heavenly kingdom. For it is vain for us to expect that our afflictions shall be sanctified to us, while we do not use our best endeavours to have our hearts and our lives reformed and amended by them.

1. *Would we reap the peaceable fruits of righteousness from our afflictions, we should daily pray to God for his spirit to sanctify them.*

We should look to God for help and strength, to preserve in us a temper suited to sufferings, and disposed to receive spiritual advantage thereby; to strengthen, support and encourage our hearts; and to assist us in the improvement of those graces, which we are called to exercise in adversity. And we should pray to him, to confirm the pious resolutions we have formed, and to enable us to perform the vows we have made to him in the day of distress. We should look to him for the in-

fluences of the holy spirit, which Christ has purchased for his suffering disciples, and which alone are able to support us with strength in the inner man, when our corruptions would certainly betray us. For it is by this sacred agent that good men are armed with patience, fortitude, and resignation to the divine will. It is he that inspired the primitive christians with zeal and fortitude, under all their troubles, and enabled them to rejoice in tribulation, "the power of Christ resting on them." And it is he, that is promised to us under the reviving character of the *comforter*, to abide with us for ever. He can lead our minds to Jesus Christ, that distinguished example of patience and sufferings, who from his cradle to his grave passed through a scene of the greatest poverty and reproach, bearing the contradiction of sinners, and at last submitted to the accursed death of the cross; nay, who expired under the wrath of God for our sakes; and notwithstanding all this, was never heard to utter the least expression of discontent, nor a single murmuring complaint against God. The holy spirit can set this amiable example of patience and resignation before our view, and engage our endeavours to imitate it, which is an infallible way of securing the advantages designed to be communicated by our afflictions. He can lead our views beyond this troubled scene, to that world of light and joy, where sin and sorrow shall be no more; and enable us to trust in the wisdom, the power and goodness of our exalted Redeemer, that he will at last bring us to his heavenly kingdom, though it be through many tribulations.

APPLICATION.

1. *If then it is good for us to be afflicted, we have reason to adore the divine mercy and compassion to his children in their afflictions.*

True it is, that “no affliction is joyous, but grievous for the present;” and we are too often ready to account our heavenly father severe in his corrections; but when rightly improved, they are productive of the most desirable consequences, and are the indications of his care and love for us. The apostle assures us, that he chastens every child that he receives, that they might be made partakers of his holiness. Like children, we are ignorant of our true interests, judge only by appearances, and would soon ruin ourselves by our own choice. But our heavenly father sees, and judges, and chooses for us, and communicates, in love, what he knows will be best. Never did any good man see sufficient reason to regret the severest afflictions he ever met with, if they were rightly improved; and thousands have been thankful for them, as the greatest of their blessings, and have acknowledged, to the praise and honor of divine grace, that it was good for them that they were afflicted.

2. *What has now been said may teach us how to bear and improve both present and future sufferings.*

This sickly season of the year has made many painful breaches in many families, and has drawn forth the tears from the weeping eyes, and the groans from the burdened heart, for the loss of some near and tender relation. Those therefore, who are mourning under

these afflictive dispensations, and those who are involved in any other calamity, should be careful that they do not bear all the smart of such visitations without the benefit, that might be derived from them, and that would be a rich equivalent for the mercies resumed.— While God is calling you to mourning and lamentation, let it be your principal care to attend to the design of the rod, and search and try your ways, that you may turn again unto the Lord. Review the conduct of your lives, and the state of your affections, that you may discover what has been deficient or irregular, and that the proper remedies may be applied. Look to that God, who has the hearts of all men in his hand, that he would soften the hard heart, and give you a penitent frame; that your souls might be purified from all their dross in the furnace of affliction, and have the divine image instamped upon them in brighter and fairer characters. And in one word, endeavour to set your hearts on that God, who can abundantly supply the place of all earthly enjoyments, with the communications of his grace, and who perhaps has removed some darling of your affections, which has filled that place in your hearts, which belonged only to him, and which by alienating you from his love and service, might have proved fatal to you. Eternal glory, my friends, is so great a thing, that it is well worth our while to bear the sharpest sorrows, by which we may be formed for it. And let those of us, who are in ease and health, while others are mourning around us, learn to sympathize with the distressed, and remember that in the uncertainty of human affairs, it may not be long before we be called to put these instructions into practice.

which we have been laying before you this day. The scene may soon shift, and a storm may soon succeed our present calm. It is our wisdom therefore, to be armed against the worst, by the cultivation of those graces, which will be a comfortable support under afflictions, and our only preparation for that state of everlasting rest, "where all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes; where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor pain, and where we shall change the spirit of heaviness for garments of everlasting praise."

SERMON XI.

THE GRACE OF CHRIST SUFFICIENT FOR US.

COR. II, 12, 9.

And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

THIS is a state of probation in which we are training up for an endless state of happiness or misery, according as we behave ourselves in this world. And therefore we may reasonably expect to meet with many troubles and temptations, which no prudence can foresee, nor any industry guard against. The frailties of our bodies, the ignorance and corruptions of our minds, the injuries of the world, the vicissitude of all sublunary things, together with the repeated assaults of hell, are fruitful sources of a variety of uneasiness and pain. Nor has the disciple of Jesus Christ, who has enlisted under his banner, and devoted himself to him in the most public manner, reason to expect, that because of his profession of christianity he shall be exempted from the common lot of mankind. Nay, so far is it from this, that from his adherence to the interest and cause of his master, he will be exposed to a variety of sorrows, that never affect the men of the world. Is the case then of the true christian more miserable, than that of others, who will not have Christ to reign over

them? By no means. Although he is not immediately removed out of his probationary state, yet he has comfort and support under all his trials, with which the world is unacquainted, which far overbalance all his troubles and calamities. Although he is ignorant and apt to be led astray, weak and easily overcome; yet his almighty redeemer will never leave nor forsake him: and he has assured him, that “his grace is sufficient for him, for his strength is made perfect in weakness.” This reviving promise, with many others adapted to his particular cases and necessities, he has for his security and comfort, in every trial and temptation. For this promise is to be considered, as made to every child of God; although it was originally made to the apostle Paul, when he earnestly entreated the Lord, for the removal of that thorn in the flesh, that messenger of Satan, that was given him, lest he should be exalted on the account of extraordinary revelations made to him, when he was taken up to the third heavens. For we find the author of the epistle to the Hebrews applying a promise made on a particular occasion, as of general use. When Joshua was about to take the command of the Israelites, to lead them into the land of Canaan, and to fight the Lord’s battles, God graciously promised to him for his encouragement and support: “as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.”* This promise the apostle improves as an argument against covetousness and an anxious concern for futurity, and a ground of contentment in every condition in life. † For he hath said, “I will ne-

*Jos. I, 5.

†Heb. XIII, 5.

ver leave thee nor forsake thee ;” so that we may boldly say, “ the Lord is my helper ; I will not fear what man can do unto me.” All the children of God, whether in any preceding or succeeding age of the church, stand in the same relation to him ; are within the bonds of the same covenant ; have an interest in the same love, and are under the conduct and direction of the same redeemer, in whom all the promises are *yea and amen*. Therefore, we may justly understand the promise, made to the apostle in our text, upon a particular occasion, as extending to all the children of God in all their troubles. And they may derive encouragement from it, to expect, that either God will remove the temptation, or support them under it, so that they shall not be totally and finally ruined by it. “ The grace of their Lord and Redeemer is sufficient for them ; for his strength is made perfect in their weakness.”

In the improvement of these words, we shall endeavour, through divine assistance, to shew,

- I. That God’s own children may, for wise reasons, expect to be suffered to fall into troubles and temptations.
- II. That the grace of the Redeemer is sufficient for them under all their trials.

I. That God’s own children, for wise reasons, may be suffered to fall into various troubles and temptations.

It would be arrogance and presumption in us ignorant and short sighted mortals, to attempt to lay down all the reasons of the divine administration in any particular instance of his government. He, whose wisdom is infinite, and whose understanding is unsearchable, must have many reasons of his procedure which we cannot comprehend. "His ways are above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts." Yet he has condescended to reveal himself so far to us, as to enable us in some good measure to vindicate his ways towards us, and to give some of the reasons why he suffers his own children, whom he loves with peculiar affection, to fall into troubles and temptations.

1. *To prevent our being exposed to temptation, would be inconsistent with our being in a state of probation, and inconsistent with our profession of christianity.*

By enlisting under the banner of Christ, we are engaged in a continual warfare with the united powers of hell, with the world around us, and with our own indwelling corruptions. And a state of warfare always supposes opposition and conflicts, and struggles and uneasiness; and it must therefore be absurd to expect, that we can "fight the good fight of faith," and at the same time meet with no temptation to draw us aside from the path of duty: Nor are these enemies of our salvation so weak and inconsiderable, as to give us rational grounds to hope, that they will give us little or no uneasiness. "The principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world," with whom we profess to contend, are possessed of angelic powers and

capacities, are filled with malice and revenge against us, are many in number, vigilant to observe, and diligent in improving an opportunity against us. Besides, they have had long experience in the accursed arts of ruining immortal souls, have actually slain their thousands and ten thousands; and the best of God's children have found by mournful experience, that they have been often overcome by them. So sensible was the apostle of the danger arising from this quarter, that he founds an exhortation to vigilance and sobriety, upon the consideration of the devil's going about "like a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour." As we are then engaged by our profession of christianity, in this dangerous conflict with evil spirits, who will frequently renew their assaults, however often vanquished; we can reasonably expect nothing but frequent and severe struggles with them, while we are in this state of probation.

Nor is this all: The christian not being of the world, while he is in it, but a sojourner and traveller to the invisible world, must expect to suffer persecution in some degree, if he would live godly in Christ Jesus. Although the enmity that subsists between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, does not discover itself in the heart and fire of a raging persecution, yet it will appear in afflictions of an inferiour nature. Because the christian cannot run to the same excess of riot with a wicked and ungodly world, they will traduce and despise him, accuse him of an affectation of singularity or of hypocrisy, and his brightest virtues will pass under an injurious name. His humility passes for pride and grimace, his patience under injuries, cowardice and mean-

ness of spirit; and his punctuality in duty will furnish abundant matter for ridicule and reproach to a wicked world around him. And as this is his situation in the world, it must surely be no small trial to bear these things, in a manner becoming the dignity of his christian profession. He cannot expect more than his innocent master; to be exempted from bearing the contradiction of sinners against him. And during our continuance in this state of probation, we must necessarily converse with sensible objects around us, which tend to engross our affections, to hinder our progress in the spiritual life, and to lead us astray from the path of duty. Among all the various tempers and dispositions of men, there is not one to be found but may be successfully addressed by some peculiar temptation of the world; there is no age or period of life, in which the riches of honor and the pleasures of time, have not attractions fatally successful against us; and there is no state or condition, that can in this life, place us beyond the reach of an assault from one quarter or another. And therefore, it is a necessary consequence of our being here in a state of probation, and engaged in a perpetual warfare with the world, that we must expect to meet with temptations of this kind.

And further, by enlisting under the banner of Jesus Christ, we are also bound to conflict with our remaining corruptions, which are daily breaking out in various instances, and subjecting us to many a severe and dangerous struggle. Our sanctification here is but imperfect and incomplete; so that the best of christians often find the “flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spi: it

against the flesh ;” and these two are contrary, the one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would. “ This, in a greater or less degree, is the condition of every one that has engaged in the spiritual warfare. And the apostle Paul, notwithstanding all his proficiency and advancement in the spiritual life, had “ a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him,” some peculiar infirmity or temptation, which was continued with him to keep him humble, though he besought the Lord thrice that it might be removed. So that from the whole it appears, that to be exposed to no temptations, would be inconsistent with the design of God in placing us in a state of probation here, and inconsistent with our professions of christianity.

2. *God may suffer his own children to fall into temptations and troubles, in order to mortify their remaining pride and corruption.*

When the christian is in prosperous circumstances, or is favored with extraordinary manifestations of the divine favor, the great adversary of his soul endeavours to improve his prosperity as a means of lulling him into a carnal security, or of puffing him up with spiritual pride : but God in tender mercy to him, sends adversity to rouse his mind from his indolence and insensibility. This was the case of Joseph’s brethren, who began to think of their unnatural treatment of him, when they fell into trouble in Egypt. “ Verily we were guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear ; therefore is this distress come upon us.” And the apostle in our

context assures us, that the reason why he had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, was in order to keep him from being immoderately exalted on the account of extraordinary revelations made to him, when he was caught up into paradise.

3. *God may suffer his children to fall into trouble and temptation, to correct them for their sins and to make them more watchful.*

God frequently reclaims the wanderings of his people by severe and afflictive dispensations of his providence. Every child of God has reason to say with the Psalmist, "that it was good for him to be afflicted; for before he went astray, but now he had learned to keep the word of God." How ardent are their prayers, how deep their repentance, and how active and careful are they, when the hand of God lies heavy on them, in comparison with what they were, when the sun shined unclouded on their heads and every thing succeeded according to their wishes! And if we grow remiss and careless in the ways of God, and leave the avenues and passes of the soul unguarded, we provoke our heavenly father to leave us, we pave the way for our adversary to destroy the peace and comfort of our minds, and give him an opportunity of convincing us by mournful experience, of the necessity of vigilance and of living near to God. And if we not only remit our care and watchfulness, but also harken to his destructive insinuations and comply with his temptations to depart from the living God, our offended father may suffer us to experience his power and malice, in order to teach us what an evil

and bitter thing it is to go astray from him, and to provoke him to withdraw the light of his reconciled countenance.

4. *God may suffer his children to fall into temptations and trials, in order to prove and strengthen their graces.*

This was eminently the case of that ancient sufferer Job, who had obtained the character of a perfect and upright man, from God himself. Yet the accuser of the brethren maliciously insinuated, that his obedience to God flowed from some selfish and mercenary principle. “Does Job serve God for nought? Thou hast made an hedge about him, and hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is encreased in the land.— But put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.” The good man is brought to the trial and stands the shock, perhaps the greatest that any mere man did, triumphs over the malice of the devil, and is accepted of his God. Fully sensible that afflictions and temptations give occasion for the exercise and improvement of grace, the apostle James (1, 2, 3.) exhorts us in these words: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience.” And the apostle Paul says to the same purpose.* “We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.” Thus our graces are improved and strengthened, and we are trained up for more eminent services and suffer-

* Rom. v, 3, 4.

ings in the cause of God. And while we are taught fortitude and firmness of mind, the same severe discipline breaks the insensibility and fierceness of our natures, softens us into humanity, and melts us into commiseration and tenderness for the distressed. Thus our Saviour himself learned, and thus his followers learn to sympathise with one another under temptations and troubles.

5. *God may suffer his children to be involved in difficulties to teach them the insufficiency of their own strength, and of every thing else to support them in the spiritual warfare.*

The scandalous and aggravated fall of Peter is recorded to teach us the folly and danger of depending upon our own strength, to overcome the numerous and powerful enemies of our salvation, and the necessity of choosing God for our portion and happiness, our protector and defence. Were we left to struggle with our enemies in our own strength, we should be soon baffled and swallowed up by them. And it is a mistake here that ruins thousands, who enter into the spiritual warfare without a dependance on the power of the victorious captain of their salvation; and therefore after they have made some faint resistance, and continued a little time in the field, they give up all for lost, and fall a sacrifice to their unwearied enemies. Therefore, God suffers his own children to fall sometimes by the power of temptations, to teach them the folly of depending upon their own strength, or upon any thing else but the grace and power of their almighty Redeemer, "who

alone can make them more than conquerors." This brings me to shew,

II. That the grace of the Redeemer is sufficient for us in every trial and temptation.

There is no purpose for which the christian needs grace and assistance, but he may find a sufficiency in his exalted Redeemer, "in whom dwell all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and the fulness of the godhead bodily." His grace is sufficient to restrain the rage and violence of his enemies. "For he has the keys and power of the invisible world, and all its inhabitants under his absolute controul. He holds the infernal spirits in chains, checks and governs all their motions, and says to the most furious of them, as he does to the proud waves of the sea, "hitherto shall ye come and no farther." Are we ignorant and easily led astray by passion, or prejudice, or the false and delusive appearances of things? He is able to instruct and teach us, to lead us into all necessary truth, to direct us in the way that is everlasting, and to make us wise to salvation. Are we weak, and easily overcome by the restless enemies of our salvation? His grace is sufficient to assure us, that no temptation shall befall us, but what is common to man, and what we shall be enabled to bear. So that he is able to support our spirits when ready to sink under the weight of our afflictions or the power of our temptations. Nay, he is able to make us rejoice in tribulations, and to triumph in the midst of surrounding flames; the power of Christ resting on us. Are we ready to be discouraged at the prospect of dif-

sicant and laborious services, to which we may be called in the course of divine providence? Are we ready to account the yoke of Christ heavy, and his commandments grievous? In this trying conjuncture, his grace is sufficient for us and his strength is made perfect in our weakness. However hard and severe the duty may be; yet “through Christ strengthening us, we shall be enabled to do all things;” and therefore with the highest reason the apostle exhorts us “to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.”* In a word he is able to strengthen all our graces, and to keep us by his mighty power through faith unto eternal salvation. He is able to keep us from the tyranny of Satan and the bondage of sin, from sinking under the overwhelming load of affliction, and from final apostacy, from the curse of a broken law, and the slavish fear of death.

Now that the disciple of Jesus Christ, who has enlisted under his banner and devoted himself to his service, may depend with confidence upon the grace and strength of his Redeemer to be sufficient for him to answer all these important purposes, will appear from the following considerations.

1. *The various relations, under which he condescends to own us, are a sufficient ground of trust and confidence in him in every temptation.*

We are the *redeemed of the Lord*. For our sakes he descended from the regions of light, and emptied him-

*Eph. vi, 10.

self of the glory, that he had with the father before the world began. He condescended to assume our nature, to submit to a life of labour and reproach, and to the ignominious death of the cross; in order to deliver us from the curse of a broken law, the wrath of an offended God, the tyranny and bondage of sin, and from the fatal consequences of it in the world to come. Now, seeing he has redeemed us by his own blood, can there be any blessing that he will refuse to bestow on us? Will not his living care perform what his dying love began? Will not that love which brought him from heaven, which supported him in all his amazing sufferings, which nailed him to the accursed tree, and laid him in the silent grave, still engage him to protect, to strengthen and to comfort those that he has died to redeem? Would he die to save us from the power of our enemies, and then leave us exposed to their power and rage? No: Those that he loves, he loves to the end, and will never leave nor forsake them, until he brings them in safety to those mansions of joy and glory, which he has purchased for them, in his father's house.

Again, does he not acknowledge us as the *members of his body*? And if it would be unnatural for us to suffer any of our limbs to be destroyed through our negligence, when it was easy to preserve it; would it not be inconsistent in the blessed Redeemer to own us in this relation, and at the same time exercise no care over us? Is it possible for us to remain unconcerned, when any of our members is suffering, or in eminent danger of being destroyed? And does he not as tenderly sympathize with all his suffering members; being "touched

with the feeling of our infirmities?" Nay; sooner shall we be able to divest ourselves of all the feelings of human nature, and delight in pain and misery, than the blessed Redeemer can lay aside his concern for the members of his mystical body, and suffer them to be destroyed.

Again; does he not acknowledge us as his *brethren*? And is not this a title of love; and does it not direct us to the expectation of favor? Is it unnatural and unbecoming for those that are connected together in so close and endearing a relation, to be strangers to each other's griefs and burdens and difficulties? And will he, who encourages us to expect his counsel and assistance in all our distresses, by assuming the title of our elder brother, forget this tender relation, shut up his bowels of compassion from us, and disappoint our expectations from him? No: he exercises all that tenderness and care for us, which this relation demands. And is not this argument strengthened, when we consider that he owns us under every relation that can promise us protection, friendship, assistance and care?

And what is full and express to our purpose; he has promised to be the *captain of our salvation*, to protect us against all the assaults of our spiritual enemies, to lead us on to victory, and to make us more than conquerors. In a battle it is of great advantage to have a brave and experienced commander, who has a tender regard for his soldiers, who will not desert nor expose them to unnecessary dangers and hardships, but will encourage and help them in an hour of extremity. Such

a leader and commander has the christian warrior, who loves us with infinite tenderness, who will never forsake us in the article of danger, but will encourage and strengthen us to fight the good fight of faith, without yielding. He will never call out his children to fight with flesh and blood, with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and leave them to struggle alone with their numerous and potent enemies. No : he has never deserted any of his humble followers ; and they will ever, till the end of time, find him kind and faithful, until every enemy is vanquished and their salvation is completed. However, he may for a season suffer them to be led captive by their enemies ; and however they may be ready to give up all for lost, yet in this hour of darkness, the captain of their salvation appears for their deliverance, stirs them up to the fresh contention, and strengthens them to persevere with fortitude. For their support and encouragement, he says to them, “ fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God ; I will help thee, yea I will strengthen thee ; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”* He assures them in our text, that “ his grace shall be sufficient for them, and his strength shall be made perfect in weakness.” And he has promised, that “ he will never leave nor forsake them.”† This is that victorious captain, under whom the christian fights and conquers : This is that man, who is promised “ to be a hiding place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a

*Is. XL, 10.

†Heb. XIII, 5.

great rock in a weary land." In a word, there is not a relation under which he is pleased to own his children, but what promises comfort, support and direction, under all their troubles and temptations.

2. *The divine perfections of our Redeemer give us ground to trust, that his grace shall be sufficient for us.*

Our Redeemer is God as well as man. "He is the man that is my fellow," saith the Lord of hosts. "He was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God." In him are lodged all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; so that he cannot be mistaken in determining the allotments of his children. "He is the king of kings and Lord of Lords; the beginning and the end, the first and the last; who was in the beginning with God and is God, and by whom all things were made, that were made, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers." And although he emptied himself of the glory that he had with the father before the world began, and appeared in the humble form of a servant; yet even in the days of his flesh, the whole creation, animate and inanimate, paid an absolute homage and obedience to him. The winds and waves, sickness and death, angels and devils obeyed his sovereign voice. Nor is the compassion and tenderness of his heart towards his disciples, inferior to his power. What then can all the united powers of earth and hell do against infinite wisdom, unlimited goodness, and almighty power? Can they destroy those that are protected by such a Saviour? That arm, may the christian say, which laid the foundations of the earth

and settled the ordinances of the universe; that arm, which formed and still upholds the stupendous fabric of nature, is stretched out for my protection and security. He that spoke the almighty word, and immediately an universe emerged out of nothing, cannot want power to crush all my formidable enemies by a single act of his will. And he, whose words are more inviolable than the everlasting pillars of heaven, can never prove unfaithful to his gracious promises. Omnipotence itself must first be vanquished, and the compassionate Redeemer lose all his affection for those, whom he purchased with his blood, before I can be destroyed by the violence or rage of my enemies. Let floods of corruption then rise within me, and dangers threaten me from without; yet I am secure in the hands of my Redeemer, from whom none shall ever be able to pluck his sheep. Vain world! I shall e'er long be delivered from all thy snares and placed beyond the reach of all thy temptations. Infernal serpent! Christ the victorious captain of my salvation will at last crown all my labours in the spiritual warfare, and give me power to trample you under my feet. This, my friends, is the security that every person, who is enlisted under the banner of Christ, has, that his grace shall be sufficient for him, and that his strength shall be made perfect in weakness. And what heart could desire more? Who would be afraid to encounter the various enemies of his salvation? Who can despair of success and victory, under the conduct of omnipotence?

Was there any necessity for it, we could appeal to innumerable gracious promises made to the christian

for his security and comfort under every trial and temptation. And we might appeal to the happy experience of thousands, who have been enabled to fight the good fight of faith, and to come off victorious through him that loved them and gave himself for them. But the comfortable doctrine is sufficiently confirmed already; and we shall therefore proceed to the

APPLICATION.

1. *Are the children of God then frequently exposed to temptations and troubles? Hence learn of how great advantage it is to exercise a lively faith in the son of God.*

When we are tempted to sin, our faith in Christ should teach us to reason thus: Did the Lord of life and glory bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin might live unto righteousness? And shall we, who expect such inestimable advantages by his death, deliberately counteract one of the great ends of his sufferings? Shall we suffer those sins to reign in our mortal bodies, which he designed to destroy, when he bore the punishment of them in his own sacred body? Shall we not comply with this great end of our Saviour's death, and testify the sense we have of our obligations to live to him by a constant watchfulness against every sin, and by the strongest resolutions to forsake every false and wicked way? Has he not by his death obtained that invaluable gift of the holy spirit, by which we are enabled to mortify the deeds of the body? And shall we not look up to him by an eye of faith for those gracious aids and influences which he has pur-

chased, which he bestows with the greatest readiness, and which alone can make us more than conquerors in every temptation?

Again, are we tempted to distrust the goodness of God, and are we ready to look upon our trials and temptations as arguments of our rejection by God? We may see from the preceding discourse, that God, for wise reasons, often suffers his own children to fall into temptations; and we may derive encouragement by looking to that Redeemer, who was tempted in all things as we are; who was assaulted for forty days in the wilderness by a variety of the most horrid temptations; who was tempted, not only to a sinful distrust of divine providence on the one hand, and to a rash presumption on the other, but also to fall down and worship the usurping prince of this world. Faith is the shield by which we are to quench these fiery darts of the devil. And what little ground have we to think it strange, that he who dared to attack the head, should also assail the members; or that we are rejected by God merely because we are tempted; when we see from the example of our blessed Redeemer, that it is not inconsistent with the divine goodness to expose the dearest of his children to the most violent temptations?

Again, are we ready to faint in the spiritual warfare, when we consider the violence and strength of temptation and our own inability to resist? Here faith in the son of God is of great advantage to encourage our hearts and to strengthen our resolutions to fight without yielding. "His grace is sufficient for us, and his strength

is made perfect in weakness." And we should by faith, consider him who rejected the most alluring offers of the tempter, and who stood firm under the most violent shock of persecution and suffering. We may derive support from considering this glorious captain of our salvation, who triumphed over all his and our enemies, and who has not only taught us by his example how to conquer them, but has also promised us all necessary assistance, and has assured us that greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world. Let us then look to *him* by faith, who by his own sufferings, has learned to succour those that are tempted; who has spoiled principalities and powers, and who can bruise Satan under the feet of his weakest followers, strengthening them with might in the inner man, and keeping them by his mighty power through faith unto eternal salvation.

Are we ready to be discouraged, when we consider how often we have broken covenant with God and fallen into sin? Let us by faith, consider our almighty advocate with the father, even Jesus Christ, the righteous, who is also the propitiation for our sins. Let us look to our glorious Redeemer, in whose atoning blood there is efficacy enough to wash away sins of the deepest dye, and in whose all-sufficiency there is strength enough to recover us from the most dangerous falls.

2. *Is the grace of Christ sufficient for us in all our trials? How happy then are those who are enlisted under his banner?*

They shall never be suffered to fall into temptations but for their advantage: for God grieves none of his

children willingly, but pities them with divine compassion, watches over them with peculiar care, provides for their security and support, and orders all their allotments in infinite mercy and tenderness. They shall never be deserted by their God and Redeemer in an hour of difficulty and distress, but he will either enable them to bear the temptation, or with it make a way for their escape. They have peace and comfort which the men of the world know nothing of, and which can support them under the loss of many external comforts, and when every thing looks dark and gloomy around them. They have peace with God, enjoy the light of his countenance, “and the testimony of a good conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, they have their conversation in the world.” Their formidable enemies may rage, but they cannot destroy those, who are supported by the mighty God of Jacob. They may pursue them with restless malice and assiduity, even to the confines of the invisible world, but their almighty Redeemer stands ready to receive their departing spirits, and guards of attending angels are commissioned to convey them in safety to the abodes of everlasting joy and rest. Who then can sufficiently describe the happiness of those, for whom the grace of their Redeemer is sufficient in all their trials, and in whose weakness his strength is made perfect? Who, my friends, would not desire to be under the protection of such a Saviour? Who could think a hardship of his service? Who would not glory in their relation to him? Who would not be willing to enlist under his banner?

3. *How miserable are those who refuse to serve their Redeemer?*

They have no interest in the grace of the almighty Redeemer; and they are bound to conflict with all their enemies, who would soon swallow them up, if left to contend with them in their own strength: but if they do not conquer they are ruined forever. We are all probationers for eternity; and if we refuse to have Christ to reign over us, he will leave us in the hands of our enemies, and sentence us to dwell with them in everlasting flames. Now who can describe the horror and anguish that will certainly overwhelm them, when they find that they have no interest in their judge, and that they have nothing to save them from that place of torment, which was prepared for them and their apostate leader.

4. *From this doctrine we may learn how strong our obligations of gratitude and obedience are to God and Christ, for offered grace and strength.*

When we consider our own unworthiness to receive the least mercy from God, whom we have so often offended; and at the same time consider that he has, notwithstanding, given his only begotten son to die the accursed death of the cross, in order to redeem us from misery, to purchase grace and salvation for us; our hearts must be surprisingly hard and insensible, if we forget our obligations to live devoted to his service and depending upon his all-sufficient grace. But may I not

hope, my friends, that we, who have this day renewed our covenant with the Lord at his table, shall feel the force of our obligations to serve him? This congregation are witnesses of the pious resolutions we have formed, to encounter all our spiritual enemies in the strength of divine grace. And shall they not also see the performance of our vows? The eyes of the world are on us. Let us not then give them an opportunity to speak evil of our profession: let us not wound the name and interest of our Redeemer, or cast a reflection on his grace by our unguarded lives. We have acknowledged this day, before God, angels, and men, that we are under all the sacred ties of duty, interest, love, and gratitude, to fight the good fight of faith, and to remain loyal and faithful unto death. Let us then guard against making enquiries after our vows, against unfaithfulness in the covenant of God, lest after having enlisted under the banner of Christ, we be of that unhappy number who draw back into perdition. Let us not count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, lest when we profess before Christ at his bar, that we have eaten and drank in his presence, he may declare to us, "I never knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." Let us call to mind the solemn transactions of this day when we fall into temptation, and improve the dying love of our Redeemer as an argument against all sin. We have taken Jesus Christ this day, for our prophet, priest and king; let us therefore depend upon him for grace to help us in every time of need, trusting that his strength shall be made perfect in our weakness. Thus shall we live happy and comfortable in life, be secured against all the

assaults of our enemies, and at last received as conquerors into those mansions of joy and glory, which are prepared for all that come off victorious in the spiritual warfare.

SERMON XII.

THE PATH OF THE JUST IS AS THE MORNING LIGHT.



PROV. IV, 18.

But the path of the Just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

NOTWITHSTANDING the extraordinary degree of wisdom that was given to Solomon, he shamefully and ungratefully deserted the ways of God, through the violence of sensual passions which had darkened his understanding. This melancholy instance of human frailty, is recorded by the sacred historian as a warning to future generations, that men should not think themselves safe from error, whatever talents and abilities they possessed, but in the exercise of the greatest vigilance and circumspection, and under the protection of divine grace. Such is the strength of our corruptions, the weakness of our disordered minds, the influence of bad examples, and the unwearied activity and vigilance of our spiritual enemies, that were we not continually preserved by the watchful providence and powerful grace of God, we must soon become a prey to their malice. Solomon being recovered from his wanderings, in order to make all the satisfaction he could for the dishonor he had done to God and religion, by his corrupting example, offers

himself as a guide to others in the paths of righteousness, and employs all his wisdom and eloquence, to dissuade them from the dangerous ways of vice, and to encourage and promote the cause of religion. For this purpose, insinuating his salutary instructions as the affectionate advice of a father to his son, for whose happiness all his wishes and aims were directed, he uses the most earnest entreaties in our context, not to join in society with wicked men, nor to imitate their examples. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away." The inconceivable importance of the exhortation, added to his affectionate concerns for our happiness, not only engaged him to use such a variety of expression, but also to dwell upon the subject and to point out in the subsequent verses, the injustice and violence to which men are led, either sooner or later, by the company and examples of wicked men. They first begin with intemperance and then proceed to injustice; and to injustice they add ungodliness. They first wrong their own souls, then distress their neighbour and their God. For having wasted their consciences within and their substance without, they make no scruple to disregard the eternal laws of heaven, and to invade the rights and the property of other men, that they may be able to maintain the expence of their lusts. "They sleep not except they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall: for they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence." Such is the hateful character and the destructive path of sinners; and in order to enforce the exhortation with the greater evidence, he sets before us a beautiful and

lively representation of the safety and happiness of a life of religion, by comparing it to the morning light, which gradually advances from one degree of brightness to another, until it arrives at meridian splendor: "But the path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

By the just, we are not to understand those who merely abstain from doing unjust things to their neighbours, while at the same time they may be indifferent about the duties they owe to God and themselves: but such as have a vital principle of religion implanted in the heart by the spirit of God, which disposes them to pay a sincere and universal obedience to all the laws of God, without exception or reserve. And by the path of the just, we are to understand the temper and conduct of those, whose minds are enlightened by the rays of heavenly wisdom, rectified by christian principles, purified in some good degree from earthly affections by a living faith, and elevated above sensual gratifications, and who act in the general frame of their conversation, under the influence of a principle of piety to God. There is such a thing as justice towards God, consisting in that love, reverence, and obedience, to which he is unquestionably entitled, by the unchangeable perfections of his nature, from all his rational creatures; and since all our rights and privileges are derived from him, who has distributed to every man as he pleases, giving unto one man more and unto another less, in the course of his wise providence; every man is bound, by his dependance upon his Maker, to leave them in the quiet possession of them: so that injustice towards men, is still greater

injustice towards God ; and therefore, the just man who is righteous towards God, and whose conduct is regulated by a regard to the will of the supreme disposer of all things, cannot be unrighteous in his dealings with men. And as the health of his body and the serenity of his mind depends upon his temperance, and a proper improvement of the talents and bounties of God's providence, he cannot abuse them without being guilty of ingratitude to the bounteous author ; that is of the worst sort of injustice to him. Hence it appears, that universal goodness is implied in the character of a just man : and that it is with the greatest propriety and fitness, that the whole compass of our duty is represented under the notion of justice ; since whatever may be the immediate object of any duty, or whatsoever name it may pass under, it is however no other than strict justice towards God. Upon this account, godliness, righteousness, and sobriety, which comprehend the whole of our duty, are included in the character of the just man, whose " path is like the morning light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

Having thus determined the character of the just, let us attend a few moments to the important instructions, which are suggested by the comparison, which the wisest of men makes between the morning light and the temper and conduct of every good man. And although it is extremely dangerous in the interpretation of scripture to strain and torture metaphorical expressions and similitudes, as far as a warm imagination and a creative fancy might carry us, and it is an important branch of our duty to guard against it : yet I think we are way-

ranted by the whole tenor of divine revelation, as well as by many particular passages of it, to suppose, that the path of the just being compared to the morning light, may suggest to us the certainty and pleasure, as well as the instructiveness and progression of a life of religion, which last is indeed, the principal thing intended by the comparison.

1. *The true christian knows, with the most comfortable certainty, that the way he has chosen is the way of the divine commands, and that it will terminate in eternal life.*

As it is by the light of the sun that the existence of many material objects is discovered, so by the light of reason and revelation, the christian's mind is enlightened to see his duty and his danger, and he knows upon the most rational evidence, that the path he has chosen is approved by his maker and will bring him to glory. In this respect he has greatly the advantage of the sinner, whose way is represented as darkness, and who knows not at what he stumbles; as you have it in the verse following our text. If the sinner is certain of any thing, it must be that he is wandering from the way of the divine commandments, and that he can never obtain that rest and satisfaction, which he is seeking. For no other evidence can attend a vicious course of life, than that it is one continued deviation from the prescriptions of reason and revelation; that it is folly in the beginning and progress, and shame and misery in the issue. He may, indeed, through his ignorance or inattention, or the darkening and deceitful nature of sin,

fondly imagine that he is wiser than the christian, and boast of his freedom of thought and the strength and sufficiency of his feeble understanding, merely because he can trample upon the principles of education, and laugh at those things, which formerly, perhaps, would have made him tremble. But being "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him," and because of the blindness of his mind, his confidence in error arises from the thick darkness in which he is involved. Putting light for darkness and darkness for light, he cannot have that clear perception of his duty and his interest, and that satisfaction of his being right which attend the path of the just. But nothing can be made more evident by the light of the sun, than this is to the christian, that while his conduct is actuated and governed by the great principles of reason and religion, it must necessarily be approved, by that righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness, and whose countenance beholdeth the upright. He knows that as God is a being of the most absolute moral perfection, infinitely holy, just and good, faithful, compassionate and merciful; it must be his will, that we should be "followers of him as dear children," endeavouring to be perfect as he is perfect, and holy as he is holy, imitating all his imitable perfections, as far as the frailty of our nature will admit, and performing all those duties, which result from his perfections or from his relation to us, or the conditions in which we are placed by his providence. And as he has in unparalleled mercy and grace appointed a method for the pardon of our sins and our exaltation to a glorious immortality, through the righteousness and atonement of his son, it must be

his will that we renounce every other dependence for justification and salvation, and humbly rely on a Redeemer for all the blessings of the well ordered covenant, while we endeavour to adorn his doctrines by a holy conversation. Now, this is nothing else but a short description of a religious life, which consists in such actions as are suited to our dependence upon God and our obligations to him, or such as qualify us for the enjoyment of himself in glory; and consequently, the truly religious man has the comfortable assurance, that the way he has chosen is the way of the divine commandments, being conformable to the dictates of eternal reason and the infallible revelation of the divine will. Nor has he less certainty that it will inevitably conduct him to eternal life and felicity in another world. The connection between holiness and happiness being necessary and unchangeable; he has no reason to doubt, that it shall be well with the righteous in another world; so that he has the same reason to conclude that he will be happy hereafter, as he has to believe that he is holy now. And what a satisfaction must it be to the just man to see his path plain before him, and the heavenly city at the termination; to know that his conduct is agreeable to the will of God, and that eternal life will be his reward; and to be delivered from all those perplexing fears which haunt the sinner, concerning the conclusion of his life, which he cannot but apprehend will be miserable whenever he turns his thoughts upon the melancholy subject.

Now, this advantage of a religious life, seems to be suggested in our text, by its being compared to the

morning light; as light is frequently taken for knowledge in the scriptures. Thus, (2 Cor. iv, 6,) "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our minds, to give us the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Those who are enlightened by the gospel of Christ, and walk in the truth, are denominated the "children of the light and of the day;" whereas those, who live in ignorance of God and religion, are said to be "children of darkness."* But we are more especially confirmed in this interpretation, from the verse immediately following our text, where it is said, that "the way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble." But further;

2. *The pleasure and satisfaction of a religious life is also suggested by the comparison of it to the morning light.*

Light is often used in scripture for prosperity, joy and happiness. "Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart."† And, "O! that I were as in the months past, when his candle shined upon my head; when by his light I walked through darkness."‡ "The candle of the wicked shall be put out; his prosperity and comfort shall be destroyed." "Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun." When the grace of God has made a saving change on the heart of a sinner, and turned him from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan to

*1, Thess. v, 4, 5.

†Ps. xcvii, 11.

‡Job. xxix, 2.

serve the living God, inspiring him with the love of goodness and a steady resolution to walk in the ways of wisdom, he finds to his comfortable experience, that they are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. For “great peace have they that love the laws of God.”— They have pleasures, which strangers to God and his ways intermeddle not with; pleasures in the immediate exercises of religion; pleasures in the recollection and review of their lives; and pleasures in the enlivening prospect of the favor of God, through all the future stages of their existence. For our encouragement in the spiritual life, the benevolent author of our beings has so framed us, that pleasure waits upon a consciousness of having complied with any instance of duty, and the best pleasures always attend upon the best actions. Even in the mortification of our corrupt lusts and affections, there is a more solid and substantial pleasure, than can possibly arise from the gratification of them; and if a religious life, as far as it consists in abstaining from evil, be pleasant, it must be more delightful, as it employs us in doing good. Every virtuous action produces an instantaneous satisfaction, which grows stronger, as it is done with a more express regard to the will of God, and with a stronger bent and determination of the mind. And if we carry our enquiry to those actions, which are more properly denominated religious, such as relate to the worship of God, both private and social, we shall find the pleasure still more rational, elevated, and divine. Devotion, as it is the soul’s converse with God, the source of perfection and comfort, must be the most rapturous exercise of the human mind, where it is in any good degree fitted for the heavenly employment.

When the understanding and heart conspire, when a man has just and enlarged views of the divine perfections, a soul sparkling with the image of God, a comfortable sense of the divine favor, and an happy warmth of affection and gratitude for the amazing discoveries of the love of God through a Redeemer; in such a case, there are no pleasures on this side of heaven, that deserve to be compared with the pleasures of devotion; the pleasures of contemplation, prayer and praise. Nor is the satisfaction small where devotion is sincere, even in the lowest degree, provided there be a rational hope of the divine acceptance, and our doubts and fears do not prevail so far as to destroy the pleasure.

But the religious man has another privilege in his pleasures, that he can enjoy the *past* as well as the *present*; that by the amazing power of memory and reflection, he can summon them afresh to his aid, under the troubles of life, and enjoy them again with advantage. Although the time past can never be recalled, and it is impossible that we should live over again the months and years that are gone; yet the hours that are filled with virtuous actions are never lost, while the memory of them remains. And herein consists a considerable part of the glorious distinction of the pleasures of religion above the pleasures of sin, which last but for a season, and then turn into wormwood and gall. Vice, which allured the thoughtless sinner with her painted appearance, when she approached him in a temptation, now terrifies and confounds the deluded victim with her ghastly train; and the shades of his departed pleasures appear in horror before his affrighted imagination, and

point with an awful hand to the judgment of a sin-avenging God. But the christian, who can review a life that has been governed by the principles of religion, enjoys a perpetual feast in the testimony of a good conscience, and experiences a solid satisfaction as lasting as his memory, and which he can repeat when he will; a pleasure, independent of time and all its vicissitudes, which the world cannot give nor take away; and a pleasure, the more valuable in that as it arises from the time past, so it runs on into the future and grasps an unwasting eternity: for the pleasures of religion run parallel with eternity, and grow and flourish by their duration, while the good man solaces himself with the recollection of the blessings and mercies which he has received from the bountiful hand of God, and considers that they are conveyed to him by the constitution of the well ordered covenant, his mind reaches forward to the invisible world, and dwells with pleasure and satisfaction on the joys of his heavenly kingdom and the mansions of his father's house, which were prepared for him by a Redeemer, and which are secured to him by the same everlasting covenant. Thus does he experience joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the holy ghost. His hope in God, the rock of ages, places his soul upon an immoveable foundation; and when the billows of adversity run highest and beat upon him with the greatest violence, when the years draw nigh, when the hope of the hypocrite vanishes like a spider's web, and all the distempered pleasures of the sinner desert him in his greatest extremity; the pleasures of religion still subsist in all their strength and perfection; his confidence in God supports him in the

prospect of adversity, and his hope of everlasting rest and peace and joy, raises him above the common disquietudes of life. Though I am weak and without strength, may the christian say, though the billows of adversity might soon overwhelm my soul, and the enemies of my salvation make mournful inroads upon my peace; yet, blessed be God, my sufficiency is in the irresistible power of an almighty friend, and my confidence in the faithfulness of a covenant keeping God. I will not therefore, faint in the day of adversity, but wait with humble patience and hope till the arrival of that happy hour, when I shall be placed beyond the reach of every envenomed arrow, that might hurt or wound my peace. As long as I have this hope in God, through a Redeemer, I cannot be without peace of conscience, and peace with God, and delight in him. I rejoice that he has undertaken the tender office of a shepherd, to guide me with his counsel, to refresh me with the consolations of his spirit, and to conduct me in safety through all the dark and dreary steps of my pilgrimage, to the regions of eternal day.

3. *The instructiveness of a religious life seems to be suggested by its being compared to the morning light.*

By the light which it diffuses all around, others are invited and encouraged to walk in it. For this reason, our blessed Lord tells his disciples, that their "light should so shine before men, that they seeing their good works might glorify their father in heaven." And he expressly calls them "the light of the world," not only because they were appointed instructors of mankind, but

principally with a view to their example, that others might be induced to obey the gospel, from an observation of its blessed effects in the lives of its professors. There is a light which arises from the lustre of a religious conversation, which is often more instructive than that of precept, as it convinces men of the practicableness, as well as of the excellence of religion, and insensibly enkindles a laudable emulation to accomplish what we see performed by others, in the same circumstances with ourselves. Upon this account, every christian who lives in a prevailing degree, according to the prescriptions of the religion he professes, is in some measure a light of the world. And we have reason to bless God, that in all ages of the world, he has raised up many, whom he has qualified with such distinguished abilities and graces of his holy spirit, that they are properly denominated the burning and shining lights of the church. This should be considered as a great encouragement to true christians, that God makes use of their examples to reclaim others from the error of their ways, and should excite them to be more circumspect and vigilant in their conversation, and to abound in every grace and ornament of a good life, that they may be thereby more extensively beneficial to mankind; and have the peculiar honor of co-operating with God in the glorious designs of his grace, in bringing many sons and daughters to glory. To do good, that we may be seen and honored of men, is indeed but a sordid and mean inducement; but to labor to excell in all the branches of a religious life, that God may obtain the greater praise, that his kingdom may have a greater extension, and that a greater number of immortal souls, who are wandering in

darkness and error, may be brought home to God by a saving conversion, is the noblest ambition that can actuate the human heart.

4. *The christian's progress in religion is compared with evident propriety to the morning light which shines more and more unto the perfect day.*

As the morning sun encreases in light and splendor as he gradually ascends above the horizon, until he arrives at his meridian latitude ; so christians, whose tempers are regulated, and whose conduct is directed by the gospel of Christ, are upon the whole gradually improving in knowledge, holiness and spiritual joy, until they are translated to the "inheritance of the saints in light." By the sacred illumination of the spirit of God, their understandings will be gradually enlightened with the beams of heavenly truth, their prejudices removed, their conceptions of divine things enlarged and cleared, and their spiritual thirst excited to take in a larger degree of that heavenly knowledge which makes them wise to salvation. The satisfaction a good man experiences in the encrease of his knowledge, the pleasure and profit he may hereby convey to others, the two great fountains of knowledge, the revelation and the works of God laid open before him, the examples exhibited to his view, and the animating encomiums bestowed upon religious wisdom in the sacred oracles, will concur to raise his desires and strengthen his resolutions and endeavours to encrease his knowledge of divine things. And according to the natural progress of the life of God in the soul, the will and

affections will operate in some proportion to the clearer views of the understanding, which may be one reason of the apostle's joining together "growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ."* This progress in holiness and grace consists in an extensive obedience to the whole will of God, to all the laws of righteousness and truth; a growing sincerity and governing intention to please him in the whole of our conduct; an ardent desire and zealous endeavour to do good to the souls and bodies of men; an increasing humility and daily repentance for our sins; and a constant dependence upon Christ for the supplies of his grace to enable us in all things to adorn his doctrines by an holy conversation and to comply with the terms of the gospel covenant for salvation. The essential excellence of these christian graces, together with an humbling sense of his low attainments in the spiritual life and the weakness and imperfection of all his graces, will powerfully engage the christian to "give all diligence to add to his faith virtue; and to his virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity: that these things being in him and abounding, he may not be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."† The rational satisfaction he must feel in finding his heart changed, his spirit rectified and his condition improved, will dispose him to make greater advances in holiness, that he may be more like to God, a greater blessing to mankind, more prepared for heaven

* 2. Pet: III. 18.

† 2. Pet. I, 5.

and posses a greater degree of inward satisfaction and a lively hope. Besides it is essential to the nature of true grace to grow, and that sacred agent, who has implanted the divine principle of life in the soul, will strengthen and support it by his grace, and enable them that wait upon him, to “renew their strength” to “mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.” The same external means; the same internal thoughts and reflections, which were improved by the spirit of God to engage him at first in the love and practice of religion, will still be improved to lead him on to more exalted degrees of grace in the spiritual life, until he be brought to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. For the “peace of God, which passeth understanding,” is both the natural consequence and the promised fruit of exalted piety. “The works of righteousness are peace, and effects of righteousness are quietness and assurance forever.” As it is honorable to the promises and providence of God, whom the christian has chosen for his portion: as it is for the reputation of christianity, the great source of joy and comfort; and as it is beneficial to himself and to the world, the christian will endeavour to make such advances in religion, as will enable him to “rejoice in the Lord and to joy in the God of his salvation.”

APPLICATION.

And now, my friends, the proper application of this subject is, to examine ourselves by what we have heard, whether we are of the number of “the just, whose paths are like the morning light, which shines more and more

unto the perfect day?" Do we know from happy experience, that the ways in which we walk, are the ways of the divine commandments and the ways of life? Do we experience those pleasures in religious duties, in the review of our lives, in the recollection of what God has done for our souls, and in the joyful hope of his favor, which strangers to him intermeddle not with? Are we careful to make our "light so shine before others, that they are thereby induced to glorify our heavenly father?" And do we find upon impartial examination, that we are encreasing upon the whole in knowledge, holiness, and spiritual joy; notwithstanding many failures in duty and declensions in grace? And are we humbled before God, that in the midst of any attainment which his grace has enabled us to make, we are still so defective in love to God, in thankfulness to Jesus Christ, in affection to our brethren, in good-will to men, in humility and heavenly mindedness, in resignation and spiritual joy? If this is indeed your character, in a prevailing degree let me exhort and beseech you to give glory to God, whose grace has enabled you to choose that better path, that shall not be taken from you. Frequently review the great principles that have determined your choice, and endeavour to strengthen them by devout meditation, watchfulness and prayer to God, for renewed influences of his grace, to enable you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is for the credit of the gospel, the honor of God, and beneficial both to your own souls, and the souls of others, that your light should shine with an encreasing lustre, that others seeing your good works may be induced to glorify our heavenly father.

But while we indulge our charity in hoping, that this is the character of many in this assembly, faithfulness to your immortal souls, and the slightest observation of the conduct of persons in every christian society, forbid us to conclude, that it is the character of every individual present; and was there but a single person here, who is still walking in darkness and wandering on in the broad way that leadeth to destruction, his precious soul, whose redemption cost the blood of the son of God, is entitled to a faithful warning of his folly and danger. And yet alas! there may be more than one or two; and should your own consciences testify to any of you, "thou art the man," who art hitherto walking with heedless steps in the road that leads down to destruction; let me beseech you by your hopes of sharing in the salvation of the just, that you delay not a moment longer to enter upon that safe and pleasant way that leads to eternal life. We know the language of that deceitful heart, which says, that it is time enough hereafter, when you vainly hope for less opposition to this change either from yourselves or the world. Believe it, the difficulty will grow greater the longer it is deferred; your reluctant hearts will be more disinclined to the blessings, the corrupting influences of bad examples will grow stronger, your attachment to the vicious practices to which you have been accustomed, will be firmer, and you will have less and less reason to hope for the quickening influences of the spirit of God, whom you are daily provoking, and without whom you cannot be recovered from the error of your ways. Be exhorted therefore, to say with repenting Ephraim of old, "What have I more to do with idols?" "I will this day avouch

the Lord to be my God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and his commandments, and to hearken to his voice." Begin with an hearty repentance for the sins of your past lives, and faith in the mercy of God, through a Redeemer, for the pardon of them. Plead with him, to give you a lively sense of your sins, confess them before the throne of his grace, and implore his mercy to give you that evangelical repentance which is unto life, and those holy resolutions of amendment and endeavours after new obedience, which he will strengthen by his grace, until they produce a genuine conversion to God and a comfortable preparation for his heavenly kingdom.

SERMON XIII.

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO.

PROV. 22, 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

IT is a very old observation concerning the state of the world, and the conduct of mankind, that they are continually sinking into a deeper degeneracy and falling short of the virtue, and piety of their ancestors. This complaint has been borrowed by every age, as what they imagined was more applicable to themselves, than to any period that was past. I would not undertake to say, that there always has been a just foundation for such a mournful lamentation; but certain it is, that every sincere christian is greatly concerned, and mourns before God, that there is so little vital religion and practical godliness to be found among all ranks of professors in the christian churches. And possibly, if we enquire into the causes of this melancholy complaint, we shall find that nothing has a greater influence to produce a general disregard to the interests of true religion, than the want of care to bring the rising generation under a solemn and abiding sense of the importance of it in their own souls. For, under the good provi-

dence of God, the propagation of religion in the world to the latest posterity, depends in a great measure upon the pious care of parents to instruct their children in the principles of our holy religion, and to impress their tender minds with an early sense of their personal concern in them. For when young persons early devote themselves to the service of God, they have great advantages for making a delightful proficiency in the ways of godliness; and a sacred conscientious regard to the honor and advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the promotion of vital piety in their own souls, daily growing with their increasing years, they will grow more and more determined in their adherence to the ways of God, and more solicitous, when they are settled in families, that they and their houses may serve the God of their fathers. And there is equal reason to hope, that that blessed Redeemer, who took little children in his arms and blessed them, will also prosper their pious labors in the Lord; so that under the impressions of a religious education, pure and undefiled religion may be transmitted to the latest generations. Whereas, on the other hand, if parents neglect the training up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; it cannot be rationally expected that they will either be solicitous to secure the salvation of their own souls, or careful to promote the eternal happiness of those that may be dependent on them or descended from them. So that the pious care or fatal neglect of parents, in the religious instruction of their children may have a much more extensive influence, than many seem to imagine; when they can patiently bear the thoughts of their children's being sent into a

world full of snares and temptations, unprincipled in religion, unacquainted with the corruption of their own hearts and unconcerned about their eternal salvation. What can be rationally expected as the consequence of this? Shall such children be a seed to serve the Lord, or accounted to him for a generation when we are sleeping in the dust? It might as well be expected, that you should reap a plentiful harvest without plowing and sowing, as that your children should grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, without your pains to teach them the things that belong to their eternal peace. Nothing therefore can be of so great importance, both to the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world, and to the everlasting salvation of your children, as to train them up in the ways, in which they should go, that when they are old they may not depart from them. And when I consider the happy consequences arising from a faithful discharge of this important duty, I cannot but entertain a pleasing hope both of your patient attention and of the sacred influences of the holy spirit to bring what may be said with divine power to our hearts and consciences; while I would plead for those, who cannot plead for themselves. In consequence of the method proposed, when I explained the duty and shewed the success that might be expected from attempting it; I propose at this time, through divine assistance, to mention

I. Some arguments to enforce the duty of training up our children in the way, in which they should go.

II. Apply what may be said.

I. Arguments to enforce the duty.

1. *There is a peculiar pleasure attending this duty, which should powerfully constrain parents to the conscientious discharge of it.*

Besides the comfort attending the consciousness of having complied with any known and important obligation; the gracious parent of mankind has wisely framed us with such principles and affections as necessarily secure a secret unutterable delight in forming the tender minds of our children for God and religion. This is a commandment, in keeping of which there is a great reward, and one of those ways of wisdom which are ways of pleasantness, and a path which will lead to peace and happiness. We trace with peculiar pleasure the first efforts of speech on their stammering tongues, and the early dawnings of reason in their feeble minds. It is a delightful task to assist the openings of nature, to lead the young strangers into a new world, to pour the fresh instruction over the unenlightened mind, and to strengthen it with the principles of any kind of useful knowledge, which their age may admit, or their circumstances require. And if this is a pleasant office, what superior delight and satisfaction must it afford, to raise their unpracticed thoughts to meditate upon the most noble and exalted objects; to engage them to think on the adorable God with veneration and joy; to teach them to enquire after an interest in the blessed Jesus, the faithful shepherd of his helpless flock; to open to them the wonders of redeeming love; to instruct them in the

principles of divine truth, and to form them to sentiments of piety to God and love and benevolence to the whole human race. Must there not be a peculiar satisfaction attending the consideration, that we are fellow workers with God himself, that we are promoting that glorious plan of salvation, which the son of God condescended to bleed on the accursed tree, to establish in our degenerate world; that we are preparing subjects for the kingdom of his grace; and that we are laying the foundation of that knowledge, virtue and happiness, which shall be continually increasing through the boundless ages of eternity! How reviving is the hope, that our pious labors in the Lord may be blessed by the concurrence of the holy spirit leading them into a saving acquaintance with God and themselves, and thereby making us the happy instruments of repairing those mournful breaches that sin has made in the world; of counteracting the destructive operations of that apostate spirit, which works in the children of disobedience, of reseuing an immortal spirit from slavery and ruin, and of preparing it for the glorious society of those exalted spirits, which surround the throne of God with the most enraptured strains of devotion and gratitude. This is an exercise near a-kin to the employments of the heavenly world; and it may be rationally expected that God himself, who has enjoined it on parents for the sake of their children, will visit their souls, in the midst of these pious cares, with some foretastes of those pleasures, which flow from his throne above, as a token of his gracious approbation, and as a pledge of their future success. For while we instruct our children in those sacred truths of our holy religion,

which have afforded ourselves the greatest comfort in this house of our pilgrimage; our instructions and admonitions will return into our own bosoms with a rich increase of edification and refreshment. And hereby we shall rise into more endearing communion with our heavenly father, be more attempered to the sacred employments of the upper world, and more meet for the inheritance with the saints in light. However laborious it may be to give "line upon line and precept upon precept;" and however discouraging it may be to consider the little good effects our most affectionate warnings and admonitions may have upon our children; yet God has annexed a peculiar pleasure to the tender toil, and has afforded abundant hopes of future success, sufficient to encourage us to persevere in the important duty and "to be instant in season and out of season." And can we, after all this encouragement, which God has given to secure the religious education of our children, neglect that sacred business, which is attended with substantial comfort, even in the midst of a thousand anxious fears for their happiness, which prepares ourselves for more endearing communion with God, and gives us a higher relish for the sacred pleasures of the heavenly world? Our own desires to grow in grace and to be qualified for a more exalted station in the kingdom of glory, powerfully plead for the children, which God has given us, and lay us under peculiar obligations to train them up in his ways. But this argument, we hope, will receive additional force, when we consider further, that,

2. *The interests of the Redeemer's kingdom depend greatly upon the care of Parents to train up their Children for God.*

We live in a moral world, where one generation after another, is removed from the stage of action to make room for those that are to succeed. With regard to ourselves, we are convinced, both from our own daily observation and from the sacred oracles of God, that this state is but the house of our pilgrimage; that here we have no abiding city, but are travellers to the invisible world; that the most healthy and vigorous amongst us, shall soon go the way from whence we shall not return; and that we must resign the important trust of the gospel, which has been committed to our charge, to others that shall succeed us; and if we have any just sense of the advantage of having the oracles of God committed to us, and the amazing and distinguishing goodness of God, in bestowing this invaluable privilege upon us, or any regard to the happiness of our children; into whose hands would we rather choose to deposit the sacred trust than into theirs? But how can we hope, that they will esteem or be careful to maintain the trust, if we do not labor to prepossess their minds with a previous sense of its importance? How can we expect, that when we are mouldering in the house of silence, they will fill our places in the house of God, or rise up in our stead for the support of the dying interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world? Can we expect it in the neglect of the only rational method of securing religion amongst us? It is true, that God has promised to be ever with his church, so that the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it, but the kingdom of his son shall endure as long as the sun and the moon; one generation after another rising up to declare his mighty works. But these gracious promises, which we are sure a faithful God will accomplish, do not prove that this kingdom shall be continued amongst us, more than they would once have proved, that the candlesticks would never be removed from the Asian churches, which have been given up to desolation many ages ago; and is it not a distressing consideration to think, that true and vital religion should be lost among our dependants; that the house of the Lord should be deserted by our children; that they should forsake the assembling themselves together to acknowledge their dependence on their creator, to do homage to the king of kings, and to celebrate the riches of redeeming grace? Is the thought easy to be supported, that God should write upon our children, or upon their posterity, the sad memorials of a departed glory; that when the worship of God is forsaken, the servants of God must bear a fruitless testimony against an unbelieving generation, until their hearts are broken with so sad an office, and religion is buried in their graves? And is it not peculiarly melancholy, that the children of the kingdom should be thrust out; that those whom we have devoted to God in the most solemn manner at their baptism, should fail of the grace of God and should walk in the ways of the destroyed, and of those that are forsaken of the Lord of all? And can we after all, entertain so great an indifference for the interests of that Redeemer, in whose name both we and our children have been baptized, as to be contented that his holy religion should die in our hands? Was it for this

that the son of God descended from heaven, to publish the gospel covenant in the world, and expired on the cross to confirm it by his blood? Was it for this that the pious labors of our ancestors have transferred this divine religion down through so many succeeding generations, and so many martyrs have sealed it with their death? Was all this done that christianity should be lost among our descendants, or at least sink into an empty name or a lifeless circle of unmeaning forms? Yet, humanly speaking, this must be the melancholy consequence of neglecting to train up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Had we any love to a crucified Redeemer, any regard to the advancement of his kingdom in the world, or any grateful sense of his distinguishing grace in making known to us the way of salvation in his glorious gospel; these things should awaken in us an holy zeal and an earnest desire to spread a sweet savour of his name, as far as our influence can reach; but especially in our families, amongst those whom we have received from him and devoted to him, and in whose happiness we are so tenderly concerned. This brings me to add, that

3. *The present and future happiness of our children depends upon our care to train them up in the ways they should go.*

However little we may regard it, yet it is a solemn truth confirmed by the mouth of inspiration itself, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It is generally the surest way to happiness in

this world, and through the merits and righteousness of the Redeemer, the only way to glory in the world to come. It would be easy to enlarge upon its happy tendency to promote our health, reputation, estates, and the peace of our minds. It secures immediate blessedness to the man that fears the Lord and delighteth greatly in his commandments: as it moderates or suppresses those hurtful passions, which throw the mind into confusion and anguish, and affords abundant exercise for those affections which are delightful; it secures a peace and satisfaction which cannot be derived from the objects of time and sense; it administers "peace of conscience and joy in the holy ghost;" so that the christian finds by happy experience, that "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." They are ways, that not only secure comfort in this world, but also lead up to the paradise of God. For invariable truth and goodness has declared, that to them that by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honor, and immortality, God will give eternal life. So that if our children, through the divine blessing upon our pious instructions, become truly religious, they will not only be preserved from those follies and crimes, which stain the honor and ruin the substance of families, but they will take the most probable method to make life comfortable, and will be entitled to the paternal care and blessing of God, while they are in this world, and will be made heirs of eternal glory in the paradise of God. But on the other hand, if they prove vicious and prophane, which, without the principles of religion to restrain them, we have but too much grounds to fear; what can we rationally expect, but their infa-

my and misery in this world and eternal banishment from God, through the unwasting ages of eternity?— Now, if happiness or misery, the greatest that human hearts can conceive, are likely to be the portion of our children, according as we train them up for either; what man or woman that has the bowels of a parent, can hesitate a moment, whether he will bring up his children in the fear of the Lord, or permit them to walk in the ways of their own heart, and in the sight of their own eyes, until they sink into that horrible pit, from whence there is no redemption? How preposterous is that anxious care of parents, which engages them “to rise early, to sit up late, and to eat the bread of carefulness,” to advance the fortunes of their children, and secure to them the possession of those dubious advantages of this world, which may prove either blessings or curses to them, as they are improved or abused; while they will be at no pains to secure for them the favor and approbation of their God, and an interest in those durable treasures, which “the moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves steal away,” and which alone can make them rich indeed. Such a partial care only of the meanest part of their concerns, is no more reasonable than for a parent, who sees his child perishing before his eyes, to be solicitous to adorn its clothes, instead of affording that immediate help which its extremity demands. Should not this consideration then engage us to consult for their greatest good, and employ our greatest care to lead them into those paths, by which they may avoid eternal destruction and arrive at unfading glory? Especially when we consider, that they have derived a corrupted degenerate nature from us, which prompts them to de-

part from the living God; and that our own personal mistakes in conduct, or our bad examples, have contributed to lead them astray. Does the subject, that by treason, has forfeited his estate from his children, look upon them with pity and concern, and use all his remaining influence to secure his majesty's favor for them before he dies? And shall parents be unconcerned about the favor of God for their children, who have derived from them a tainted blood and a forfeited inheritance? Would he not be justly accounted an unnatural monster indeed, who could introduce the plague into his family, and see his children die around him without concern, while there was a sovereign remedy at hand, by which thousands had been cured; and he would not so much as direct, or insist upon the application of it. But what is a natural death, or the most painful disease of the body, when compared with that mortal disorder of the mind, which, without an application to the great physician of souls, must terminate in eternal *death* and the most insupportable torments forever and ever? The matter may be brought to this easy but important question, shall we teach our children to spend their days upon earth, like rational creatures, in the noblest enjoyment of God and themselves, until they rise to the glories and pleasures of the heavenly world? Or shall we teach them to live like the beasts that perish in the amusements of a vain imagination and in the indulgence of the meaner appetites of their nature, until they sink under all the shame and remorse of a guilty condemning conscience, and the almighty vengeance of an incensed God? And can any be so far lost to every sense of interest and duty, as to imagine that the little interests of time are

worth a moments thought, while these important things which belong to their eternal peace are forgotten and neglected? But this argument should receive additional weight from considering, that

4. *The religious instruction of our children, or the neglect of it will not terminate in them alone, but will also have an extensive influence over all with whom they converse.*

If by the blessing of God upon our pious care, our children's hearts are early touched with an abiding sense of religion, they will soon be convinced that they were not born for themselves alone; but the mercies of God and the example of our Redeemer, will teach them to exert themselves for the service of mankind, and to do good unto all as they have opportunity. As they advance in life, who can tell, in how many instances their pious and charitable cares may be effectual for the benefit of their fellow creatures; how many in the depths of poverty may be relieved by their liberality; how many in perplexed and intricate circumstances may be directed by their counsel; how many weeping eyes may be dried, and how many mourning hearts may be revived by their tender sympathy or seasonable relief; how many of their thoughtless companions may be reclaimed from the error of their ways by their example and influence; and how many aged christians may be excited and quickened in the heavenly road by their ardor and zeal. I can appeal to the conscience of every parent in this assembly, that you wish this to be the character of

your children. And should not this powerfully constrain you to exert your utmost endeavours, thus to train up your children for extensive usefulness in the world, that they may be good angels to mankind and blessings to all with whom they converse?

But on the other hand, we must remember, that our children will not be mere cyphers in the world, if we neglect to train them up for God. Instead of blessings they will prove curses in their generation. The licentiousness to which their corrupt nature will prompt them, may lead them by unthought of consequences, to injure and defraud, as well as grieve and torment others. Instead of reclaiming those that are going in the paths of the destroyer, they may grieve the generation of God's children, blast the hopes of many an anxious parent, defeat the good influence of all their pious admonitions, allure many unpracticed youths into remediless destruction, by their sinful discourses and corrupting examples, and draw down the just judgments of God upon a guilty land. So that the care or neglect of the religious education of our children will have a very extensive influence, not only over their own conduct and happiness, but also over the happiness or misery of all with whom they converse; which should excite us to redoubled diligence in training them up in the ways of God, least for want of the restraints of religion, they become the melancholy instruments of ruining the immortal souls of others, and thereby break the hearts of many a pious parent, who has deserved no such misery and affliction from our hands.

The want of time engages me to wave the consideration of some other arguments, taken from the express command of that God and Redeemer, who have entrusted us with the religious education of our children; the peculiar advantages which parents have for this purpose, by their being constantly with them and acquainted with their dispositions, and the most suitable seasons of address; from the encouragement they have to hope for the divine blessing to render their labors successful; and from the influence that the conscientious discharge of this duty must have upon their own peace in life and at death. The bare mention of these arguments, which might be urged with pertinency upon the present occasion, must suffice, that we may leave room for an address to both parents and children, which we intend in the

APPLICATION.

1. It is with pleasure, that we can congratulate some of you at least, who have the testimony of your own consciences, that in the general tenor of your conversation, you are faithfully endeavouring to discharge the important duty which we have been recommending; and that you have reason to hope that your labor has not been entirely in vain in the Lord. You are better acquainted with the doctrines of the meek and lowly Jesus, than to ascribe the success to the prudence of your own conduct, to the strength of your reasoning, or to the warmth and tenderness of your address. Whatever of these or any other advantages you enjoy were derived from the father of lights, "from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift." In vain had your pious admonitions, from day to day, dropped as the rain

in refreshing showers, or distilled as the dew, in the most gentle and insinuating manner. In vain had the precious seed of the word been sown with unwearied diligence, and watered with the tears of tenderness and love; had not God commanded the operations of his blessed spirit to descend as a more efficacious rain to water their tender hearts. Be persuaded therefore, to adore the riches of free grace, which has granted you any increase; and let the former success of your labors in the Lord, excite you to greater diligence and renewed application to the tender toil, mourning for former deficiencies in duty, and humbly looking to that compassionate Saviour, who bought you and your children with his blood, for the influences of his holy spirit, which can open their obedient hearts to your instructions and bring them with power to their consciences, so that they shall terminate in eternal joys and unfading glory. And if there are any of your children, of whom you cannot yet form the comfortable hope that they are acquainted with the power of practical godliness, but are unfruitful under all your cultivation, or visibly turned aside from the ways in which you have endeavoured to train them up; let me encourage you to persevere even in the midst of discouragement, and be not weary in this important branch of well-doing; remembering that thereby you will deliver your own soul; and that although the objects of your compassionate care be not gathered, yet shall you be glorified, for your work is with the Lord, and your reward is with your God. But still you have abundant encouragement to hope for success from the boundless compassion of God, who exhorts and commands you, "in the morning to

sow your seed, and in the evening not to withhold your hand; for you know not whether shall prosper, this or that; or whether both shall be alike good.”* Is the danger extreme? Let your efforts be so much the more zealous, your admonitions so much the more frequent and serious, and your prayers so much the more earnest and importunate. It may be that God will be gracious to you, that the child may yet live; and your sad apprehensions may only serve to increase your joy, when you will be able to say, “this my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” Or it may be your pious admonitions may have the desired effect, when you are sleeping in the dust, and when the blessed Jesus appears in his own and his father’s glory, he will bring with him that plant, which you have so often watered with your tears and your prayers.

But with regard to some of you, my friends, I am afraid that your own consciences now witness for me, that it is no breach of charity to suppose, that there may be some parents in this numerous society, who have been unfaithful to the souls committed to your care. If there are any of this unhappy character present, permit me to expostulate with you in a few words, in the presence of that holy God who has given you your children. You doubtless remember, that solemn and alarming charge that was given to the prophet: “Son of man I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel, therefore hear thou the word from my mouth and give them warning; and if thou speakest not to warn the wicked from

* Ecl. xi, 6.

his wicked way, to save his life ; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." If ever you have read this passage with attention, you must have been ready to say, " the Lord be merciful to ministers, they have a very solemn account to give." It is certain they have : but permit me to remind you, that this is not our case alone, but you also have your share in it ; for your children are much more immediately committed to your care, than you are to ours ; and by parity of reason, if they perish in their iniquities, while you neglect to give them warning, their blood will be required at your hands.

Let me entreat you for a few moments, to consider how you shall review a life spent in the neglect of this duty, when your souls stand trembling on the confines of the invisible world ; when your awakened consciences will testify against you, that your children's ruin is in part owing to your neglect to train them up in the fear of the Lord. This dreadful reflection will greatly darken, if not entirely suppress those hopes, which alone can support you in that solemn conjuncture. Certain it is, if you considered the dreadful weight with which it will sit upon your minds, in the immediate prospect of your appearance before the bar of your judge, you would not suffer every trifling difficulty to deter you from the discharge of this duty. But carry your prospect a little farther, to the tremendous bar of Christ, where all your delusive hopes that are not founded on his glorious gospel, will forsake you ; and think how you will answer him, when he makes inquisition for blood and demands an account of his children, whom he committed to your

care. How will you be astonished and confounded in the presence of your inexorable judge, and “call on the mountains to cover you from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb?” But is it not infinitely better to prevent these insupportable reflections before it be too late? Does not your own eternal salvation and the salvation of your children; does not interest, affection, gratitude, and every other sacred obligation, plead for your children, and loudly call upon you to train them up in the fear of the Lord?

2. I shall only detain you while I say a few things to my younger friends, for whom I have been pleading so long. You see that it is your parent’s duty to train you up in the ways of the Lord, and to instruct you in the things that belong to your eternal peace. You have immortal souls to save or lose as well as others, and you have reason to bless and praise the adorable God, who has made such a gracious provision for your instruction. You might have been born where you never would have seen a bible, never heard of the name of a Saviour, and never known the way to glory and happiness; where you would have wandered in the ways of the destroyer, and where your parents, involved in the same darkness and ignorance with yourselves, would not have been able to direct your steps in the midst of an ensnaring world. Bless God, therefore, that you have been born in a land of light, and that you “hear the glad tidings of salvation through a Redeemer.” Be careful to listen to the instructions of your parents, and labor to know the things of God; remembering that your

eternal happiness depends upon your acquaintance with God and Christ, "whom to know aright is life eternal." I hope when God is furnishing you with so many advantages for knowing his will; when you are favored with the use of your bibles and other good books; when your parents and ministers spend their time and pains to instruct you in the things that belong to your eternal peace; you will not think much of the trouble of learning. Remember that God himself has mentioned to the honor and praise of young Timothy, "that from a child he was acquainted with the scriptures, which could make him wise to salvation." And let me remind you, that your knowledge of the ways of God is not designed to fill your heads with speculative notions, but to make your hearts and lives more holy. For the blessed Redeemer himself has said it: "If you know these things, happy are ye if ye do them;" and we may add, but if you do them not, better for you never to have known them, better for you never to have been born. "For the servant that knew his master's will and did it not, was beaten with many stripes." I will leave you at this time with this one exhortation more. Pray to God to teach you by his holy spirit, to lead you in his ways, to dispose you to comply with every duty, to fit you for serving him in this world, and for living with him in the world to come. I would hope, that you do not live a single day without prayer to God for his direction and preservation, for the pardon of your sins, and for the blessing of your heavenly father and Redeemer. God loves them that love him, and "they that seek him early shall find him." Your heavenly Redeemer delights to see young persons coming to his throne

of grace and asking a blessing from him. When he was upon this earth, he took the children that were brought to him in his arms and blessed them, and said, of such was his kingdom; and he still retains the same compassion and tenderness for young persons, that ever he had. Pray, therefore, to him every day on your bended knees for a blessing. This, my young friends, is the way to grow wise unto salvation, to glorify your heavenly father; to adorn the doctrines of God your Saviour; to be ornaments to religion; to obtain peace with God and with your own consciences; to live comfortably and happy in the world; to avoid the snares of your spiritual enemies; to be a comfort and a blessing to your parents and ministers; and to be brought at last “to dwell with God and Christ, with angels and the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven.” And may the God of all grace enable you to walk in it, and preserve you by his mighty power, through faith unto eternal salvation.

SERMON XIV.

RECEIVE NOT THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

1 Cor. 3, 16.

Know ye not that ye are the temples of God ; and that the spirit of God dwells in you.

THE existence of an infinitely perfect being, who is the first cause of all things, from whom we have derived our beings, and to whom we owe the highest veneration and obedience, is a sacred and eternal truth ; witnessed by the heavens and the earth, by all above, below and around us. And it is but reasonable to suppose, that he who formed the human mind, and gave us a power of communicating our sentiments to each other, and of encouraging and persuading one another, without infringing our natural freedom, should also have access to our minds, and should know how far and with what degree of force, impressions may be made upon our spirits, consistently with our rational liberty. The operations of the spirit of God therefore, are to be considered as in a way of powerful assistance to the due apprehension and belief of the mind and will of God as revealed in his word, and to the practice of every commanded duty. While his immensity and omniscience assure us, that he is every where present, and beholds all the secret workings of our minds, and his all suffi-

ciency, that he can liberally reward us for all the sincere devotion and homage that we pay to him; his infinite goodness and mercy give us the utmost confidence, that he is willing to maintain a spiritual communion with us, by accepting our homage and worship, and granting a gracious answer to our prayers, by receiving our grateful acknowledgments, and showering down his blessings upon us with a liberal hand; and these deductions of reason are abundantly confirmed by divine revelation, in which he has promised to put his spirit within us and cause us to walk in his statutes and judgments, to quicken, enliven, direct, comfort, and strengthen us by the internal operations of his gracious and free spirit; and that he will give his spirit to them that ask him, with the readiness of a most indulgent father, to answer all the purposes of our sanctification and preparation for glory. Nay, it is supposed in every page of the bible, that there is a gracious communication of the spirit of God with our minds, by which he is the author of every devout affection, of every pious resolution, and of every religious motion of the soul; and of all that comfort, hope, confidence, and joy, which the true christian experiences in the spiritual life. This is what the apostle means by calling us the temples of God, and by saying that the spirit of God dwells in us.

Now when the adorable majesty of heaven condescends to allow us this distinguishing privilege, of enjoying a spiritual communion and fellowship with himself, by the in-dwelling of his holy spirit, is it not astonishing that any of the human race should be indifferent about it, and much more that they should be averse to

the cultivation of it? And yet melancholy experience proves that this is really the case. The men of this world immerse themselves so deeply in the enjoyment of the pleasures, profits, and honors of this life, and form such close attachments to temporal things, that they have but little relish for a spiritual intercourse with the author of their beings and the source of their happiness. Nothing can more fully discover the mournful corruption of our nature than this; especially if we consider that we are made capable of enjoying this exalted privilege, that we must be sensible that we stand in the utmost need of it; that we are frequently and earnestly invited to it; and that it is our greatest honor and happiness, as well as our duty, to comply with these invitations. This indisposition to a religious intercourse with the father of our spirits, is the mournful consequence of our apostacy from God; and therefore, as universal as the corruption of our degenerate nature, until it be removed by the renewing and sanctifying operations of his holy spirit. Man, in his original constitution, was designed to be the temple of God, and was disposed to rejoice in the exalted privilege of maintaining an holy communion and fellowship with the author of his being.

But look now into the corrupted heart of man, and how are all things in this once beautiful temple of God miserably defaced? Those clear notices and discoveries of divine truths, which he originally enjoyed, are in a great measure obliterated, and those laws that were written on the heart greatly obscured. That heart, that was formerly the altar of God, from whence devout

affections and spiritual oblations were wont to ascend in the flames of love, is now wretchedly defiled by being consecrated to lying vanities and contemptible objects. That inward propension of soul to honor and reverence God, to believe and trust in him, to love and obey him, which constituted the moral image of God, is ruined by sin; and a wilful alienation of heart and estrangement from him, has succeeded in its place: so that the language of our corrupted nature is: "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; who is the Almighty that we should serve him, or what profit should we have if we pray unto him?"* And every unrenewed and unsanctified soul being thus unfit for the spiritual residence and the distinguishing fruits of the special presence of an holy God, is in a mournful degree forsaken of God and deprived of this spiritual communion.

But blessed be God; he has formed the gracious plan of restoring your degenerate nature to this singular honor, of being the living temples of God: for this purpose the eternal word was made flesh and tabernacled amongst us. He became the glorious Immanuel, "God with us, God manifested in our flesh," which gives us the highest assurance of his merciful design to restore our nature to that communion which we had lost. Nay, he became an atoning sacrifice to expiate our guilt, that he might open a way for our restoration to this privilege consistently with the honor of that God, whose justice we had so highly provoked. And it is for the same purpose

*Job XXI, 14.

that he has the spirit above measure, that by the communication of his gracious influences, he may prepare us for the service of God, and the enjoyment of his special presence. So that none but such as are vitally united to Jesus Christ by a living faith, and are partakers of his regenerating and sanctifying spirit, are actually the spiritual temples of God. And in being made an holy habitation to himself, we are his own workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus and prepared for the master's use.

But while we are thus formed into an habitation of God through the spirit, our own concurrence is also necessary, by a free and entire dedication of ourselves to his service. We must consecrate our understandings to contemplate, admire, and adore his perfections and the glorious discoveries of his grace in creation, providence and redemption, our wills to choose him as our portion and happiness, and our affections to love and delight in him; and all our active powers and faculties to conspire in paying that reverential homage and worship that is due to him. Sensible of the imperfection of the new nature, even in the best of us, we should labor after an universal holiness of heart and life, and guard against every known sin that might provoke him to withdraw from us: for the temple of God must be holy.—No polluting light must be cherished in the heart, no habitual practice of sin must be allowed to stain our conversation, if we expect the special residence of God in his spiritual temple. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or what communion hath light with darkness, or what concord hath Christ

with Belial? None can be admitted to the honor and happiness of enjoying so great a privilege, but such as are careful to cultivate every amiable branch of the christian temper, and to be holy in some good degree, as God is holy; and the greater proficiency we make in an holy conformity to his image, the more improving and refreshing shall our communion with him be, and the more copious communications of his grace may we expect. For while we thus concur with his gracious design of preparing us for an holy habitation for himself, we may be assured that he will accept the dedication we make of ourselves to his service, and give us the special marks of his approbation by the operations of his holy spirit. Though there be no such visible glory to indicate the divine presence in every christian, as attended the dedication of the temple by Solomon, yet there is the spirit of God dwelling in his heart by faith and by his stated and constant operations, carrying on the progressive work of his sanctification, conforming him more and more to the image of God, exciting filial affections to him, and disposing his heart for more constant and delightful communion with him. This is plainly implied in our text, where the apostle asserts, that we are the temples of God; and adds, by way of illustration, that the spirit of God dwells in us; and it is confirmed by the gracious promise of our Saviour, to them that love him and keep his words, that the father will love them, and that the father and he will come to them and take up his abode with them. Every true christian therefore, has reason to expect God's gracious presence, to hear and answer his fervent and devout supplications, to accept his grateful sacrifices of prayer

and praise, and to dispense the various blessings of his grace. Whenever he draws near to God with a purified heart and the tenders of a devout and filial affection, God will draw nigh to him with the quickening influences of his holy spirit, and the reviving manifestations of his complacency and love. The reality of this spiritual intercourse between God and us, and our capacity for the enjoyment of this exalted privilege, is evidently implied in our being called the temples of God, and having this holy spirit dwelling in us.

But that we may have a more comprehensive view of this subject, let us attend to the method by which this spiritual communion is maintained and promoted.

On our part it is maintained by faith, meditation and prayer, and on God's part, by his word, his ordinances, and his holy spirit.

1. *Faith is an happy instrument, whereby an heavenly intercourse is maintained between God and the believer.*

The light of reason and revelation discovers to us the reality of the divine perfections, together with these interesting truths, that belong to our eternal salvation.— But faith goes further, and realizes them to the mind, and impresses it with such sentiments, as should naturally flow from them. This is mentioned by an inspired writer as the effect of Moses's faith, that “he endured as seeing him who is invisible.”* It does not rest as a spe-

*Heb. xi, 27.

culative principle in the head, but descends into the heart, and operates with a quick and commanding influence upon all the leading powers of the soul; enlightening the understanding, ruling the will, governing the affections, and thus regulates the whole conduct. It produces such a disposition and behaviour, as corresponds with the great principles and precepts, which we believe. It operates variously according to our faith. When God and his perfections are viewed by an eye of faith; it impresses the mind with a lively conception of them, and by exciting corresponding sentiments of piety to him it becomes the means of an holy communion with him. It disposes us to resign ourselves to his wisdom and direction, to love his goodness, to trust his righteousness, to confide in his power, to fear his justice, to imitate his holiness and to honor and reverence his majesty.— Faith represents God as an ever-present friend, attentive to our thoughts and our words, our ways and our complaints, concerned for our happiness, and invariably pursuing it by all the methods of his providence and grace. When it surveys the threatnings of his word, it fills the soul with an holy awe and reverential fear: when a divine promise is the object of faith, it embraces and applies it, rejoices in it and depends upon it.— When a command is the object, our faith disposes us to endeavour after a conformity to it, and to take every precept of scripture as a rule of life. When a future state is the object of faith; when it looks at those things that are unseen and eternal; it represents them as present and visible, and affects the mind with the consideration of them as much as if they were so: and hence it is called ‘the substance of things hoped for and the evi-

dence of things not seen.' When the blessed Redeemer is the object of our faith, it produces all those grateful and devout affections, of love and joy, of fear and hope, which should arise from those endearing characters, under which he is represented in scripture. When it views him as our mediator, it leads us to trust all our everlasting concerns in his hands, to approach God only through him, and to expect the divine acceptance only through the merits of his atonement. When it views him as our propitiation, it fixes our dependence on him alone for pardon and justification; and when as our Redeemer, it touches all the springs of gratitude in the soul and kindles the warmest sentiments of gratitude, love and joy. In a word, it engages us to hearken to him as our instructor, to obey him as our king, and to follow him as our pattern and guide. And thus by exciting all those devout and pious affections to God and Christ, on the lively exercise of which our communion with him depends, it is the happy instrument of carrying on an heavenly intercourse between God and the believer.

2. Meditation is also another way of enjoying communion with God.

By turning our thoughts upon God, by entertaining ourselves with the views of his perfections exhibited in his works and by acknowledging his hand in every occurrence, his children gain a growing acquaintance with their heavenly father; while those who will not allow themselves time for this heavenly employment contract an habitual estrangement from him. The more the

mind is accustomed to meditation, the more readily will it engage in it, when any uncommon event or extraordinary providence calls us to contemplate the wisdom, power or goodness of God. And these impressions that are made on the contemplative mind are often retained or recalled, until they have a religious effect on the heart, and are improved for the purposes of a growing piety. Thus the pious christian has often found that the flames of divine love, of hope and joy have been enkindled in his soul, while he was meditating on the glorious perfections of God, his wonderful works of mercy and goodness, the miracles of redeeming grace, the invaluable privileges of the gospel, the precious promises made to the believer, together with that inconceivable crown of righteousness, which is reserved for him in heaven. And thus does he rise into a more full and comfortable communion with the author of all his mercies.

3. Prayer is the natural consequence of devout meditation, and therefore another way of maintaining a heavenly intercourse with God.

When the christian's faith or meditation give him a strong and lively view of the wisdom, goodness or power of God, in any affecting dispensation of his providence, or in the glorious plan of our redemption by Jesus Christ, he will naturally lift up his heart to God in pious ejaculations, and devout ascriptions of praise and thanksgiving. And humble and fervent prayer is admirably adapted to the purposes of a growing acquaintance with God, as it improves and strengthens

those pious dispositions, on which the pleasure and happiness of religion and our capacity for enjoying communion with God depend: such as divine love and gratitude, trust in the providence of God under all our troubles, contentment, patience and resignation to the divine will, hope in his mercy for whatever relates to our present or future welfare, and an ardent thirst for that fulness of joy and those rivers of pleasure, that are at the right hand of God.

But this spiritual intercourse with God is also maintained on his part, by all those methods by which he communicates the knowledge of himself and the richest blessings of his grace;—viz: by his word, his ordinances, and the influences of his spirit.

1. *God as really speaks to us in his word, as if we heard an audible voice from heaven, directing us in every duty.*

Herein he has made known to us the way of life through his son, and has given us the knowledge of those things which can make us wise to salvation. By the fullest directions for the regulation of our conduct, by the most powerful arguments to quicken and encourage us in duty, and the most invigorating consolations to support us under the troubles of life, which he has given us in the sacred volume; he holds a divine correspondence with us, expresses the greatest good will towards us, and gives us the fullest assurance of his remembrance of us and his readiness to help us. By this incomparable book, which is enriched with the most ex-

tensive promises and the wisest counsels, he disperses the clouds of ignorance and error, in which we are involved, in the land of our pilgrimage, and opens to us the ravishing prospect of immortal life and glory.

2. Our communion with God is also promoted by the ordinances of his church.

He has appointed a standing ministry in his church, together with various refreshing ordinances, which he has made the usual channels, through which he communicates his special grace. And while we with reverence and sincerity attend upon his public worship, treasure up in our hearts the gracious contents of his word, or join together in celebrating his praise, or in commemorating the dying love of our Redeemer; he draws nigh unto us, spreads the banner of his love over us, and gives those rich supplies of grace which we need. In these sacred ordinances he strengthens our graces, confirms our resolutions, comforts our hearts with the consolations that are in Christ, and inspires us with zeal to promote his kingdom and interest in the world, and to press forward to greater attainments in the spiritual life, and a better preparation for the business and the enjoyments of the heavenly state.

3. But our spiritual intercourse with God is principally maintained by the in-dwelling and agency of his holy spirit.

That we might both understand the meaning and feel the genuine power of divine truths, and experience

those pious affections, in which our communication with him consists, the spirit of God is sent down to dwell in our hearts, to remove our carnal prejudices, to enlighten our minds, to enlarge and elevate our understandings, to give us a larger acquaintance with divine things, and to make us wise unto salvation. It is his peculiar office, as the comforter sent by the father to abide with us forever, to take of the things of Christ, his doctrines, his promises and instructions, and to shew them unto us; to bring the truths of the gospel with power to the conscience, to influence our conduct, and to enable us to discover our interest in the promises and blessings of the gospel covenant, for our comfort and support in life. It is his sacred office to strengthen us with might in the inner man, to lead us in the ways of righteousness and safety, and to fill the soul with joy and peace in believing; and surely, that soul who follows on to know the Lord, who is desirous of a farther acquaintance with God, cannot be disappointed in his expectations from the sacred agent, who has taken up his residence in the believer for this very purpose. Can it be thought, that the father of our spirits, who has assured us, that he will give his holy spirit to them that ask him, will not recruit the strength, fortify the resolution, and aid the endeavours of his children? No: he will lead them in the way everlasting, he will give power to the faint, and to them that have no might he will encrease strength; so that they shall find that his grace shall be sufficient for them, and that his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness. So that in all their troubles they shall be supported by the right hand of his righteousness, and in the hour of their dissolution, when their faith is

almost turned into vision, they have reason to hope, that the spirit of God who dwells in them, will enable them to rejoice in the God of their salvation, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

APPLICATION.

1. *How marvellous is the condescension of God in making such sinful and worthless creatures his living temples.*

What are our souls, to which so many remains of impurity cleave, that the high and holy God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, should notwithstanding, choose them for his special residence? What are our poor and defective services, that he should regard them with a favourable eye, or reward them with the manifestations of his love? Let us therefore adore and magnify the condescension of God, who stoops so low as to dwell with the humble and contrite soul, who trembles at his word.

2. From this discourse we see the honor and happiness of every true christian, whom the most high condescends to honor with his special presence: for where the blessed God makes a soul his peculiar habitation, he dwells in it by the stated operations of his holy spirit; he replenishes it with the rays of divine light and life, enstamps his own amiable image upon it, refreshes it with his own consolations, and admits it to that freedom and communion with himself, which is peculiarly delightful and inconceivably beneficial. He makes them to experience the incomprehensible sweetness and the glorious

extent of that precious promise, "I will dwell with them and walk in them, and be their God."

3. Let this discourse excite us all to examine ourselves, and try ourselves, whether the spirit of God indeed dwells in us; or whether we are not still in the melancholy possession of the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. If we have not the spirit of Christ we are none of his; but are led captive by Satan at his pleasure. No doubt, we all think too favourably of ourselves: but do our temper and conduct lay a solid foundation for such an hope? Does the prevalence of holy and devout affections in our souls, and the habitual regularity of our lives, and our growing conformity to the moral image of God, give us rational grounds to conclude, that we are led by his spirit in the ways of righteousness and peace? Do we experimentally know, what it is to enjoy communion and fellowship with God and Christ, by his holy spirit, in meditation and prayer, in reading his word and attending on the ordinances of the gospel, and in the exercises of faith and hope, and spiritual joy? If this should be our happy condition, let us magnify the Lord for the distinguishing honor he has conferred upon us, in making us his living temples, and earnestly aspire after a more intimate intercourse with him. Let us breathe after brighter discoveries of his amiable glories, fuller communications of his quickening and transforming grace, and more ravishing manifestations of his love. Let us endeavour to keep the fire of devotion continually burning in our hearts, that our spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, may be daily offered up to him in his spiritual temple. Frequent and

lively contemplations of the glory of God shining in his works and his word, the ardent breathings of inflamed affections, and the warm aspirations of our souls, are exercises highly becoming those, whom he chooses to be an habitation for himself by his spirit; and let us guard against defiling his temple by intemperance or sensuality, and thereby provoking him to withdraw from us and to destroy us. He will resent it as an heinous indignity, if we suffer any moral impurity, such as malice and envy, hatred and revenge, pride and sensuality, allowed to remain in our hearts: for the apostle speaking of those spiritual temples, says, "if any man defile them, him will God destroy."

But if your own consciences testify against any of you, that you have no rational ground to conclude, that you are yet the temples of God and have his spirit residing in you; O! be entreated, as you value the favor of God, as you wish to experience the smiles of his countenance in time or through eternity, to consecrate yourselves, your souls and your bodies, to his special and perpetual service. Cry earnestly to him for the renewing influences of his spirit, to purify your degenerate nature and make you an holy habitation for himself.— Implore his sanctifying grace to enlighten your minds, to rectify your inclinations, to spiritualize your affections, and to banish every hateful passion and every defiling lust, that might provoke him to withdraw from you, and leave you to wander on in a melancholy estrangement from the adorable source of life and happiness; and be constant and conscientious in your attendance upon all those instrumental duties of religion and

the ordinances of the gospel church, which he has appointed as the usual channels of communicating his grace, to prepare you for the habitation of his holy spirit. Spirituality and purity in your desires, integrity and sincerity in your aims and intentions for the glory of God, will invite that blessed spirit, who has given this temper to take up his residence in the souls you have consecrated to his honor.

And finally, to encourage you to seek for this exalted privilege, let me beseech you to consider the attainableness, the knowledge, and the pleasure of communion with God. Has he not promised to give his holy spirit to them that ask him, with infinitely more readiness than the most indulgent father could give bread to a starving child? Are not his sacred influences purchased by Jesus Christ to be communicated to such as desire them? Is not this sacred agent daily striving with you, and pleading for admission into your hearts, to prepare you for communion with God? And can you spend your time to greater advantage? Can any thing more improve and exalt your degenerate natures, than by faith, meditation and prayer, to ascend up to the first cause and principle of all things, to behold, admire, and taste his surpassing excellence, and to feel his quickening influences, until we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord? And what pleasure and satisfaction can equal that which arises from the intimations of the divine love and the tokens of his favor? To love and to be beloved by the greatest and best of all beings, who is the unwasting source of all good, and who can free us from every pain, secure

us from every danger, and confer upon us every blessing, is the most exalted happiness that the nature of man is capable of enjoying. This is "joy and peace in believing, which strangers to God intermeddle not with." If these things then have any weight, as they certainly should have the greatest, let them engage us to consecrate ourselves as the temples of God, that he may send his spirit to dwell in our hearts, and prepare us for living with him in everlasting glory.

SERMON XV.

RECEIVE NOT THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

2 COR. 6, 1.

*We then as workers together with him, beseech you also,
that ye receive not the Grace of God in vain.*

IT has been often observed that we form the best estimate of the true value of the blessings of divine goodness, when by the want of them we are made sensible of their necessity and importance to our happiness. The mercies, of which we have had a long and uninterrupted enjoyment, how great and valuable soever they may be, too commonly make but a very faint impression upon us. We become almost insensible of their worth, and are neither careful to improve them, nor sufficiently thankful to the bounteous author for the gift. This wrong judgment appears with melancholy evidence in nothing more than in our sentiments concerning the christian religion, which is stiled with peculiar propriety in our text, "The Grace of God."—It is an inestimable treasure, which we have enjoyed through our whole life: we never knew, what it was to want it; what it was to be deprived of the privileges of looking into our bibles, and of drawing support and direction from that sacred fountain of knowledge for the conduct of human life: and hence it comes to pass that so

few in the christian churches have so high an estimation of its incomparable value as it justly deserves. Too many think of it with a cold indifference, and more act as if they looked upon the religion of Jesus as a superfluous institution, of little or no advantage to mankind. They are at little pains to make themselves acquainted with the scheme of salvation which it proposes. Their bibles lie by them as a neglected or useless book; and they are seldom referred to as an infallible standard to rectify their opinions or practice. But had we ever known, or did we attentively consider the horrid barbarity and ignorance, that gloomy superstition and those slavish fears, from which we are delivered by the gospel of Christ, no cold or lessening thoughts of it could find room in our breasts. With eager joy would we embrace the heavenly gift, and with thankful souls adore the divine goodness for the invaluable blessing. The heathen world were involved in impenetrable darkness, and perplexed with excruciating uncertainty about the true happiness of mankind and the method of obtaining it. Even their philosophers with all the advantages of learning and of their deep and laborious researches, were much divided in their opinions about this question, which was of so much importance to the human race. The feeble light of nature served only to shew them the misery in which they were involved, and to fill their minds with the uneasy apprehensions of its continuance, by the slight notices which it affords of their future existence in another world. Their continual sacrifices preserved amongst them a lively sense of their guilt, without giving them a comfortable assurance that it could be removed by the most costly offerings. You

have the perplexing uncertainty of the light of nature on this subject expressed in the pathetic language of the king of Moab. “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” But blessed be God, all this uncertainty and doubt is removed by the glorious light of the gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, and has laid the most solid foundation, on which we may securely build our hopes of pardon and eternal salvation.

And shall we, my friends, receive this grace of God in vain? Shall we, on whom the sun of righteousness has risen in all his glory and splendor, whose darkness is dispelled, and whose hearts are gladdened with the rays of his heavenly wisdom, be careless and indifferent about the safe and infallible directions he has given to lead us to glory?

By the grace of God, in the language of scripture, we are to understand, the free unmerited favor of God, his unsolicited love and mercy, which is the spring and foundation of all the blessings we receive from his bounty. In this sense, it is used in 2. Tim. 1, 9. Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, according to his purpose and grace. In conformity to this general idea, it is frequently put for some particular instance of the divine favor and mercy to man; such as

the free and efficacious work of the holy spirit, renewing the soul after the image of God, and continually guiding and strengthening the believer to obey his will, to resist temptations, to mortify corruptions, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord: "My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in your weakness;" for the believer's justification in the sight of God, through the righteousness of Christ, and the consequent glorious state of reconciliation and peace with him, into which we are introduced by the unmerited favor of God: "By grace are ye saved through faith." "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand;"* and also for the doctrine of the gospel, which contains the offers of pardon and salvation to penitent believers, together with all the great and precious promises of the new covenant. "This is the true grace of God wherein you stand."† This is the true and genuine doctrine of the gospel of God. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; that is the gospel of Christ."‡ In this sense I would understand the expression in the text. We beseech you that "ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

Now, that the gospel of Christ may be stiled with the greatest propriety, the grace of God, is abundantly evident from this single consideration, that all mankind, both Gentiles and Jews, were utterly unworthy of such a favor. Mankind are endowed with rational powers,

* Rom. v, 2.

† 1. Pet. v, 12.

‡ Tit. ii, 11.

in the due exercise of which they might attain to a considerable knowledge of God and religion. And however insufficient this may be in some instances, for the great purposes of religion; yet undoubtedly a diligent search after it, and a suitable improvement of what we had already attained, gives the most probable foundation to hope, that a gracious God will give us what farther knowledge he sees necessary for creatures in our situation. But the neglect of this knowledge and the misimprovement of our rational powers, render us utterly unworthy of such a favor. Now that this was the case with the heathen nations, is most certain. They had sunk into such ignorance of the nature and perfections of God, and had adopted such an impious, absurd, and ridiculous scheme of religion, as it was impossible for them to fall into, had they exercised and improved the reason that God had given to them. Our understandings are, no doubt, much darkened by our corruptions, and our natural powers much weakened; yet not so much, but that “from the things that are made, we may know the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead:” so that those ridiculous tribes of mock-deities, and that impious scheme of superstition, which the heathen nations adopted, must have been the offspring of the most criminal negligence and shameful stupidity. And how much more criminal must they appear to be, if with many, we suppose that God never in any age of the world, left men to search out their duty by the faint glimmerings of the light of nature; but that they were aided by the traditionary remains of an ancient revelation: For to what a sinful neglect of God, to what a scandalous indifference about the great truths

of religion, must we ascribe it, that they suffered this knowledge of God to be so soon and so totally corrupted and effaced, that they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image, made like to corruptible man, to birds, to four-footed beasts, and to creeping things; that they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. Now, if in the most enlightened ages of the world, and amidst all their boasted pretensions to wisdom, the Gentile nations were so far from improving the light that God had given them, in such a manner as to deserve an additional revelation of his will, that they were absolutely without excuse for their impiety and folly, as an inspired apostle assures us they were: the revelation of the gospel must be a free unmerited favor of God, and an astonishing instance of his unparalleled mercy and grace. Nor were the Jews themselves more deserving of such a favor. Though distinguished above the rest of the world by a superior degree of knowledge, and an express revelation of the will of God, they so obscured and corrupted it, by their false and interested interpretations of it, that they rendered the commands of God of none effect, and taught for divine doctrines, the commandments of men. The public instructors of their nations, the Scribes and Pharisees, set up the idle traditions of the elders, as of superior authority to the laws of heaven, and in many important instances of morality, taught the people to transgress the commands of God, by their vain traditions.* So that the gospel of Christ may, with the utmost propriety, be stiled the grace of

* Mat. xv, 3.

God, as it was a free and unmerited favor to the whole world.

I. But when may we be said to receive this grace of God in vain?

1. *We receive this grace of God in vain, when we are at no pains to gain an acquaintance with the gospel scheme of salvation, by reading the scriptures, or attending upon the public explanation of them.*

It requires no great expence of thought to discover, nor of language to prove, that it is our duty to gain a competent knowledge of that religion, on which our hopes of eternal happiness are built. That wilful and affected ignorance, which arises from carelessness or inattention, or unreasonable prejudices against the means of instruction that God has given us, cannot fail to subject us to the wrath and displeasure of God, in proportion to the abilities and opportunities of information we enjoy. If the heathen nations were inexcusably criminal for their ignorance of the being and perfections of God, which were clearly seen by the works of creation and providence, so that God gave them up in righteous judgment, to vile affections and a reprobate mind; we must be incomparably more criminal, if we remain ignorant of our duty in any important article, under all the advantages we enjoy by the clearer light of the gospel. It is in vain, and worse than in vain to us, that we are favored with the benefit of a full and final revelation from heaven, of the will of God concerning our salvation; if we remain ignorant of the important doctrines and duties,

which our infallible instructor has taught us to believe and practise. To what purpose is the mystery of our redemption, which for ages lay hidden in the counsels of divine wisdom, made known to us in the gospel, if we are not at pains to make ourselves acquainted with the contents of that sacred volume? To what purpose has the providence of God so ordered matters, that we have bibles in all our houses, at a very small expence, and opportunities of instruction for the rising generation to be furnished with the knowledge of the great principles of religion, if we seldom or never look into our bibles, or are careless about instructing our children? To what purpose has God appointed an order of men, whose business it is to explain the doctrines of the gospel, and enforce them upon the consciences of men, by all those arguments which are suggested in that glorious revelation, if we forsake the assembling of ourselves together, for the purposes of religious instruction, and suffer every frivolous excuse to have sufficient weight to restrain us from attending upon the public instructions of the sanctuary? Reasons, if they indeed deserve the name of reasons, taken from the coldness of the day, the unseasonableness of the weather, and distance of the place of worship, a trifling indisposition of the mind or body, have frequently weight enough to prevent our attendance upon the ordinances of the gospel, which the wisdom of heaven has appointed for the instruction of mankind, which reasons have no influence to keep us from scenes of diversion or the gratification of an idle curiosity. From this carelessness and inattention to the doctrines of the gospel, it is melancholy to observe the degree of ignorance that prevails in the christian churches,

concerning the peculiar doctrines of the gospel and the way of salvation, through a Redeemer. And do we not receive the grace of God in vain, if under all the advantages we are favored with, for gaining the knowledge of our duty, we are, notwithstanding, ignorant of it, and have nothing but obscure or false conceptions of the way which God has appointed for the pardon of our sins, and our recovery from the ruins of our fall?

2. *We may be said also to receive the Grace of God in vain, when the gospel fails to reform the heart and life, and we are building our hopes of salvation upon any foundation that is not authorised by this divine revelation.*

Let a man's knowledge of the christian religion be ever so exact and extensive ; suppose him, through the influence of a good education and a careful attention to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, able to explain them to others, and vindicate them from the objections and cavils of gainsayers ; yet if his knowledge do not mend his heart and reform the conduct ; that man's religion is vain. The only valuable end of knowledge of religion is practice, and if it only produces a form of godliness without the power ; if it terminates only in amusing speculations, without descending into the heart, and operating with a commanding influence over all the active powers of our nature, it can answer no other purpose than to sink us down under a more aggravated destruction. For " he that knows his master's will and doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." Although we may have reason for gratitude to God, for

the advantages of a good education and a well informed judgment, yet they should not be mistaken for a sanctified heart. It will avail us nothing, that the oracles of God have been committed into our hands, that we have heard the glad tidings of salvation through a Redeemer, and that we are well acquainted with the doctrines of our holy religion; unless we experience that saving change in the temper and conduct, which will discover itself in an holy conformity to the precepts and example of Christ. For what end has the inspiration of the Almighty given us understanding, and distinguished us from the brute creation, with the capacity of considering the tendency of our actions, and of looking forward to the consequences of our conduct in another state: and for what purposes are we favoured with such clear and perfect discoveries of the divine will respecting our deportment in life; if we may disregard these advantages with impunity, and live as if we had no higher destination than the beasts that perish? If the mere knowledge of our duty, or a speculative belief of the doctrines of christianity had been sufficient for our salvation; they doubtless had been safe, who heard the son of man teaching in their streets, and delivering his heavenly doctrines with unparalleled plainness and authority: and they too had not only been safe, but also entitled to a superior rank in his heavenly kingdom, who have prophesied in his name and done many mighty works; and yet we are assured by the mouth of infallibility, that he will say to many of them at last, "depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know you not." Though we could speak with the perspicuity of an angel upon the nature of any christian doctrine, and with the

warmth of a Seraph, upon the influence of a christian grace, and with all the energy of persuasion explain the several arguments, by which they are enforced upon the conscience ; yet if we do not reduce them to practice, if our knowledge of religion does not improve our dispositions and regulate our lives ; our religion is vain, and we are “ as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.” The christian religion is a practical institution ; and while it unfolds the mysteries of redemption, and the method of pardon and justification through the atonement of Jesus Christ, by faith in his blood ; it insists also on an universal holiness of heart and life, and a prevailing conformity to the divine and unspotted example of our exalted head and pattern, as absolutely necessary to qualify us for the enjoyment of God in glory. So that if our knowledge does not produce this happy effect upon us by the sacred agency of the spirit of God, we shall be found at last to have received this grace of God in vain ; nay, it will be better for us never to have known the way of life through a Redeemer, never to have been possessed of higher advantages for knowing our duty, than the benighted savages enjoy who live without God and Christ and hope in the world.

3. We shall also be found to have received the grace of God in vain, if we build our hopes of eternal salvation upon any other foundation, than that which is warranted by the gospel of Christ, as alas ! too many in the christian churches are observed to do, either through pride or ignorance or inattention. Notwithstanding the clearness and perspicuity of the gospel in the important doctrines that belong to our peace, it is found by long

experience and the observation of many ages, that many too securely trust to the privilege of their being born, and baptized and educated in the church, of their professing themselves members of a particular christian society, separated from others, it may be from an apprehension of a more scriptural worship and purer doctrines, as a sufficient foundation for their hopes of eternal life. But if a lineal descent from Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God, or an incorporation with the Jewish church, could not entitle the Jews to the spiritual promises of the covenant that was made with him and his seed; no more will the hearing of Christ preached in our streets, our eating and drinking in his presence, and our professing to be the members of his visible church, entitle professors under the gospel to pardon and salvation, without an hearty and unreserved compliance with all the terms of the new covenant. Nor is there more security in a dependence upon the regularity and orthodoxy of our religious opinions and sentiments; if while we have zeal enough to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints and abilities sufficient to vindicate and support the doctrines of the gospel, we are at the same time making shipwreck of a good conscience, and mistake an orthodox head for a renewed temper and an holy conversation; or if while we may indulge ourselves in the conscious satisfaction of entertaining more enlarged and generous sentiments, than what others can admit, who are under the influence of a narrow education and a biggoted spirit, we are, notwithstanding our freedom of sentiment, the workers of iniquity and the slaves of sin and corruption. Of the same precarious nature too, is the depen-

dence of those, who are building their eternal hopes on the merit of their own imperfect obedience, and the external regularity of their conduct, or their conceited apprehensions of their own attainments in the spiritual life ; without an humbling sense of the corruption of their hearts, of their manifold violations of the divine laws, and of the just demerit of their sins ; and without a fiducial regard to the righteousness and atonement of Christ, through which alone their sins are to be pardoned, their persons justified, and their services accepted of God. In vain also, is the dependence of others upon an external form of godliness, without the life and power of it, or upon a punctual and regular attendance upon the various ordinances of the church, or the exercises of public or private devotion, without cultivating that spiritual temper, which they are calculated to produce in every christian. No more will the warmth of our passions in religious exercises avail us ; the joy and transport which we have some times experienced in the glad tidings of the gospel, or the fearful apprehensions we have at other times entertained, of the wrath and displeasure of God, on account of our sins ; unless these experiences terminate in a hearty submission to the gospel method of salvation, and produce in the renewed soul, a steady and uniform endeavour to live before God in newness of life, and to adorn the doctrines of Christ by an holy conversation. Now all these and many other as precarious foundations of hope, are unsupported by the gospel of Christ : and therefore, all those, whose pride or ignorance lead them to depend upon them for eternal life, and to neglect the only safe and infallible

method of salvation which the gospel professes, may be said to receive the grace of God in vain.

The gospel of Christ gives encouragement to such guilty sinners as we are, to expect salvation only upon our compliance with the gracious terms of the new covenant, which was ratified and established in his blood; and therefore, lays our only solid foundation of hope, in an hearty choice and personal acceptance of Christ, as our complete and only Saviour; and a careful uniform endeavour to cultivate the same mind, which was also in him, and to imitate his perfect and distinguished example; in a hearty renunciation of every other dependence, but his righteousness and atonement for justification; a sincere repentance for all our sins, a total renovation of heart and life, a genuine conversion to God, by the influences of the holy spirit, and a cordial union to Christ by such an active and lively faith, as will discover itself, by engaging the renewed soul in a cheerful compliance with every duty which we owe to God, our neighbour, or our own souls. Now this being the only method of salvation proposed in the gospel, every other scheme of men's devising, must be deceitful and vain, and our dependence upon them a melancholy argument, that we have received the grace of God in vain.

APPLICATION.

Now, my friends, has this grace of God been given unto us? Do we behold the glorious light of the gospel? Do we know the terms upon which our heavenly father is willing to receive us into his favor? How thankful should we be for this invaluable gift of his grace, and

how solicitous that we receive it not in vain. No nation perhaps in the world was overwhelmed with more melancholy darkness, with greater ignorance or more abominable superstition, than this country in which we live. The natives of the land are yet wild and savage to a proverb; their principles of morality are almost extinguished, and their religion is worse than superstition; while we enjoy the glorious light of the gospel in its purity and perfection; and can we ever think upon our distinguished condition, without hearts overflowing with love and gratitude to that merciful God, who has caused the sun of righteousness to rise upon us, and to visit the melancholy abodes of darkness and barbarity; without dropping a tear over our unhappy neighbours, “who knows not God nor the way of salvation through his son;” and without sending up our most earnest supplications to the father of lights, that he would give his gospel a more extensive spread, and enlighten the wretched savages of the wilderness with the saving knowledge of his will. If we have any just sense of the greatness and importance of our happy destination above them in this respect, can we forbear crying mightily to God, to give his son these heathens for his inheritance, and these corners of the earth for his possession; and encouraging every laudable attempt to enlarge the bounds of his Redeemer’s glorious kingdom.

And while we express our solicitude for the propagation of the gospel, should we not be more solicitous lest we should have received and so long enjoyed this exalted privilege in vain? Should we not therefore cause our conduct in this respect to pass in review this day before

our consciences, and examine ourselves, as in the presence of the heart-searching God, whether we have duly prized this gracious gift of God? Whether we have been sufficiently careful to make ourselves acquainted with the contents of this sacred revelation, by reading it in private or attending upon the explanation of it in public; whether we are not resting our hopes of eternal salvation upon our knowledge of its doctrines or upon some other foundation equally insufficient and precarious, without complying with those terms, which it proposes as absolutely necessary to our eternal happiness. Let us ask our own hearts, whether the light of the gospel has enabled us to see our wretched and miserable condition by nature, our inability to make an atonement for our sins, our liableness to everlasting punishment, and our absolute insufficiency by our own strength to emerge from the ruins of our fall? And have we from a sense of our own weakness been brought to a cordial dependence upon Jesus Christ for the pardon of our sins, and for the influences of his grace to enable us to live in newness of life and to adorn the doctrines of his gospel by an holy conversation.

If this is indeed your genuine character, you have reason for abundant thankfulness to that God, who has enlightened your minds by his glorious gospel, and enabled you by his grace to lay hold on the only foundation of hope that he has proposed to perishing sinners. I hope that it will be your constant care to regulate your lives by his gospel, and to cultivate those graces of his spirit, which he has emplanted in your hearts, by the daily exercise of them in all the duties of the christian

life. And let the former experience of his goodness, encourage you to look to him who has begun a good work of grace in your hearts, to carry it on to perfection; that through the continued influence of his holy spirit accompanying the truths of his gospel, you may be more and more conformed to his image, until you arrive at that blessed state, in which you will shine forth in his complete resemblance, and find it your inexpressible felicity and joy.

But, my friends, if any of your consciences are this day suggesting alarming apprehensions against you, that you have hitherto received this grace of God in vain: we beseech you by the mercies of God, by the grace of a Redeemer, by the regard you have to your own salvation, to lay your mournful condition seriously to heart, and resolve from this day forward that you will study the intimations of the divine will concerning your salvation, with more attention than ever you have done; that you will listen to the salutary directions of his gospel, and love and live by your bibles. You are exalted to heaven in point of privilege, and enjoy many advantages for growing wise to eternal salvation, which have been denied and are still denied to thousands, whose souls are as precious as yours. O! let it be your constant care that it be not your condemnation “that light has come into the world, and that you have loved darkness rather than light, because your deeds have been evil.” And let it never slip out of your minds, that all the warning you have had from the gospel of Christ; all the offers of grace and salvation that have been made to you; all the endearing invitations of that

compassionate Saviour, who has brought life and immortality to light, will rise up in judgment againt you, and aggravate your future condemnation, if you are found at last to have received this grace of God in vain, if you are found amongst the despisers of his gospel.

Let me, therefore, beseech you, while you study your bibles, and labour after a sacred acquaintance with them to know the things that belong to your peace, that you would look to the father of lights for the illumination of his holy spirit, to bring home the truths of the gospel to the heart, that you may be transformed into his glorious image, and made meet for his heavenly kingdom

SERMON XVI.

REASONABLENESS OF SERVING GOD.

ROM. XII, 1.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The apostle Paul having dispatched the argumentative part of his epistle to the Romans, comes in this chapter to the practical improvement of what he has said. Having suggested a variety of considerations, which proved the excellence of the gospel institution and the singular mercy of God to the Gentile nations, whom he had called into the christian church, and to those Jews, whom he still retained in so happy a relation to himself, while the bulk of their nation has fallen into a state of rejection; he endeavours to urge them to a conversation answerable to the privileges they enjoyed, and the mercy they had experienced. For this purpose, he enters upon a series of the most admirable practical exhortations and instructions, and wisely lays the foundation of all practical religion in a principle of unfeigned piety towards God, in consecrating ourselves to him as our most reasonable service. To this he urges them by a consideration of the tender mercy of God, and especially that illustrious display of his mercy and grace, in

calling them out of darkness into the glorious light of the gospel, of which he had so fully discoursed in the former part of his epistle. I beseech you, therefore, says he, my dear brethren, partakers with me in this holy calling, by all the tender mercies of our most compassionate God, that instead of those animal victims, whose slaughtered bodies you have been accustomed to offer in sacrifice, you would now present at his spiritual altar, your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Let all the members of your bodies and all the faculties of your souls, being sanctified and animated by divine grace, be employed in the service of him, to whom you are under such indissoluble obligations. The body is here by an usual figure put for the whole person; as on the one hand, the body cannot be presented as a living sacrifice to God, otherwise than as it is actuated and animated by the soul; so on the other hand, the soul cannot now be presented unto God and consecrated to his service, otherwise than as dwelling in the body, and employing its members as instruments of righteousness. This God requires of every one of us, who are planted in his churches, and enlightened by the rays of divine wisdom in his gospel, as our reasonable service; and it will be more acceptable to him than any ceremonial forms, though prescribed by divine appointment. And indeed, what can be more reasonable in itself, or more honorable and advantageous to ourselves, than that we should be consecrated to the service of our Creator and Redeemer, our unwearyed benefactor, and our supreme end and happiness? It is the glory and honor of a rational creature, to employ all his active powers in the service of that God,

who has given him his being and distinguished him from all the visible creation around him, by an amazing apparatus of active powers and capacities; and who has made provision by the gospel scheme of salvation, for his being exalted to glory, honor, and immortality, in the coming world, although he had, by his apostacy from God, forfeited all right to any mercy and favor from his hand. The grace of God, therefore, which has appeared in the gospel, lays us under the strongest obligations to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. Whether we consider the nature of God, or the nature of man, the circumstances in which we are placed, or the peculiar advantages we enjoy by the gospel, it will appear in every view, our most reasonable service.—With the utmost propriety, therefore, does the apostle beseech you by the mercies of God, that we present our bodies and souls a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

In the farther improvement of these words, we shall endeavour, through divine assistance, to shew,

I. What is implied in consecrating ourselves to the service of God.

II. The reasonableness of the duty of serving God.

I. What is implied in consecrating ourselves to the service of God.

In general, the service of God includes the habitual practice of every duty, which we owe to God, our neigh-

hour and our own souls. For God requires the whole heart and the constant exercise of all our active powers, without admitting a rival to him in our affections, or giving the least toleration for the indulgence of any known sin, however dear it may be to us: but more particularly,

1. *Consecrating ourselves to the service of God, implies a careful discharge of all the duties of piety and devotion, both public and private.*

As our heavenly father has graciously consulted for our happiness, in all our religious obligations, the great ends of the exercises of devotion, are to maintain an acquaintance and correspondence between God and our souls, and to recover those pious frames, and recall those serious thoughts, which are often dissipated by the importunate cares and pleasures of the world. *Reading the scriptures* therefore is found, by the universal experience of all christians, to be the unspeakable advantage for the accomplishment of this design. We derive indeed, singular assistance in the spiritual life, from the pious labors of those shining lights of the church, who have employed their talents in explaining this sacred treasure of divine knowledge, and exhibiting to open view, the rich store of divine consolation and direction which it contains: but the reading this sacred volume is the usual means which the holy spirit generally makes effectual for the conversion of sinners, and the comfort and support of believers, amidst the troubles and perplexities of life. It is able to make us wise to salvation, and when accompanied with his sacred illumination, will

prosper to the end for which it is sent, “ pulling down the strong holds of sin, and turning us from darkness unto light, and from the service of Satan to serve the living God.” We are not to imagine, that the holy spirit miraculously conveys any new truths to the mind, different from what he has already revealed in his word : but that he powerfully engages the attention and affects the heart with the reality and importance of those truths, with which we were previously acquainted ; and believers he comforts under their trials, directs in his ways, and assists in the performance of duty, by bringing the truths of his word to their remembrance, enlightening their minds to understand them, and enabling them to apply the various promises of the gospel for their refreshment and support. If we therefore desire to be changed and renewed in the temper of our minds, or to be prepared for the acceptable service of God, we should carefully read the scriptures and treasure up in our hearts, the principles of the christian religion and a rich store of useful knowledge. And it is doubtless of great advantage in the private exercises of piety and devotion, to choose the more plain and practical parts of the sacred volume ; to read but little at a time, and to quit when the attention flags ; and above all, to read with a view to have our hearts warmed and mended, and to receive instruction from God.

And to reading the scripture, we should join *meditation*, and consider what influence the several truths we read have upon us, to correct our tempers and to reform our practice. It is personal application which gives life and energy to the truths of the gospel, and power

to its arguments and motives to persuade ; and without this, the general knowledge which we have, makes little or no impression upon us. We should frequently consider, how we are affected with the great and interesting truths of the gospel ; with the momentous subjects of death and judgment, heaven and hell, the immortality of the soul, and the account we must give of our improvement of the talents God has given us. We should think what we are likely to be a few years hence, when we must enter into the invisible world ; what is the prevailing temper of our souls now, and what is the general tenor of our conduct ; what preparation we have made for an everlasting inheritance, and what rational prospects we may entertain beyond the grave. • In our private retirements we should examine, whether we are going backward or forward in the road to glory ; whether we are more diligent and active in the concerns of our souls, and more in earnest in the service of our God and generation, than we formerly were : or whether we are not degenerating into a greater formality, lukewarmness, and indifference in duty. We should consider what are the sins, to which we are more exposed from our constitutions, and our conditions and employments in life, and what advantages we gain over them ; what sins are yet to be repented of, what corruptions are to be mortified, what graces are to be strengthened, and what mercies we need. We should meditate on these and such like important branches of our duty, until the recollection of the number and aggravations of our sins inspire us with an unfeigned sorrow and contrition of soul, and the most determinate resolutions in the strength of Christ, to hate and forsake every false and wicked

way, and to turn unto God and his service with all our hearts. It is the melancholy corruption of our natures which renders us indisposed to the service of God, and obstructs our progress in the spiritual life ; and here we should mourn before him daily, for our imperfections and miscarriages, and guarding against every appearance of evil, determine in his strength, that we will have no more to do with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Prayer to God for the strengthening influences of his grace should always attend these exercises of private devotion. He is the author of every good and perfect gift, and gives his holy spirit to them that ask him, to assist us in the discharge of every duty. Without the concurring operations of this sacred agent, all our feeble attempts to serve him must prove fruitless and abortive. “ Without me,” says our Saviour, “ ye can do nothing ;” but it is the glory of the gospel constitution, that how weak soever we may be in ourselves, there is the most encouraging provision made for our deriving strength and assistance from Jesus Christ, who is the head of divine influence, to help us in every time of need ; so that while his power rests upon us, we shall be made strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and enabled to do all things. However insufficient we are in ourselves ; yet blessed be God, our sufficiency is in him, from whom cometh our help.— We should therefore look to him, for the communications of his grace, and the aids of his spirit, to change and renew our tempers, to subdue our corruptions, to conquer our enemies, to strengthen us for every incumbent duty, and to animate us “ to fight the good fight

of faith, that we may obtain a crown of righteousness and life." It is remarkable that after some of the most absolute promises of the new covenant (recorded in Ezek. 36 and 26,) "to take away the stony heart, and to give us hearts of flesh, to put his spirit within us," and "to cause us to walk in his statutes and judgments to do them," this declaration immediately follows: "thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired after by the house of Israel to do it for them." And for our encouragement in this instance of duty to God, he has annexed a sublime and rational pleasure to these exercises of private devotion, and has given us the most comfortable assurance of a gracious answer to our prayers. Every christian finds by happy experience, that these stated seasons of retirement to converse with God and his own soul are the most useful and delightful moments which he enjoys. Hence is the noble and pious resolution of Joshua, that whatever others might do, as for himself and his house, they would serve the Lord. Nor indeed can it be rationally dispensed with by any head of a family, who is sincerely desirous of serving God himself, and of engaging others under his care, in the same laudable practice, by his pious example.

But besides these private duties of piety and devotion, Jesus Christ, the great head of the church, has appointed others of a more *public nature*, whereia we are required to serve the Lord. And therefore if we would rationally expect his approbation, we should be constant and conscientious in our attendance upon the *public ordinances* of his house, the word, sacraments

and prayer, not only to give a public testimony of our obedience to all the commands of God, but also to engage others in the same important duty by our example. So far are they from being a tiresome burden to the pious man, and an unwelcome interruption to his secular employments, that he rejoices at the approach of that day of sacred rest, when disencumbered with mortal cares, which are so apt to make him forget his heavenly destination, he can come up to the house of God, to converse with the uncreated source of his being and happiness by prayer and praise, to contemplate the adorable perfections of his nature, to meditate on the wonders of his redeeming love, and to attend to the salutary and interesting messages of his grace. Feeling a sacred relish for divine ordinances and a solid satisfaction in his attendance upon them, he will encounter many difficulties rather than be deprived of the benefit of them, and will stir up his heart and guard his thoughts, that he may worship God in spirit and truth, and be the better prepared for the employments of his heavenly kingdom. And as the public ordinances of the church were appointed by Christ, to form us into a glorious resemblance of God in purity and holiness, the pious worshipper will take heed, how he hears the gospel, remembering, that it will be either “a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death to his soul;” that he must be either the better or the worse for his attendance upon it; and that he must one day give a solemn account of all those sacred opportunities of serving God and of growing wise unto salvation, and for his neglect of them, when he could embrace them.

2. *Consecrating ourselves to the service of God, implies a careful discharge of all the duties which we owe to our neighbours.*

While we are promoting the human and social virtues in their proper extent and influence, we are as really serving God, as when we are engaged in the more immediate acts of his worship. We are serving God, when we endeavour to exemplify in ourselves and to cultivate in others, a temper of peace, unanimity, meekness, moderation, candor, charity, benevolence, lenity, justice, and mercy, which are the great duties enjoined on christians towards others, by our holy religion; for no man is born for himself alone, or designed to live in a solitary and unconnected state in the world. God has wisely appointed the various connections and relations which bind us to one another, and formed us with amazing powers and capacities, whereby we may be extensively useful to each other; by promoting peace and good order in the community in which we live; removing violence and spoil, and taking away exactions from the people; defending the poor and the fatherless; rejoicing the heart of the widow; delivering the afflicted from the hand of the oppressor; by searching out the most proper methods of preserving and restoring health; of crowning laudable industry with the desired success; of carrying on trade and the mechanic arts to the best advantage; of engaging men in the love and practice of religion; of removing their prejudices and fastening conviction on their consciences, that their happiness as men and members of society, depends upon their living godly, righteously, and soberly, in the world. Various

are the ways by which we may be extensively useful to others by our example, our prayers, our advice, and many other offices of humanity and kindness. It is hardly possible to be placed in such circumstances in this world, as will put it out of our power to be some way beneficial to our fellow men. Now, the very condition which puts it in our power to do any thing for the benefit of others, is the voice of God to us to improve the talent, with which he has entrusted us for their advantage ; and while we are acting conformably to his wise appointment, we are serving him and our generation according to his will. So that it is a very great mistake, to think that religion consists wholly in the exercises of piety and devotion : for we are honoring the religion we profess, and adorning the doctrines of the gospel, when we are serving our generation and employing our time and talents, for the benefit of mankind and the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world.

3. *The service of God includes those duties, which have a more immediate reference to ourselves.*

God has not only given us mortal bodies, which standing in need of daily refreshment, demand a particular attention and care : but he has also given us immortal spirits, which are of infinitely more importance, and whose salvation is ' the one thing needful ;' and our nature is so corrupted by our apostasy from God, and we have contracted such a load of moral guilt by our violations of his laws, as is sufficient to sink us down into the most miserable condition forever, and must ruin us beyond the most distant hope of redemption, unless the

pardoning mercy of God and the sanctifying influences of his spirit, are extended to us. Our business, therefore, is to labour after the pardon of our sins, through the atoning blood of Christ, and the renovation of our natures, through the sanctifying operations of his holy spirit. By a diligent attendance upon the instituted means of grace, we must strive to obtain that saving change, which the holy spirit works in the hearts and lives of his children; whereby all the powers and faculties of their souls are renewed, and holy and divine dispositions are implanted in the heart, which draw forth the desires to God and Christ, and evidence themselves in a conversation becoming the gospel. Pulling down every high thought which exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ, we must humbly accept of life and salvation as a free and unmerited gift of divine grace, through a Redeemer; while at the same time, we use our utmost endeavours to grow in grace, strengthening every virtuous disposition implanted in the soul, and improving in faith and hope, in charity and humility, in meekness and patience, and in all the other amiable graces of a good life. Firmly persuaded of the necessity of forsaking every false and wicked way, however dear it may be to us, and convinced of our own weakness and inability, we must resolve in the strength of divine grace, that we will yield ourselves unto God as alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness; and carefully practise whatsoever things are just, holy, pure, of good report, virtuous, and praise-worthy. While we are strangers in this world and travelling to the New Jerusalem, the city of our God, we must serve him on the road with our souls and our bodies, which are his.

The christian that acts in this manner, acts agreeably to the rational and immortal nature that God has given him, making his precious soul, which is in danger of perishing by sin, the object of his principal attention.

We come now to shew,

II. The reasonableness of serving God.

1. *This is easily deduced from the perfections of God and the nature of man.*

The existence of an independent uncreated first cause of all things, is a sacred and eternal truth, witnessed by the whole universe, by the heavens and the earth, by all above, below and around us; the maker and contriver of all things, and the source of all that harmony and order; of all that beauty and happiness, which adorn the face of nature. And this adorable God, is not only infinite in power and wisdom and knowledge, but also unchangeably holy, just and good; merciful compassionate and true, without the least variableness or shadow of turning. Religion therefore, which is founded in his adorable perfections, must be our most reasonable service. Is there an all-perfect being whose unsolicited goodness gave birth to the universe? Then it must be fit and proper, that every rational creature, whom he has made capable of knowing and serving him, should reverence, adore and worship him; should prostrate themselves in his presence and extol his incomprehensible excellence and glory. Is he able to save or to destroy, to make us inconceivably happy or miserable, by a single act of his will? And is it not reasona-

ble to give all diligence, by a course of holy obedience to his sovereign will to avoid his displeasure, which is worse than death and to secure an interest in his favor, which is better than life? Are holiness, justice, goodness and truth, essential attributes of the divine nature? And can a reasonable being act in a way more becoming the rational nature, which God has given him, than by endeavouring after the nearest possible resemblance of him in those glorious perfections, which are the standard of all moral excellence and beauty; by being "holy as God is holy, merciful as he is merciful, and perfect as our heavenly father is perfect". There never was, or never will be any other measure of the happiness and glory of a rational creature, than its conformity to the moral image of God. To restore our degenerate natures to this, and to re-instamp his image upon our souls, which had been defaced by our apostacy from him, is the gracious design of God, in forming the amazing "plan of our redemption by Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world to destroy the works of the devil, and to purify us to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." And can any thing be more reasonable than to be fellow workers with God, co-operating with him in the glorious designs of his grace, by cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and studying to be holy, as he who has called us is holy, in all manner of conversation.

2. *The reasonableness of serving God may also be deduced from a consideration of the nature of man.*

Our nature is compounded of body and spirit, by the first of which we are allied to the beasts that perish,

and by the latter we claim kindred to the highest order of intelligences. Our bodies are surrounded with innumerable dangers, subject to many wants and pains, the seat of many restless appetites, preserved with difficulty through a short and troublesome life, and then they return to their original dust. But our souls are capable of more sublime pleasures and more intolerable pains, than what belong to the body; are possessed of noble and exalted powers and faculties, which may be so refined, enlarged and improved in virtue and holiness, as to prepare us for the inconceivable blessedness of the heavenly world; or so debased and polluted by sin as to render us incapable of relishing the pleasures of the heavenly state; and they will survive the stroke of death and live through a boundless duration either in eternal happiness or everlasting torment. As we are then partly mortal and partly immortal, ever anxiously pursuing happiness, under one form or another, and yet easily betrayed into misery more intolerable and lasting than any thing we can at present conceive; is it not our highest wisdom to put ourselves under the gracious protection, and obey the salutary prescriptions of that almighty and glorious God, who can secure us from every danger, supply our innumerable wants out of his fulness, and crown our fidelity in his service, with an happiness, large as our most extensive wishes, and lasting as our immortal spirits? Is it so that we are weak and indigent creatures, unable to provide for the supply of our returning wants, and daily supported by the unmerited bounty of that God, who fills our hearts with food and gladness? And what can be more becoming our dependent state, than to consecrate all our active powers

to the service of him, in whom we live, move and have our being, who constantly loads us with the blessings of his providence, and opens his liberal hand to satisfy the desires of every thing that lives? Is it not our wisdom to secure a title to the favor and friendship of that God, whose watchful providence provides for the ravens of the valley, and therefore will much more tenderly regard the cries of his own children? Have we many restless appetites and turbulent passions in the gratification of which we are capable of but low and mean delights, which, when ungoverned, are the source of a sad variety of pain and torment, and which, when under proper subjection to the more exalted powers of our nature, our reason and conscience, are capable of answering the most important purposes in life? And is it not our wisdom to hearken to the salutary prescriptions of God, in the regulation of our appetites and passions, placing them only upon such worthy objects as he has pointed out, and exercising them only in that degree which he allows; that they may be improved as the happy instruments of promoting religion in our souls, refining them to a godlike lustre, and producing pleasures, even in the pilgrimage of life, that are worthy of our rational and immortal nature, especially, when we farther consider, that the soul is capable of vastly nobler pleasures, than what can be suggested by passion and appetite, and more piercing pains than the body is exposed to suffer. As long as the spirit within us remains firm and unbroken, we sink not under the infirmities of the body and the calamities of life. Strong resolutions supported by the testimony of an approving conscience and the smiles of a reconciled God, and the

animating prospect of an incorruptible crown of glory, can struggle through any outward distress: "but a wounded spirit who can bear?" What can heal the wounds that are made by sin and guilt, or inflicted by the hand of an angry God? In vain does the awakened sinner strive to loose his guilty fears amidst the hurry of business or the mad intoxications of sensual pleasures. These are but miserable comforters, which, instead of assuaging, will only encrease his pain. Religion alone prescribes the effectual remedy, and points out the skilful physician, who alone can bind up the broken heart and remove the spiritual maladies, under which our souls languish. Nay, he can not only heal the dangerous wounds that sin has made, but he can cause the broken bones to rejoice, and fill the soul with joy and peace in believing. And can any thing be more becoming our mournful condition as sinners, ready to sink under the frowns of a holy, sin avenging God, than a speedy application to the blood of sprinkling for pardon, and to the influences of his grace, for the sanctification of our natures? Can any thing be more reasonable, than to consecrate ourselves to the service of that God, who has made this glorious provision for the restoration of our fallen nature to his favor and friendship?

But farther, has the soul many excellent powers and faculties, which, when rightly improved, render it capable of a sublime and rational happiness, not only in this life, but also, when the body is laid in ruins in the grave? And what is the right use of these powers and capacities, which tends to perfect our nature and make

us happy? Is it any other, than what the service of God requires; the exercising of them in the duties of piety, righteousness and sobriety? Any other use of them is vain and trifling, and will leave us in a miserable condition at last, when we must appear before the righteous judge of the universe, to render an account of our improvement of the talents committed to our trust, and receive according to the deeds done in the body. Here we sojourn but a few days; but an everlasting eternity depends upon our diligence and fidelity in the service of God, while we are in this state of trial. We must shortly remove into the invisible world, where nothing can stand us in stead, but the favor and friendship of that God, whom we must serve in this life, if we expect the manifestations of his love in the next. The happiness of our souls in the coming world will depend upon the gracious habits we have contracted in our embodied state. "He that is holy at death shall be holy still, and he that is filthy then shall be filthy still." The prevailing disposition, which the soul carries with it into the invisible world, shall continue through eternity, rendering it meet, for an inheritance with the saints in light, or for everlasting banishment from the presence of God. The consequence of this is, that the service of God, in this imperfect state, is the most wise and rational conduct, agreeable to the nature of mankind, dictated by the powers and faculties of our souls and bodies, and excellently calculated to promote your perfection and happiness. With good reason therefore, does an inspired apostle beseech us by the mercies of God, to present our bodies and souls a living sacrifice, holy and

acceptable unto God; and enforce his tender exhortation by this powerful argument, because it is our reasonable service.

APPLICATION.

1. Hence we may learn our obligations of gratitude to God for the gospel of our Lord Jesus, and the method of salvation through him.

If the service of God is highly reasonable in itself, and of unspeakable and everlasting consequence to a rational creature, we can never sufficiently prize the christian religion, from which we derive the clearest knowledge of our duty, the most encouraging motives and arguments to comply with it, and the most satisfactory account of the method by which our sins may be pardoned and our immortal souls saved from everlasting destruction. Being founded in the adorable perfections of God, and perfectly accommodated to the rational nature of man, and to his miserable and helpless condition, as a fallen guilty creature, it carries with it evident characters of a divine original, which should endear it to the affections of the human race. God having spoken to us in these last days by his only begotten son, has distinguished us not only from the heathen nations, who were left to search out their duty by the faint glimmerings of the light of nature, but also from his ancient people, who were favored with a considerable degree of divine revelation. The precepts of christianity contain a complete and infallible directory for the behaviour of a reasonable creature towards God, his neighbour and

himself; and his duty is explained and enforced upon the conscience by considerations and arguments, which were never sufficiently known before. Here we see the glory of the divine nature shining in the face of his only begotten son, and the different claims of his justice and mercy satisfied in the death and sufferings of the Saviour of sinners, "through which he can be just, and the justifier of them that believe on him." "Here mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."* While we are called as fallen sinners to the exercises of faith and repentance, and a life of holy obedience to the precepts of the gospel, God has been pleased to give us the most encouraging assurance, that our sins shall be pardoned through the atonement of his son, and that our imperfect services shall not only be accepted, but also rewarded with an inconceivable and eternal weight of glory. And can we, my friends, consider ourselves as guilty sinners, justly exposed to the righteous vengeance of an offended God, and liable every moment to be sentenced to everlasting destruction; and then view with attention, the astonishing mercy and grace of the gospel method of salvation, without hearts overflowing with love and gratitude, and feeling the constraints of divine love, powerfully engaging us to consecrate our souls and our bodies, our time and our talents, to the service of that God and Redeemer, by whom we are delivered from hell and destruction, and are raised to the hopes of a glorious immortality?

2. *Permit me therefore, my friends, to exhort and beseech you, by the mercies of God, to consecrate yourselves to his service, as your most reasonable duty.*

We appeal to your own consciences, that power which God has given you to pass a judgment upon your own actions, whether it is not the most reasonable thing in the world, that you should serve him with your souls and your bodies, which are his. Has he made you to know more than the beasts of the field and wiser than the fowls of heaven? Has he given you reason, by which you may reflect upon your own conduct and look forward to the consequences of your actions? And will you, notwithstanding, act and live, as if you were possessed of no higher capacities than the beasts that perish. What end can this glorious distinction of your nature above the visible creation around you answer, but to sink you deeper into destruction, if it be not improved according to the directions of God in his service? Shall the dull ox know his owner, and the sluggish ass, his master's crib, at which he is fed; and shall man, the lord of this lower creation; man, who was formed after the image of his Maker, prostitute the exalted faculties and previliges of his rational nature to the ignoble service of sin and Satan; and forgetting his divine extraction and heavenly distinction, content himself with a transitory and sordid portion on earth, without aspiring after glory, honor and immortality? It is in the service of God alone, that our rational powers can find a proper employment, their greatest enlargement and their highest perfection. It is vice, that degrades and enslaves human nature and perverts and destroys its

noblest powers. If we would desire to be happy, let us not take the direct course to make ourselves miserable ; but let us consider, and shew ourselves men, that God has not given us reason and understanding in vain. He has shewn us what is the good and acceptable will of God, wherein our truest happiness consists and how we may obtain it. Let a principle of gratitude and self preservation therefore operate with a commanding influence upon our hearts, engaging us in his service. Shall God do so much for our salvation? and shall we do nothing for ourselves? Shall the adorable Trinity consult for our happiness, contrive and execute the astonishing plan of our redemption? And shall we remain as careless and indifferent, as if we had no souls to save or loose? How shall we answer it to God and our own consciences, if we refuse to serve him? "Is not his favor life, and his loving kindness better than life?" Can we be happy without an interest in his everlasting love? And shall we not be engaged to seek it above all things in that way which he has appointed?

Fain would we, my friends, prevail with those of our people, who have never yet sincerely devoted themselves to the service of God, to do it without delay, and to proceed no farther in that dangerous road that leads down to destruction. Stronger arguments we cannot use. We beseech you therefore by the mercies of God and Christ, which yearned over you with infinite tenderness and compassion, when our degenerate nature lay buried in the ruins of our fall: by the unparalleled love of our heavenly father, which provided the ransom in his own bosom, and gave up the son of his love to the tor-

tures of crucifixion for our sakes ; and by the sceptre of his grace, which he holds out with amazing long suffering and patience to guilty rebels, entreating them to lay down the weapons of their rebellion and to accept of salvation by a Redeemer : We beseech you by the memory of the most benevolent person, and the most generous friend, that ever lived ; by all that he did and suffered to redeem us from a vain conversation in the world when he trod the wine press of the fathers wrath alone, and groaned and died upon Mount Calvary : We beseech you at once by the sceptre of his grace, and the sword of his justice, by which his incorrigible enemies will be slain before him : we beseech you by the regard you have for your immortal souls, and all your hopes of future happiness ; by the expectations of that important day, when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven ; by the terrors of a dissolving world, and the awful sentence with which that grand solemnity shall be closed ; we beseech you by all these arguments of love and terror, that you yield up yourselves to God as alive from the dead ; and that you serve him with fidelity, till the latest hour of your lives. Thus alone shall we be able to meet our descending judge in the glorious triumphs of his grace, and be acknowledged by him as his servants and friends, who shall reign with him in everlasting glory.

SERMON XVII.

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN.

COL. III, 3.

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

It is one of the inestimable blessings of the gospel of Christ, that it has in a great measure removed that impenetrable cloud which hung over the invisible world, and perplexed mankind with inexplicable doubts about their future existence. The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, which is so peculiarly comfortable to the good man, amidst the storms and calamities of life, is set in the clearest light by the gospel; which greatly strengthens our obligations to an holy life, at the same time that it assures us, that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, but shall meet with a bountiful reward of grace from the liberal master whom we serve. If this is but the beginning of our existence; if we are designed for an eternal duration, and hope for the approbation of our judge, when the time of our trial is over; both reason and revelation assure us, that we must live with a constant reference to eternity, and maintain such a conduct as will tend to prepare us for the business and employments of the heavenly state. Now the gospel of Christ has pointed out the temper and behaviour, which alone can qualify us

for an admission into the joys of the New Jerusalem, and has cut off every presumptuous hope of entering into the kingdom of heaven, and of seeing the face of a reconciled God, unless we are born again and cultivate an universal holiness of heart and life. The voice of reason too is the same. If heaven is our native country and our home; if we are strangers and sojourners on earth; is it not reasonable, that we should lay up our treasures there, and set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth? If we are by the interposition of Jesus Christ, incorporated into a glorious society of pure and exalted spirits, who shine in the beauties of holiness, under him as our spiritual head; should we not live as citizens of heaven, the members of that illustrious community, and maintain an habitual correspondence of sentiment, temper, and character? Now there cannot be a more proper motive to engage us in such a conduct, than that which is suggested by the apostle in our text: viz. That as christians we profess to be dead to sin and the world, and to depend upon Jesus Christ as our spiritual head, for the sacred influences of his grace, to begin and carry on a divine life in the soul, until we be prepared for eternal life and blessedness. For thus stands his argument: Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth: "for you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." It may be reasonably expected of christians, that their attachment to the great and glorious views of the invisible and eternal world, where Jesus Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, should moderate their regards to the transitory state; as they are by profession dead, with him to the world and sin, and they de-

rive from God a principle of a new and better life, through Jesus Christ, the head of divine influences, and the author and finisher of their faith. Hence the lives of all true christians are said "to be by faith in the Son of God;" and they are animated and encouraged to such a conduct, by what the apostle adds in the following verse: "When Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." When he, who is the great spring of our celestial life, shall appear in all the pomp and splendors of his final triumph, then shall you also appear with him in glory, and make a part of that bright and illustrious assembly, which he has redeemed by his death, and which he will form into a lustre and perfection, suitable to the glorious relation under which he will then acknowledge them before the assembled universe.

The words of our text then contain a short but comprehensive description of the temper and life of every real christian, which we shall endeavour more particularly to explain.

1. *The true christian is said to be dead ; dead to sin, and to the world.*

When he is enabled by divine grace to mortify the deeds of the flesh, so that the dominion and tyranny of sin is broken in the soul, he is said in the language of scripture to be dead to sin. "How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein.)* This is farther explained in the 7th verse. "He, that is dead, is freed

from sin ;” and again in the 11th verse : “ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” By a similar figure, those who continue under the unbroken dominion and tyranny of corruption are said to be dead in *sins* and *trespasses* ; not that either the one or the other expression should intimate that he is as incapable of moral action, as a man, that is under the power of natural death, and so is incapable of the actions and operations of natural life. We are not to torture and strain the metaphorical expressions of scripture, to such an unjustifiable height, as could not be vindicated, in the explanation of any other book ; but endeavour to fix our eye upon the general sense of the expression ; to which we are safely conducted either by the scope and design of the sacred writer, in the place, or by more plain and parallel passages. Now the plain and obvious meaning of the phrases under consideration is no other than this ; that the man that is dead *in sin*, is so far under the dominion of sin and corruption, that he cannot live without the habitual practice of it, until a change is wrought in his heart, by the spirit of God, “ whereby old things are done away, and all things are become new.” And we are said to be dead *to sin* ; not when we have arrived at an unsinning perfection in holiness, to which the best of christians never attain on this side the grave, until, in their dissolution, the last act of sanctification passes upon the soul ; but when by the grace of God, we are so far delivered from the reigning

power of sin, and so effectually convinced of its ruinous tendency and consequences, that we cannot any longer indulge ourselves, in the allowed and habitual commission of it. This makes the expression sufficiently plain, when we add, that those, who live in the habitual practice of sin, are proceeding with dangerous steps, in the road to eternal death ; but those, who are dead to sin, and live in the habitual practice of holiness, are delivered from the fears of eternal death, and are making a safe and comfortable progress, in the way to everlasting life and glory.

But the true christian is also dead to the world : by which is meant, that he is no longer under the government of worldly affections. Although he cannot but desire the good things of this life and it is an essential part of his duty, as connected with others, by the most important relations of human society, to have a proper and reasonable regard to them ; yet he does not seek them as his chief good, does not pursue them as his happiness and dare not sacrifice his conscience to obtain them. While the men of this world “ can rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness ” to encrease their earthly possessions, or even break through the sacred restraints of reason and religion, of honor and conscience, for the sake of them, and content themselves with such a portion for their immortal spirits ; the true christian, having obtained the knowledge of a more exalted happiness, enjoys the accommodations of this life with an indifference becoming his hopes of a better, and with an attachment that is consistent with his resignation to the

will of God when they are removed from him, by any calamitous dispensation of his providence. All its sinful pleasures, he renounces as inconsistent with his peace and the hopes of the favor and friendship of his God; its innocent and lawful pleasures he endeavours to use with caution and discretion, and its calamities he does not anxiously dread, but rather endeavours to consider them as the wise and salutary expedients of his heavenly father, to prove and strengthen his graces, to mortify his remaining corruptions, and to quicken his aspirations, and endeavour after a solid and substantial happiness, large as his wishes and lasting as his immortal spirit. Thus is he crucified to the world, and the world to him, as all those irregular appetites, which are generally denominated worldly affections, are in some good degree mortified in him. Thus is the christian dead to sin, and dead to the world; and we may add, that he endeavours to live daily in the near views of death, that he may be always in readiness for his great change.

2. *But notwithstanding this, the christian is said to be alive; alive unto God and divine things, and in daily expectation of eternal life.*

Being quickened by a principle of divine life, wrought in his soul by the regenerating influences of the spirit of grace, he is alive unto God, and unto righteousness; endeavouring to maintain lively affections towards God and Christ. Tenderness of conscience in matters of sin and duty, and a ready disposition to comply with his eternal obligations to piety and devotion, to charity and justice, to temperance and so-

briety, to humility and self-denial. He has a lively relish for those exercises of religion, which are insipid and disgusting to the men of this world; and being enlightened by the spirit of wisdom, he enjoys a sacred and unalterable pleasure, in contemplating the marvellous discoveries of divine love, which are made in the wonders of creation, providence, and redemption. The exercises of devotion are his most agreeable entertainments, and the care of his soul and his eternal interest his principal employment. While others are addressing themselves with eager unsatisfied desires to the objects of time and sense and enquiring with a restless solicitude, "who will shew us any good?" The language of the christian's heart is, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me." Let unthinking mortals dress up to themselves an imaginary happiness, which is ever flying before them, or which, if enjoyed, leaves them as unsatisfied as before; I envy them not their labour nor their pleasure; I have not thus learned the Lord; I am pursuing an happiness, which both reason and scripture assure me, will answer my most enlarged expectations, which will continue to afford unutterable delight when this world, with all its delusive scenes, is no more.— Thus is the christian, though dead to sin and the world, alive unto God and divine things, and carried forward in the spiritual life, by the animating prospect of a crown of righteousness and life.

3. *The life of the Christian is said to be hidden and concealed from the view of mankind.*

Although it is the unquestionable duty of the christian, "to let his light so shine before others, that they

seeing his good works," may be induced from the amiable example to glorify our heavenly father; yet so blinded is the world, so inattentive to that which constitutes the real dignity of human nature and the crowning excellency of the christian character; that it often happens, that those who are in reality, the excellent ones of the earth, are passed over unnoticed and disregarded by a blind mis-judging world, like an unpolished diamond, whose intrinsic value is unknown to a careless or ignorant observer. They, who are precious in the sight of God, the infallible judge of moral excellency, have been frequently esteemed as the vilest of men, treated as the off-scourings of human nature, and persecuted with an unchristian rage, for those very things which should have secured to them the approbation and esteem of every rational creature. So that it does not appear to the world in general, what the true christian is now, any more than to himself, what he shall be, when Jesus Christ, his life, shall come in his glory.— This may, in some measure, arise from the nature of those christian graces, that constitute the most substantial and valuable parts of their character; such as faith and love, humility and meekness, patience and resignation, moderation and self-denial, which generally delight in solitude, are not calculated to attract the notice of the world or the applauses of popularity, and which have but little in them to excite the admiration and gaze of a mis-judging multitude. Add to this, that the humble christian, conscious of his own failures, and pressed down under a mortifying sense of his own infirmities and corruptions, cannot be very solicitous about appearing eminently good in the eyes of others. He is

more concerned about that honor that cometh from God, than that which cometh from man. His principal study is integrity of heart and life, that he may secure the approbation of his heavenly father, who seeth in secret.— While hypocrites make clean the outside of the cup and platter, and are extremely solicitous to appear well in the eyes of the world ; his principal attention is employed in the cultivation of the internal temper of his mind, which is open to the inspection of the heart-searching God alone ; and this is one reason, why the christian's spiritual life is so often hidden from men, and the internal beauties of his mind are passed over and disregarded by an undistinguishing multitude. Besides, the envy and prejudice, and ill-will of others, will dispose them to rob him of his just share of commendation, to call his brightest virtues by an injurious name, and to aggravate his real miscarriages and blemishes to an unchristian height ; lest the lustre of his graces should too far eclipse their own, or that they may find a wretched apology for their own vices, in the unhappy falls and miscarriages of the christian. The world is always ready to take more notice of the faults of a good man than of his virtues ; and both may be sometimes so much blended together, as to make it extremely difficult to ascertain his true character, which will contribute not a little to the obscurity of it. Add to all this, that virtue and goodness often lose their honor in this world, by being buried in the obscurity of the christian's condition in the world ; at the same time that the distresses of his poverty and the straitness of his circumstances, render him incapable of exercising many graces, which would signally distinguish his real character, was he not deprived of an opportunity of dis-

playing them before the world. These things being considered, it should not seem strange, that some of the best of men, who may be eminent for all the branches of the christian temper, and maintain the divine life with a comfortable vigour in their souls, may, notwithstanding, be so much hidden from the world as to pass unnoticed, and it may be, hated and despised.

But the christian's life is not only hidden from the world, with respect to that part which he passes in this state of trial; but the future part of it is also concealed both from them and himself also. It doth not yet appear what he shall be, when the time of his complete redemption shall come. "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive," the grandeur and glory, the happiness or duration of his eternal life. An impenetrable veil covers the glories of the invisible world, through which no mortal eye can penetrate. While we are imprisoned in flesh and converse only with embodied spirits, we are unable to form the least adequate conception how we shall live in an unembodied state, nor what satisfactions we shall enjoy in conversing with pure immaterial spirits. And hence that eternal life, which the christian is heir to, is, also a hidden life.

4. *The Christian's life is hid with Christ, in God.*

When he had accomplished the arduous work of our redemption, he went "to his father and our father, to his God and our God." There he is hidden from mortal view, and with him the first springs and principles

of the christian's spiritual life, which flow from him as their sacred source. Although the effects of his glorious grace may be in some measure discerned both by the believer and by others ; yet the first principle of it is hidden with Christ, with whom is the residue of the spirit, whereby he can quicken the wretch that has been long dead in trespasses and sins, and raise him to newness of life. And he is not only the author, but also the finisher of our faith. He not only implants a saving faith in the soul, whereby it is brought to lay hold on him as the Lord his righteousness for justification in the sight of God, but he also, by the continued aids and influences of his holy spirit, maintains and cherishes the sacred principle, and carries it on from one degree of strength unto another, until it finally terminates in the vision of God. Did not he, that begins a good work of grace in the soul, carry it on to perfection, through all the different stages of our sanctification, or did he suffer the operations of his quickening spirit to be interrupted ; the christian's spiritual life and vigor would as certainly decay, as the rivers would be exhausted, when the streams from whence they flow, are cut off. And as it is by these hidden springs of grace, that the spiritual life is maintained and supported, it is properly said to be hidden with Christ. And it is said to be hidden with Christ, *in God* ; on account of that spiritual union and communion which subsists between God and the believer. " He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."* We live in God, when those holy and devout affections, which are im-

*1. John, iv. 16.

planted by the spirit of grace, are directed to him as the object of all our hopes and our happiness when we find the greatest satisfaction, in contemplating the glorious discoveries he has made of his perfections through a Redeemer, and enjoy the reviving smiles of his countenance and the copious supplies of his grace, to strengthen us for the duties and trials of the spiritual life, and for the enjoyment of himself in glory.

And as our spiritual life is hidden with Christ as the author and preserver of it, by the continued influences of his grace ; so is the perfection of it in glory hidden with him as the purchaser and preparer of it. He paid down his life as a ransom for us, and humbled himself unto death that he might obtain a right as our Redeemer to bestow eternal life upon his children ; and “ he has gone before us to prepare a place for us, that where he is, we may also be” to behold his glory. Hence he says “ my sheep are mine, and I give unto them eternal life ;” so that when Christ, who is our life shall appear to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe, they shall also appear with him in glory. His presence in the ordinances of his church is the support of his children during their minority on earth, and all the communications of his grace have no other tendency or design, than to prepare them for an introduction into that glorious kingdom, where he will bestow upon them the crowns of righteousness and life, which he has laid up for them.

And as our future happiness shall consist in the immediate, eternal, and uninterrupted enjoyment of God,

“ whose favor is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life ;” our eternal life is said to be hid with Christ in God. “ In his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.” The full fruition of the ever-blessed God, is the sum and substance, the perfection of a creature’s happiness. To behold the unrivalled glories of our exalted Redeemer, to be admitted to the open vision of God, to enjoy the uninterrupted smiles of his countenance, and to feel ourselves inconceivably happy in the incessant manifestations of his eternal love ; this, this is life indeed ! This is the christian’s life that is hidden with Christ in God.

APPLICATION.

1. *Hence we see, wherein the essence of true religion consists.*

As the design of all true religion is to prepare us for the final enjoyment of God in heaven, by making us holy in heart and life ; that man’s religion, which consists in external forms and ceremonies, in an idle parade of words and shew, without correcting his heart and mending his life, is beyond all peradventure vain and worse than vain. There never was, nor ever will be any other measure of the happiness of a rational creature, than its conformity to the moral image of God. If our happiness consists in living with a God of unspotted purity, and with angels, that shine in the beauties of holiness, and “ the spirits of just men made perfect :” how is it possible in the nature of things, that we could enjoy any satisfaction even in heaven, without a disposition wrought in us by the spirit of God, and attempered by

the sacred operations of his grace, for the business and the employments of the celestial inhabitants? “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” But in order to this, we must be dead unto sin, before we can be alive unto God, or entertain any rational hopes of living with him. The power of sin must be mortified in the soul, for while we are the servants of sin, it is in vain for us to pretend, that we are the servants of God; for nothing renders us more unlike to him, who is essential purity; nothing can make it more impossible for us to love him, who is unspotted holiness, or to delight ourselves in the contemplation of his adorable perfections. So certain is it, that we must be dead to sin and to worldly affections, which are enemies to God, before we can have any rational hope, that our life is hidden with Christ in God. We appeal to every person’s own conscience, to the unalterable reason of things, and to the infallible testimony of God, whether it be possible for an unholy soul, to enjoy the smiles of an holy God, “who cannot look upon sin, but with the utmost abhorrence.” And shall we, my friends, harbour that in our bosoms, or practise it in our lives, which will inevitably banish us from the presence of God and Christ and from all the joys of eternity? Shall we not rather guard against it with the most constant and diligent attention; fly from every appearance of evil, and cultivate that universal holiness of heart and life, which will prepare us for heaven and bring us to God, the judge of all; to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant; to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect?

2. *From this discourse we see our obligations to Jesus Christ.*

He died to purchase our deliverance from eternal death, and “bore our sins in his own body, that we being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness.” Our spiritual and eternal life is hidden with him, being the purchase of his precious blood and the operation of his efficacious grace. So that in every view, he is the great author of our salvation, and the adorable object of our highest praises. Shall we not then call upon our souls, with all the powers of our nature to magnify the Lord our Saviour, and ascribe “blessing and honor, and glory and power unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever?”

3. *But have we, my friends, any rational grounds to conclude, that we are dead unto sin, and alive unto God?*

Do we indeed hate sin under all its appearances, even when it promises pleasure or honor or worldly advantages: And do we love the Lord supremely with that predominant fervor, which he demands? Do the strongest desires of our souls tend to him as the centre of all excellence, and the fountain of all our hopes? Does our love to God, our faith in Christ, and our hopes of eternal life, make us die daily unto sin and to the world? Do they quicken, guard and elevate our souls, animate our duties, warm our devotions and raise us above the world and its transitory enjoyments? Do we feel our principal delight in the service of God, in conversing

with him by prayer and meditation and praise, and in the performance of those duties, which have a tendency to reform our hearts and refine our souls to a godlike lustre? If this is our character, we have all the evidence we can desire, that our life is hidden with Christ in God, that the spiritual life is begun in the soul by the influences of his grace, and that he that has began this good work will carry it on to perfection. And let us therefore, go on in our way, rejoicing in God our Saviour, and growing in grace, while we are looking by an eye of faith to our exalted Redeemer, for the continual supplies of his grace, and the aids of his spirit, to strengthen us for every good work and to perfect holiness in his fear.

But have not some of us reason to fear that this is not our character; that we are not dead unto sin and the world, and alive unto God? that the spiritual life is not yet begun in the soul? If your own consciences, my friends, testify against any of you this day, that this is indeed your melancholy condition; be entreated, as you regard your immortal souls; as you prize an interest in the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase; as you value the favor of God, which is life, to give yourselves no peace, until you have reason to hope better concerning your spiritual state. While you wait upon God in the ordinances of his appointment, plead with him for the renewing and sanctifying influences of his holy spirit, to mortify your in-dwelling corruptions, to create you anew to good works in Christ Jesus, and to enable you to serve him in newness of life. Delay not a matter of such importance. It is your life; it is your happiness:

For "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And may the God of all grace quicken us all to this most necessary of all concerns, and begin and carry on his own work in our souls, until we be finally brought to the uninterrupted enjoyment of himself in glory.

SERMON XVIII.

ENTERING IN AT THE STRAIGHT GATE



LUKE, XIII, 23-24.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, strive to enter in at the straight gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

We are not particularly informed, who it was, that asked this curious and uninteresting question, of our Lord: but it is probable from the decency of the manner, in which it was proposed, that he was one of our Lord's professed disciples. But whoever he was or whatever were his views in the interrogation, it was certainly a matter of mere curiosity, and of no real advantage to the enquirer. Hence our Lord waves giving a direct answer to the fruitless enquiry, and thereby tacitly reproves his presumption, in desiring to know the hidden things of God with which he had no concern, but in the place of it gives him, in common with those that were present, an admonition, which was of infinitely more advantage to them, as tending to their own particular salvation. "Strive to enter in at the straight gate, for I say unto you that many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able." As if he had said, I am not come to answer such fruitless enquiries, as these, which

are only suggested by an idle curiosity, and which when resolved, would have no influence on your own salvation, but I am “come to seek and save those that were lost;” therefore I exhort you to “strive to enter in at the straight gate.” For I, who am to preside at the judgment of the last day, assure you that many shall seek, who shall not be able, to enter “many shall say to me, Lord, Lord, have I not prophesied in thy name and in thy name done many wonderful works and even cast out devils in thy name; but I will declare to them, I know you not, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.” But however it may fare with others, with whom you have no concern, my admonition is to you to “strive to enter in at the *straight gate*. Do not imagine that the inestimable privilege of entering in at the straight gate, which I have told you before, leads to life eternal, is to be obtained by a few lazy endeavours or inattentive wishes; you must use the utmost possible endeavours, employ the most vigorous exertions of both body and mind, and even against the most virulent opposition. If you expect to enter into life eternal, you must strive with all your might and in good earnest, for through many tribulations, the righteous themselves are scarcely saved, and thus you must all enter into the kingdom of Heaven; “for it suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

In conformity with this, the christian life is frequently compared, with the greatest propriety and elegance, to fighting, running and wrestling; exercises that require the greatest exertions of the active powers, both of body and mind. The metaphor, which our Saviour

uses in our text, is evidently borrowed from the Roman and Grecian games, where none made any considerable figure, but such as had been previously inured to them by the closest application and the severest exercise. Consequently our Saviour's idea, of striving to enter in at the straight gate, must imply our exerting ourselves with vigour, and our using our constant and earnest endeavours, to obtain the salvation of our souls and an admission into the kingdom of heaven.

Saints and sinners, the regenerate and unregenerate, high and low, rich and poor are all equally concerned in this admonition of our Lord: for whether they are, or are not in a state of grace, and have experienced the saving operations of the spirit of God, by which they are made new creatures, or are yet in the "gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity," they have all equally immortal souls, and should use their utmost endeavours to secure their salvation, or to gain their admission into the straight gate, that leads to life eternal.

Our divine Redeemer never gave an injunction, which was not authorised by the principles of infinite wisdom, for he was the wisdom of the father; and hence he has enforced the exhortation in the text, by the most cogent reasons. "Because many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able." Many will seek it, in a careless and indifferent manner, as if it was a matter of course, that the gates of heaven should be expanded for their reception, whenever they shall be pleased to say, "Lord, Lord, open unto us;" many will seek it in consequence of their own imaginary righteousness, without any depen-

dence upon the righteousness and atonement of a Redeemer for their pardon and justification : many will seek it on principles of their own devising, without regarding those that are fixed by infinite wisdom and revealed in the gospel ; and many more will trifle with the calls of the gospel, and put off their repentance and amendment of life, until their day of grace shall be over ; until they are called to their final reckoning, for which they have made no preparation.

The entrance into heaven is said in our text to be through a straight gate, doubtless in respect to the many difficulties and obstructions, that attend the working out our own salvation, or finally gaining admission into the Paradise of God. The way of error and vice is said to be wide and the gate to final destruction is broad ; because it is easy for our corrupted natures to find and pursue it : but the ways of righteousness and life are represented as straight and narrow, on account of the many difficulties we must encounter, the enemies we must subdue, and the hardships we must sustain in the heavenly road. By the metaphorical expressions of a gate and a way, our Lord considers the happiness of heaven under the notion of a glorious mansion, to which there is a certain narrow way that leads through a straight gate, intimating thereby the difficulties and struggles of the spiritual life, occasioned by our corruptions : As he says on another occasion, “ In my father’s house are many mansions, and I go before you to prepare a place for you.” And the apostle John, using the same metaphor, says blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the

tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

In the farther prosecution of this subject I shall endeavour to shew through divine assistance,

- I. What is implied in striving to enter in at the straight gate.
- II. The dreadful consequences of not striving.
- III. The happy consequences of striving effectually.
- IV. What connection there is between an unconverted sinner's striving, and his obtaining eternal life.
- V. Why many, that seek to enter in, shall not be able.

I shall not detain you with the discussion of all these points, at the present time, but only request your attention to them, as they occur and God gives us an opportunity.

I. What is implied in striving to enter in at the straight gate.

1. Striving signifies that some vigorous effort is to be used for some important purpose. There is no need of a vigorous effort, where there is no labor to be sustained, no opposition to be overcome. No man strives, in any propriety of language, to do any thing, that is easily within the reach of his abilities. No man strives to lift a straw. The very idea of striving pre-supposes

some difficulty and opposition in the execution. This is the case with the Christian. There are great and numerous difficulties lying in his way, and many tribulations, through which he must enter into the kingdom of heaven. "Principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places;" the devil, the world and the flesh, are not to be overcome by a few lazy endeavours, and a few cold ineffectual wishes. It will cost the christian many a struggle, and many a groan before he be proclaimed a conqueror at last, and crowned with a crown of glory

2. Striving to enter in at the straight gate implies farther, that a man believes, that although it may be attended with labor and difficulties, yet still it is a matter of so much consequence in itself and of so much consequence to him, that it is worth all the labor that it may cost him. As no man will knowingly "spend his money for that, which is not bread, nor his labor for that, which profiteth not," he cannot be persuaded by all the arguments in the world, to "strive to enter in at the straight gate," as long as he believes that the gospel is but a "cunningly devised fable," that there is no salvation proposed in it, that is worthy of his acceptance, or that he can do very well without it. If he can be induced to strive to enter into the straight gate, he must be previously awakened to some sense of his sin, guilt and misery, and of the necessity he is under of securing the salvation of his immortal spirit, by complying with the prescriptions of the gospel. The gospel is a remedial institution, and considers the human race, not as righteous, but as sinners, apostate, degenerate

and guilty creatures, justly obnoxious to the wrath of God. It is in this view that mankind are considered in the gospel, as involved in a state of sin, condemnation and ruin. And no person can be supposed to use his endeavours to obtain deliverance from this state, or to have a part in that salvation which the gospel reveals, while he remains in a state of carnal security, or has no sense of his misery, as lying under guilt, condemnation and alienation from God. The doing of any thing at all, although it cannot be properly denominated striving, with a view to obtain a deliverance from wrath and the dreadful consequences of sin, must necessarily imply, that the person, who does so, believes himself to be a sinner, and as such justly exposed to the indignation of heaven, and that no labor and pains, which he can bestow, will be too much for the accomplishment of so desirable an object.

3. Striving also implies, that a person earnestly desires an interest in the salvation revealed in the gospel by Jesus Christ. Desires always go before endeavours, both in temporal and religious matters. A man's striving, or using his endeavours, to obtain riches, pleasures or preferment, supposes his heart to be set upon these things; for otherwise he would give himself but little trouble about them. And this is evidently true of all our endeavours in religion, or our striving to enter in at the straight gate into life eternal. All efforts of this kind evidently suppose that we sincerely desire to obtain salvation; nor will any man strive as he ought to do, unless his desires are strong and vigorous, in some proportion to the apprehended importance of the end

proposed ; nay, unless he believes that the salvation of his soul is of more consequence to him than the possession of the whole world. For he that postpones the salvation of his soul to the acquisition of any thing that this world can bestow, cannot be said, with any propriety of language, to strive to enter in at the straight gate.

4. This striving implies the use of proper means and care and diligence, to be rightly informed concerning the way of salvation and to guard against fatal errors in this respect. For certainly we cannot be said to strive to enter in at the straight gate, into life eternal, if we are unsolicitous to enquire, where or what is that narrow way that leads to the kingdom of heaven. There is but one way of salvation, and that is what Christ, and his apostles have taught mankind. He says, that he was “the way, the truth and the life, and no man comes to the father but by him.” His apostles taught the same doctrine, of whom it was said, “these men are the servants of the most high God, who shew us the way of salvation.” They pointed out the same road and taught the same doctrines, which they had learned from him, and therefore assure us, that “there is one faith, one baptism, one Lord, and one God and Father of us all.” There is therefore, as certainly but one true faith, or one true gospel, in the faith of which we are to be saved, as there is but one God, and one Redeemer. But this way of salvation may be mistaken by those who are careless and negligent about it. And if there are some things in the scriptures “hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their

own destruction," as they do other scriptures, and if there are some, "who receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and that therefore God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lye, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth," as the apostles of our Lord inform us; nothing can be more certain, than that there is a possibility of mistaking this only way of salvation which our Lord has pointed out, through ignorance, inattention, prejudice or the turbulence and hurry of unruly passions. And if there is this possibility of mistaking the way of life, there arises a necessity of care and diligence to make ourselves acquainted with the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and to guard against dangerous and fatal errors in this respect. Nor can any man be supposed heartily to desire and earnestly to strive to enter in at the straight gate, unless he be solicitous to find it.

5. This striving supposes and implies in it earnest prayer to God for the sacred illumination of his spirit; for his guidance and direction in the way of life; for the pardon of sin and assistance in duty; for a new heart and a right spirit; that he would purge our consciences from dead works; create us anew to good works in Christ Jesus, and enable us to serve him in newness of life. Prayer is one of the most important means of striving to enter in at the straight gate; and the necessities of such feeble and helpless creatures would naturally point out this method of deriving assistance from a source that is inexhaustible, always at hand, ready to be opened for our relief, and can never fail in

our extremities. And there are so many exhortations and encouragements to us for the constant exercise of this duty, in the same oracles, and so universally known, that it seems unnecessary to direct your attention to any particular one, on the present occasion. So that if any person restrains prayer before God, and abounding in his own wisdom, knowledge and strength; imagines that he can, without divine assistance, work out his own salvation; find the way to eternal life; guard against fatal errors; overcome the opposition and enemies, that stand in his way, and enter into the straight gate, in his own strength, he will find himself miserably mistaken, and have reason to fear, least for his presumption he may be given up to strong delusions to believe a lye, and finally be excluded from the gates of the city of the new Jerusalem.

6. Striving to enter into the straight gate, implies a resolute struggle against sin and temptation, and watchfulness against the corruptions of our hearts, and a constant endeavour to avoid and forsake all those vicious practices, which God has forbidden in his word, and which bring down the wrath of heaven on the children of disobedience. For certainly that man cannot be said to strive to enter in at the straight gate, who does not endeavour to avoid those vices, against which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and which, if persisted in, would disqualify him for the joys of eternity. To live in the practice of any sin is so far from striving to enter into the straight gate, that it only qualifies for herding with those apostate spirits, who are for ever excluded from the new Jerusalem.

7. But to abstain from sin, is not of itself, sufficient to entitle us to an introduction into heaven. We must also conform to God's will, and perform whatsoever he has commanded us. And unless we are careful in this respect, we cannot be said with any propriety to be striving to enter into the straight gate. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father, who is in heaven," said our Saviour, who came from the bosom of the father, and hath revealed him unto us. And this will be found at last to be the fundamental law of his kingdom. One would think, that it was hardly possible for any person to deceive himself so much, as to imagine that he is really striving to enter into the straight gate, who is not endeavouring to comply with the known will of God.

This striving plainly implies that we should abstain from every thing that would obstruct, and that we should comply with every thing that would promote, our eternal salvation. Yet it is far from our design to insinuate, that by all our obedience we could merit salvation, or that God was under any obligations, in point of either justice or equity to admit us into heaven, on account of any thing that we could do in his service; for still we are but unprofitable servants, nay worse than unprofitable, for we are guilty creatures, and liable to the wrath and indignation of God, and if ever we are made partakers of eternal life, it must be acknowledged as the free and unmerited gift of divine grace, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, and has introduced that righte-

ousness, through which alone we can be justified in the sight of God. A dependence therefore on him as the mediator between God and man is implied in the very notion of our striving to enter in at the straight gate.

8. Lastly this striving must be perpetual and persevering as long as it shall please God to continue us in this state of trial. For if any persons after having by thus striving escaped the grosser pollutions that are in the world, should afterwards return to their former careless and wicked way of living; the apostle compares them to "the sow that was washed, returning to her wallowing in the mire." Nay he says of such persons, "that it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than thus to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

If it should now be asked whether an unregenerate sinner can thus strive to enter in the straight gate; I answer, yes. There is nothing that I have said that necessarily supposes a state of grace, that the person is born of the spirit and become a new creature by the regenerating grace of God. But if it should be farther enquired, whether a sinner can be supposed thus to strive antecedently to any influence or operation of the good spirit of God upon his heart? The answer is, by no means. The operations of the spirit of God are as extensive as the calls of the gospel, and none to whom the gospel comes are utterly neglected by this sacred agent. God is daily striving with sinful men, by his word and spirit and the works of his providence, awakening them to a sense of their guilt and misery, antee-

dently to their striving or doing any thing towards their own salvation : so that when men are finally brought to love God and to delight in his service, it is because he first loved them, awakened them to their duty and assisted them in the performance of it. Nay, so extensive and universal are the common operations of his grace, that he not only strives with those, who are excited thereby to strive for themselves, and to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling ; but he also strives with those who are so far from yielding to the operations of his grace that they are said, in scripture, to give, to resist, and even to quench the good spirit of God, until he, in righteous judgment leaves them to themselves, and gives them over to a reprobate mind : in conformity to his own threatenng, “ that his spirit shall not always strive with man,”

II, The dreadful consequences of not striving to enter in at the straight gate.

Striving to enter into the straight gate, or using our best endeavours to work out our salvation, and to obtain eternal life, is so necessary by the constitution of God, that without it we can never behold his face in merey nor enter into his kingdom. However free the grace of God may be supposed to be, yet nothing can be more manifest, than that he has required something, some duty, to be done by us towards our own salvation, although nothing is required to be done in our own strength, or without the gracious assistance, which he is always more ready to afford than we are to pray for it. The contrary supposition would involve in it, the

absurd assertion, that a man might share in the salvation offered in the gospel, without even believing it; without being awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger: without repenting of his sins and forsaking them; without praying to God for a pardon, or for his holy spirit to enable him to comply with his prescriptions; and although he is so far from mortifying his corruptions, that he daily indulges them, and continues to do so until the end of life. This is so monstrous a supposition that no man in his senses can believe it. Striving, therefore, to enter in at the straight gate, is so essentially necessary, that without it, no man can see the Lord. And what does this imply? What less, than the loss of eternal life, glory and felicity, the subjection to eternal punishment as sinners, together with an additional weight of woe and misery, arising from our neglecting and despising the gracious calls and invitations of the gospel? The straight gate is the only entrance into life, joy, glory and immortality; so that not to enter in thereat, is to be banished from the presence of God; from the smiles of his countenance; from the incorruptible inheritance and inviolable kingdom, which he has in reserve for his children. In heaven alone these things are reserved, and there is no access to them but by the straight gate; and no person can ever taste of them, but those, who enter in through this straight gate and walk in the narrow way that leads to life. But the loss of heaven and of all the joys of immortality is far from being the whole consequence of not striving to enter in at the straight gate. This exclusion from heaven is followed by an immediate detrusion into hell, “where the worm dieth not and the fire

is not quenched." As sinful creatures, we are exposed to condemnation by the just judgment of God. Nay, we are under his condemnation already; being liable to death by our primitive apostacy from God, until we are delivered from it by the redemption purchased by Christ. For it is only "to them that are in Christ Jesus, and who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit, that there is no condemnation." Now, think with yourselves, what a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, and to lie forever under the incessant manifestations of his eternal wrath. How holy a being is God! how pure and immaculate is his nature; how great is his abhorrence of sin; how determined is his resolution to punish it, and how unlimited is his power to execute, whatsoever the rectitude of his nature, or the constitutions of his kingdom demand! When the impenitent sinner continues to refuse the offers of salvation through a Redeemer, and unreclaimed by the means of salvation proposed in the gospel, and instead of being mortified becomes more and more obdurate and hardened in sin, the Lord will swear in his wrath, that such abusers of his mercy shall never enter into his rest. Nay he has assured us that he "will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on all them that obey not the gospel of his Son." However foolish sinners may flatter themselves with the hopes of impunity and imagine that God will not pour out the fierceness of his wrath on the impenitent workers of iniquity; yet they will find, that "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent;" that his threatnings will as certainly be accomplished as his promises. There remains no-

thing, therefore, for the impenitent workers of iniquity, who will not strive to enter into the straight gate, but the “blackness of darkness and everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power;” when the miserable out-cast will find what a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

And it is farther to be observed, that those who are favored with the gospel, and yet neglect to strive to enter in at the straight gate, will incur an additional weight of woe and misery, as despisers of the grace of the gospel. God has, in amazing compassion, opened a way of salvation and pardon, through the mediation, the death, and sufferings of his own Son, for guilty, lost and condemned sinners. Nay, he has proclaimed it to all the world, that his grace is free to all that are willing to partake of it, that “whosoever will, may come to the waters of life and drink;” “that they may buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” Now if you neglect this method of salvation, and think that eternal life does not deserve your striving to enter in at the straight gate, you will not only remain under the guilt of all your other sins, but you will be also justly chargeable with the additional guilt of despising the goodness of God, even the riches of his goodness and patience; and if so, what can be the melancholy consequence, but that you will thereby “treasure up to yourselves, additional wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the just judgment of God.” In conformity to this you find our Lord himself, who is appointed the future judge of the world, pronouncing a peculiar woe

against the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where he had preached the gospel of his kingdom, and performed many wonderful miracles in attestation of his mission from the father, and assuring them, that because they, notwithstanding, continued impenitent and unreformed, it would be more tolerable for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, those accursed cities, that were swept off from the face of the earth by an unparalleled destruction, than for them in the day of judgment. Hence also, you find the apostle Paul asking the awakening question, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which first began to be spoken by the Lord?" "And if he that despised Moses' laws died, without mercy; of how much sorer punishment think ye they shall be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the blood of the Son of God." These are the dreadful consequences of not striving to enter in at the straight gate. They will not only remain forever under the displeasure of God as sinners, but also be subjected to a peculiarly aggravated condemnation, as despisers of that glorious salvation which is provided and offered in the gospel.

Reserving the other heads of discourse for another opportunity, we shall conclude with a few reflections.

APPLICATION.

1. From what has been said, we see that the securing of eternal happiness is not so easy a matter as many seem to imagine. They seem to treat it as a matter of amusement or a matter of course, that when they die they have nothing to do, but to step out of life into the

new Jerusalem, without any pains or labor, or self-denial, without any intense application or vigorous exertion. Our Saviour, who certainly knew the way of life, enjoins us to strive to enter into the straight gate; plainly implying, that the business of religion, the preparing the temper of our souls for the employments of heaven, is a matter of the utmost importance, and accompanied with great difficulties, requiring the most anxious concern, the most fixed resolutions, and the most vigorous exertions. The scripture metaphors of "fighting, running, wrestling, striving, resisting unto blood, crucifying the flesh, cutting off a right hand and plucking out a right eye," by which the christian life is represented to us, must certainly imply continued exertion and care, and the most vigorous endeavours that we can possibly use, to prepare for the fortunes of that endless voyage; and by no means represent heaven as a mighty receptacle for the drones of this lazy and indolent hive. Yet there are many in the world, who, instead of making the salvation of their souls their principal concern, and the object of their most industrious endeavours, consider it rather as something which is beside the main business of life, something that is subordinate to the getting of riches, the encreasing of their fortunes, their honor or their power; or what may be easily accomplished after they have indulged themselves in their amusements, their pastimes, and their sports. But such persons will find themselves miserably mistaken and disappointed, if they expect in this easy way to gain admission into heaven, into which we must enter through many tribulations, and into which the righteous themselves scarcely enter, after all their struggles, their mortification and their

strivings in the christian warfare. Let none delude themselves with the imagination, that they are in the way that leads to life eternal, while they live in this loose thoughtless and negligent manner, nor unless they strive in good earnest to enter in at the straight gate, as a matter of infinite concern to which, in comparison, all other things are of trivial consequence.

Let me therefore exhort and entreat you all to labour and strive to enter into the straight gate, that leads to eternal life. In temporal matters, if you lose your labour, your loss is but small; but in this; if you strive successfully; your gain is immense; no less than a crown of righteousness, an inviolable kingdom, "an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away." You will be introduced to joys, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive. And you have the greatest reason to hope for success. That merciful God, who pities you in your struggles in the spiritual warfare, who warns you to fly from the wrath to come, and exhorts and beseeches you, to seek first the kingdom of heaven, and the righteousness thereof, will be ever nigh to assist you by his grace, to uphold your goings, to lead you by his counsel, to crown you with victory, and "make you more than conquerors through him who has loved you and washed you in his blood." Go therefore in the strength of the Lord, "making mention of his righteousness" and truth, and depending upon his gracious promises, that if you "ask, you shall receive, if you seek you shall find, and if you knock, it shall be opened unto you." And if you thus strive to enter into the straight gate,

and do his commandments, he will never leave nor forsake you, but will give you "a right to the tree of life, and cause you to enter through the gates into the city" of our God and Redeemer.

SERMON XIX.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

MAT. XXIV, 44.

Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

THE great business of life is to prepare for a comfortable and happy conclusion of our work. And it is likely, that he, who thinks most on death, and keeps his great end closest in view, will be best prepared for his change. For by the blessing of God, this sacred study has a happy tendency to make us more careful of our time, and more diligent in improving it for the best of purposes. It will make us more vigorous and industrious in seeking to obtain those virtuous habits and gracious qualifications, which alone can prepare us for future happiness. For universal experience proves, that the near prospect of death, makes all, both good and bad, more serious, and more thoughtful of themselves and another world. This makes the men of piety and religion much wiser than ever they were before in any part of their lives, and better judges of the value of time, and of the worth of their immortal souls. And in what affecting language do the most stupid and careless sinners express their awful apprehensions of an unknown eternity, and their contempt of the vanities of this world,

for which they had bartered away their souls. What would they not then give, to escape the torments of hell, and to obtain the glories of heaven? And why this mighty change in their sentiments? Is it not evidently, because they are brought to consider with seriousness and attention, the inconceivable difference between this and the coming world? And surely then, the study of death, which transmits us from time to eternity, must have the same happy tendency to engage us to secure our title to "the inheritance with the saints in light." If the near views of eternity can awaken the careless and secure sinner, and animate the pious christian to more ardent aspirations after heaven and happiness; the proper consideration of death must have the same effect. For this places us on the verge of time, and brings eternity near in view; because of the great uncertainty of the hour of our dissolution. Reason and revelation teach us to consider death as near at hand, in as much as we know not but this night our souls may be required of us. Thus our blessed Saviour commands in our text: "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

We propose, through divine assistance, to assist your meditations on this subject, by considering,

- I. Wherein our readiness or preparation for death consists.
- II. Why we should always be in readiness to die.
 - I. Wherein our preparation for death consists.

Our preparation for death may be considered either as *habitual* or *actual*; the first, indispensably necessary to our future happiness; the other, most desirable for our support and comfort in death. We shall consider both, and shew wherein they consist.

1. *Wherein does our habitual preparation for death consist.*

It must be allowed by all, that no man is habitually fit for death, who is not also prepared for heaven. Now, the sacred oracles require it of us, as a necessary qualification for heaven, that we “*be born again, born of the spirit, created anew unto good works in Christ Jesus;*” and be renewed in the spirit and temper of our minds. Or in other words, our habitual preparation for death or for heaven consists in that saving change, which the spirit of God works on the hearts and lives of his children; whereby all the powers and faculties of the soul are renewed, and holy and divine dispositions are implanted in the heart, which draw forth the desires towards God and Christ, and discover themselves by a conversation becoming the gospel.

Hence, this *habitual* preparation for death, must imply such a conformity of temper to the whole will of God, that the understanding of the person, who has experienced this saving change, is enlightened in the knowledge of Christ. The gospel ministry, which was instituted among men, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, by the spirit of God, has answered this important end to those that are born

again through the word of truth. They are brought to have lively and affecting views of divine things, which counteract the former apprehensions, by which the soul was kept bound in sin; so that the influence of light in the mind prevailing, their practical judgment is altered, and the objects of their faith appear the greatest realities. They have just and scriptural views and apprehensions of the divine perfections, together with the most humbling thoughts of themselves, and the deepest conviction of sin and guilt. Discerning and mourning over the corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts and the badness of the principles, upon which they generally acted before, they are persuaded, that in themselves they are "poor and wretched, and miserable and blind and naked," justly exposed to the divine displeasure, unable to atone for their sins, or to deliver themselves from hell. And together with these views of their sin and danger, they have been brought to see, that God was willing to receive them into favor through his Son; and that Jesus Christ was in every respect qualified to become such a Saviour as they stood in need of. That their ignorance may be removed by that prophet sent from God; that their guilt might be expiated by his sacrifice and atonement; that their souls may be washed in his blood, and purified by his spirit; and that this victorious captain of their salvation was both able and willing to rescue them from tyranny, and to bring them into liberty and glory. And from a thorough conviction of the necessity they lay under, to apply to him for salvation, (which can be procured by no other, for them,) they have been brought to accept of him on the terms of the gospel. They have been

led by the spirit of God to view with attention, wonder and gratitude, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of grace and glory, which are lodged in the great Mediator, and which are sufficient for the supply of all their wants, be they ever so great or numerous; and hereby they are brought deliberately, cordially, and willingly to comply with the glorious proposals of peace and pardon, that are made through him in the new covenant. And thus,

Their wills are renewed and changed as well as their understandings. Thus that "carnal mind, which is enmity to God," and will not submit to his wise and good laws, is removed; that unwillingness, which the unrenewed sinner discovers, to come to Christ, to take his yoke, to crucify the flesh, and to part with a right hand, or right eye, some darling sin, for his sake, is powerfully conquered; and they are made a willing people in a day of Christ's power. Those that are born of God have every high thought, that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ, brought into subjection to him; and all their prejudices against God and divine things being removed, they cheerfully submit to his laws, and to the self-denying terms of the gospel. They chuse God for the portion of their inheritance, Jesus Christ for their Saviour and Redeemer, in all his glorious characters and offices, and the holy spirit with all his gracious influences for their sanctifier and comforter. The general determination, upon which they act, is to promote the glory of God, and to obtain his favor; and hence they expect it only in the way, that God has prescribed, and on the terms, that he has proposed.

And farther, as they are renewed in the whole man, the affections and passions, which in the unregenerate are prevailingly set on earthly objects, are in them engaged for God and divine things. Although these will operate in different degrees, in different persons, according to their various natural constitutions, tempers, educations or customs; yet as they make an essential part of our frame, it is impossible but that they will in some measure be expressed with a matter of such importance as religion must appear to be. Love to God is the ruling principle in their heart, although it may in many instances be greatly obscured by an irregular degree of self-love, or too strong an attachment to earthly profits, pleasures and honors. Although they may not have arrived at full assurance of the divine favor, which inflames the christian's love to God more than any thing else; yet the views which they have of God as infinitely the most amiable and glorious being, as daily loading them with the common blessings of his providence, and the special privileges of the gospel; as reconcileable to sinful men, and accessible through a Redeemer; will diffuse delight and love through their souls, which will daily encrease as they advance towards the full assurance of faith. And the blessed Jesus appear to them "the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely." It is also another branch of their character that they love the holy spirit, the author of the spiritual life, who communicates to them the foretastes of heaven, by whom the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, and by whom they are sealed till the day of redemption. And it is natural for those, who love the adorable Trinity, and feel themselves happy in the communica-

tions of the divine favor, to be enlarged with a diffuse love and benevolence for the whole human race, and more especially for the household of faith. In proportion as they are renewed and sanctified, their hearts are melted down into tenderness and compassion, and warmed with love and charity. Hence they long for opportunities of doing good; for a greater degree of acquaintance with divine and spiritual things; for a greater conformity to the image of Christ; more love to him; more delight in his service; more enlarged communications of grace; and greater advancements in the spiritual life. And thus all the other affections of their souls are regulated by this, and act in subordination to the great end, which their love to God and man prompts them to pursue. And lastly

In consequence of this renewed and divine temper and frame of mind, the general tenor of their conduct is such as the gospel requires. Persuaded of the necessity of forsaking every sin of every kind, and convinced of their own weakness and inability, they resolve in the strength of divine grace, that they will have no more to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will yield themselves to God as alive from the dead, and employ their members as instruments of righteousness. Hence their principal activity and vigor is spent in pleasing God, in laying up their treasures in heaven, in endeavours to grow in grace, and to prepare for that state of holiness and happiness, into which they hope soon to be translated. Thus they endeavour to live as strangers in this world, travelling to the new Jerusalem, the city of their King, their Father and their God.

-serving him with their souls and their bodies on the road, and adorning his doctrines in all things.

These things constitute the principal part of the character of those that are born of God, and that are habitually prepared for death and judgment, heaven and eternity. And nothing short of this can constitute an *habitual* preparation for death. "For except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."* And none but those that love God can be happy in his presence; and none can love him, but those that are like him; and nothing can make us like him, but the impress of his own holy image on our hearts communicated in regeneration. And therefore this conformity to God, and nothing else, can make us habitually prepared for death, or for heaven; the happiness of which consists in the perpetual enjoyment of the love of God.

2. *But besides this habitual readiness for death, there is also an actual readiness, which consists in the lively exercise of grace at the season of death.*

The vigorous and lively exercise of those gracious habits and principles which are formed in the soul at its conversion, and by which it is habitually prepared for death, is what constitutes an actual readiness to die. The natural fear of death is in a great measure conquered by an ardent love to God and Christ; a lively faith in the Redeemer; a realizing view of heaven;

*Joh. III, 3.

and a longing desire after perfection in holiness and happiness. For that which most of all reconciles the humble christian to the thoughts of his dissolution is the firm persuasion, that he is going where all the great and precious promises of the new covenant, shall be completely fulfilled; where he shall be discharged from the tedious warfare of mortality; where he shall be delivered from every thing, that could tempt to offend his God; and where he shall exult forever in the manifestations of his eternal love. These exercises and prospects gild the horrors of death; disarm it of its sting, and make it assume the appearance of a friendly and welcome messenger, dispatched from heaven, to relieve us from pain and misery, and to bring us in safety to our father's house. This makes the lively christian desirous "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." So that if we would be prepared and in actual readiness for our removal from time to eternity, we should every day we live, endeavour to cultivate that faith and hope, that love and heavenly-mindedness, which alone can raise us above the fears of death. And for this purpose, we should endeavour always to maintain on our minds a lively sense of death as near at hand, that we may be as much under the influence of this thought, as if the physician or judge had passed the sentence upon us. For by habituating ourselves to consider death as near approaching, we shall never be much surprized with it; but whensoever our Lord comes, we shall be found watching. And we should also think often on the glorious inheritance, which God has prepared for his children, and on the grounds of hope that we have, of an interest in it. For a realizing

persuasion of this will make us willing “to be absent from the body that we may be present with the Lord,” with whom we shall be joint-heirs of “an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled and that fades not away.”— And above all, it should be our constant and daily prayer to God, that he would make us both habitually and actually ready for our dissolution; that he would support and comfort us in this solemn and critical hour; and enable us to perform this last act in life in such a manner, as would reflect an honor and credit on our profession of christianity. God alone can strengthen and support us in the last struggles of nature, and this severe conflict with the last enemy. And therefore we should look to him for this gracious assistance, which he is ever ready to communicate to his children. This is the actual preparation for death, which arises from the vigorous and lively exercise of grace implanted in regeneration, which can administer comfort in a dying hour. And therefore it is vastly different from that with which many poor ignorant careless souls launch into eternity; viz: a prayer made by a minister in their chamber; a transient ejaculation or two amidst the pangs of death; or the bequeathing to acts of piety and charity the money which the dying sinner could no longer spend in sin and folly. Men may think what they will of these things, and depend upon what preparation they will, but certain it is, if there be an eternal world to come, the most important business we have to transact in life, is to be thus habitually and actually ready to die.

II. Why should we be always prepared for death?

Because the time of our dissolution is to us entirely uncertain.

In such an hour as we think not, the Son of man cometh. Our times are in the hands of God, and our continuance in the body depends upon his sovereign pleasure. To him, who is the God of the spirits of all flesh, it belongs to determine how long our souls shall live and act in these clay tabernacles, and when our bodies shall return to the dust, and our spirits to God who gave them. He, "in whom we live, move, and have our being," holds our souls in life as long as he pleases, and then takes away our breath, so that we die and return to the dust. Now, we have no lease of future years from the great disposer of life; no certainty of a month, a day, or an hour, to live: but may be dispossessed of these houses of clay at a moment's warning. We see that death carries us off the stage at every age and period of life. Some pay but a transient visit to our world, and close their eyes almost as soon as they have beheld the light. Others are hurried away as soon as their reasoning powers begin to unfold; and the tender blossom is nipped before it is fairly opened. How suddenly are our fondest expectations from a beloved relative blasted, and all our hopes of their future usefulness disappointed, by the rude relentless hand of death? How many are surprised by the sudden and unavoidable stroke of death, in all their bloom of youth, or in the midst of their prospect of many happy days and years to come! Those very persons, that we beheld in the morning

Hourishing like the grass in all its pride and verdure, we have seen cut down and withered before noon. The seeds of innumerable diseases are sown in our feeble constitutions, which grow and strengthen there, until they at last break out with such irresistible violence, as baffles the physician's skill and the force of medicine. So that the man, who may be to day in his full strength, wholly at ease and quiet, with his breasts full of milk, and his bones moistened with marrow, may be in a very short time groaning under acute pains, and struggling in the agonies of death. No age nor condition in life is a sufficient security against the sudden and unexpected attacks of this last enemy. The human body is a curious and delicate machine, composed of innumerable tender parts; any of which being violently shattered and broken, may bring on the sudden and unavoidable dissolution of the whole. So that while we may be presuming upon the firmness of our constitutions, death may be secretly unpinning the clay tabernacle, or approaching with hasty steps, to execute his awful commission upon us. How often does it happen, according to the parable, that while men are blessing themselves, in the survey of their ample possessions, and the smiling prospects of future happiness, that very night their souls were required of them. If therefore the time of our death is so exceedingly uncertain, that we cannot promise ourselves another hour to live; what can be more reasonable than to be always prepared for that solemn change? Surely if it is a matter of any consequence to be prepared for death, it must be extremely foolish to neglect it upon the uncertain expectation of having time enough before us for this pur-

pose ; when we know not whether we have a single hour. And how much more absurd must it appear, when we consider that an endless eternity of inconceivable happiness or misery depends upon it. Our future state, into which we are removed by death, will be determined by our conduct while we are here, and our temper when we leave the world. For “as the tree falleth so it lieth.” Those that are prepared for death, shall be happy through eternity ; but those that are filthy then shall be filthy still, and shall be consigned to that place of torment, from whence there is no redemption. It is impossible for a good man, who has complied with the terms of the gospel covenant ; who loves God, and makes it his constant care through the whole of his conduct to please God, and is thus prepared for death, not to be happy in another world. Because he carries with him the very ingredients of happiness. And it is equally impossible for a careless unrenewed sinner, under the power of sin disaffected to God, and unprepared for death, to go to heaven, or to be happy there. Every one goes to that place he is most fit for ; to that company, which he most resembles in the habitual temper and disposition of his soul at death. And if death makes such a solemn and awful change in our condition, and removes us either into joys inconceivable and full of glory, or into torment lasting as our immortal spirits, and exquisite beyond all present imagination ; what madness can equal that of neglecting to prepare for this important hour, on which the fate of our souls through an endless eternity depends ; especially when the Son of man has assured us that he will come at such an hour as we do not think ? Prudent men would

not venture a matter of any considerable consequence to their health or estate upon so uncertain a foundation. And why would they venture the weight of their eternal salvation upon so precarious a footing, as the uncertain expectation of future months and years to prepare for death. From all this then we see with how much reason our Saviour urges us to be always ready for our dissolution, from the consideration of the uncertainty of life. “Be ye therefore also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh.”

Other arguments to enforce the exhortation in our text might be easily adduced, were there any necessity for them; but contenting ourselves with this mentioned in our text, we shall now proceed to the

APPLICATION.

1. *From the method, in which we should prepare for death, we see the absurdity of those methods which many take to rise above the fear of it.*

Some endeavour to banish the thoughts of death entirely from their minds; and then it is no wonder that they are not afraid of what they will never allow themselves a moment's leisure to meditate on. And thus they evade the last hold that religion can have on dissolute minds. Others, who now and then spend a thought or two on death at certain intervals, yet consider it as at a very great distance; as an evil day, which they are willing to put far from them; and therefore conclude, that it is time enough to begin to prepare for it, when it comes nearer to them. Some

again grow insensible to their dissolution from the example of those who out of a false affectation of courage pretend to despise it ; as if they had therein a fortitude superior to others, when it is fool-hardiness and rashness in the highest degree not to be afraid of this king of terrors. Others take refuge in a mere moral conduct, without any regard to the peculiarities of christianity, whereby it differs from natural religion ; as if discharging the duties which we owe to one another in our different relations were sufficient to atone for their monstrous and ungrateful neglect of the blessed Redeemer, through whom alone there is salvation. And others support themselves in the neglect of preparing for death, from some confused and extravagant notions of the mercy of God in Christ, without considering on what terms that mercy is offered in the gospel ; or that justice, wisdom and holiness are other attributes as essential to the divine nature as mercy. But the time is fast approaching, which will effectually discover the vanity and absurdity of all these methods of banishing the thoughts of death from the mind. There is no safe way to rise above the fears of death but by an habitual and actual preparation for death and heaven.

2. *Does our preparation for death consist in the cultivation of that temper and conduct, which make us like to Christ? How foolish then is the judgment of those, who think they have more than time enough to prepare for their removal into another world?*

They indeed acknowledge that life is exceedingly short, an hand's-breadth, a vapor ; but little do they con-

sider how much is to be done in this short, uncertain space. All our time here is little enough to acquire the knowledge of God, to learn his will, to subdue our corruptions, to break the power of vicious habits, to acquire those of virtue and goodness, to form our degenerate souls into a resemblance of God, and to prepare ourselves by a course of holiness for a state of happiness and perfection above. These are exercises for which we have naturally but little fondness; and therefore time, industry and perseverance, with the aids of the holy spirit are absolutely necessary to overcome the difficulties, which occur in them. The danger and slipperiness of our path require our attention and care, lest we stumble; the assaults and allurements of our enemies demand resolution and fortitude, lest we be tempted to turn aside; and the length of our journey, and the shortness of our day loudly call upon us to set out early, lest the night of everlasting darkness overtake us. Little then do those persons, who think they can soon prepare for death, consider the power of their corruptions, the weakness of their resolutions, the inveteracy of evil habits, or the malice, the cunning and activity of their spiritual enemies. And little do they consider how much they provoke the blessed God to withhold the influences of his holy spirit, without which they cannot prepare for death, by their ungratefully rejecting his present offers, and their squandering away their precious time in folly and sloth. Our time is long enough for all the useful purposes of life, to acquire those habits of virtue and piety, which will be the foundation of future happiness. But we have not an hour to loose in vanity and sin.

3. *Will the Son of Man come in such an hour as we think not? How strange is it that mortal beings who must die, should so seldom think of death?*

This is such a degree of stupidity as perhaps nothing can exceed, unless it be, that some of the human race are foolish enough to make a jest of dying; which argues a most desperate and dangerous state. Yes, some are so exceedingly hardened by a long continued course of folly and ignorance, that the sight of certain death cannot make them tremble. They cannot, or will not, direct one thought beyond the grave: or if they do, they are so unaccustomed to meditation, that gives them pain, and so they dismiss it. They have contracted this melancholy aversion to serious reflection and meditation, by long disuse of it, and by giving themselves up to the pursuits and pleasures of the present world; and of all the bad habits to which men are enslaved, there is perhaps none that is more dangerous, or that exercises a more uncontrollable tyranny over the minds of man.—The most awakening dispensations of divine providence cannot excite them to consider their latter end. They will take no warnings, hear no admonitions from the word nor spirit of God, nor from their best friends: but they will shut their eyes against the most eminent dangers; stop their ears against the loudest calls of divine providence, whether personal, public, or private; disregard the plainest and most awful threatenings, and despise the chastening of the Lord, till sudden and inevitable ruin overtakes them. It seems as if nothing but the flames of hell could make them feel; and nothing but the terrors of the final judgment can make them

tremble. But then, alas! reflection comes too late.—
O! may God awaken such to consider their latter end,
and to attend to the things that belong to their eternal
peace, before they be finally hid from their eyes, and
they be consigned to that place of torment from whence
none are ever redeemed.

4. *Will the Son of Man come in such an hour as we
think not? Let us be excited hereby to improve our re-
maining time, so as to be always habitually and actu-
ally prepared for death.*

Can you, my friends, say upon just grounds, that you
are ready for the coming of your Lord? Have you that
renewed temper of mind, that holy conversion, which
has been described? If you have, you may wait with
patience for that joyful messenger, that will bring you
to your father's house above. But if you have no rea-
son to trust, that you are yet prepared for the solemn
change, be persuaded and exhorted to improve the short
remainder of life, for this most important of all pur-
poses. Consider that much of your time is already spent,
and how little yet remains, God only knows. Can you
bear the thought, that you should yet go on to trifle
with God and religion, with your souls and eternity?
Can you bury your talents in the ground, when you have
an awful account to give of your improvement of them:
when so much is to be done for God in the world, and
while your own salvation is not yet secured? Would
you not be at pains to avoid everlasting burnings and to
obtain inconceivable happiness? These are not points
of nice and fruitless speculation. No: they are eter-

nal realities ; and you will find that beyond all peradventure, your lot will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, if you trifle away your present seasons of grace and mercy. Let nothing then divert us from the great business of life, the preparation for death ; and let us carefully guard against delays in a matter of the greatest importance, which must be done, or we are ruined beyond hope, and which ought to be done immediately, as we know not the day nor the hour in which the summons of death may be put into our hands. Let us make it the business of every day to prepare for our last, to be not only habitual but also actually prepared for that great change in the state of our existence, which is awful and important beyond any thing we can at present conceive. Let us see to it, that we have not only oil in our lamps, but also those lamps well trimmed and burning, that we may enter with the bridegroom into the marriage. And let us every day examine the state of our souls, the strength of our graces, and the foundation of our hopes, remembering that what we are thus doing, we are doing for eternity ; and happy, thrice happy, shall that servant be, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

SERMON XX.

DEATH; ITS NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES.



HEB. IX, 27.

It is appointed unto men once to die.

By the good hand of God upon us we are continued in life and brought in safety to the close of another year, although many that were as young and likely to live as ourselves, have been numbered with the dead in the course of it, and are deposited in the house appointed for all living. This is the very condition on which we are born into the world, that in a few years we must close our eyes on mortal things, and submit to the irresistible stroke of this last enemy, who is constantly invading our borders, entering into our families, and slaying our friends and relations. In the compass of a single year, what numbers go into captivity, are swept off the face of the earth, and pass into an unknown eternity? So unlimited is the empire of death over the human race, and so steady is he in the execution of his original commission to bring us down to the dust of the grave, that none are so vain as to promise themselves an immortality on earth, or to hope for an exemption from this common lot of mankind. How different so-

ever their circumstances and methods of life are, yet all expect to be laid in the solitary grave at last. Yet notwithstanding this, universal experience proves that men too often neglect this important consideration, and do not draw those practical inferences from it, which by the blessing of God, would have an happy tendency to engage them to live as borderers on the grave, and probationers for eternity. All need a constant monitor to remind them of their own mortality, and to quicken them in their preparations for a comfortable close of life.—As it finishes our trial, seals our characters, and transmits us into an eternal state of retribution, which will never be succeeded by another, it is certainly a very useful subject of consideration. It reads us the plainest and most instructive lectures, and furnishes meditations that are likely to be productive of the most excellent tempers, and the most rational conduct. And nothing can be more becoming a rank of rational beings, who know that they must soon die, than at the close of a year, to make a solemn pause and reflect upon the distinguishing goodness of God to them, who has spared them in the land of the living for another year, and enquire what valuable purposes it has answered to their souls, and what progress they have made in their preparations for meeting this last enemy with the fertility and composure of a christian. Let us then, my friends, take our stand, for a few moments, on the borders of the grave, and cast our thoughts backward on the world and forward through eternity, and consider both in the light reflected on them by death. And to assist our meditations on this subject, permit me to confine your contemplations at present to

I. The nature of death.

II. The necessity of dying that we are all under.

III. The foundation of this necessity.

IV. The momentous consequences of dying.

I. The nature of death.

1. *To die is to have the soul disunited from the body.*

None of those disembodied spirits, who once inhabited houses of clay, have returned from the invisible world to tell us what it is to die; the full acquaintance with this subject is reserved to be learned only by the last experiment. We only know in general that death is the dissolution of that *union* by which our souls and bodies are linked together. When the body becomes an unfit or disagreeable habitation, the soul takes its flight into the invisible world, and ascends to God who gave it, while the body returns to the dust, from whence it was originally taken. How this vital union is dissolved we can no more tell, than how such different principles at first came to be so intimately conjoined together. We know neither, how an immortal mind can be united to an organized piece of clay, in order to its present sensations and motions, nor how the unwelcome separation is made in order to the entire cessation of animal separation. Experience teaches, that in some instances the lamp of life gradually expires, and the christian falls asleep in Jesus, without a sigh or a groan;

but most frequently, human nature does not yield to death, without manifesting a deep reluctance to its stroke. Hence it is, that we so often hear the expiring groans of our departing friends, which afford the deepest conviction of what agonies they feel, when their souls and bodies are forcibly torn asunder.

But whatever be the manner of our death, whether the separation is effected with or without a struggle, yet both reason and revelation conspire to assure us, that this king of terrors has received no commission from the Father of our spirits to destroy their essential life, by reducing them to a state of inactivity with the body. They survive the stroke of death, and are only transmitted into the world of spirits, where they think and reason, are conscious of good and evil, and entertain prospects and reflections, that give them pleasure or pain, and doubtless in greater perfection than they could ever have them, during their connections with objects of flesh and sense. There is no similarity or agreement between our ideas of matter, however organized and refined, and a thinking, free self-active being, which presides over the body and governs its motions according to its own will, which can take in spiritual and abstract notions of God and religion, can compose them together, reason upon them, and deduce a long train of speculative and practical consequences from them; and therefore it cannot be capable of a dissolution by any impressions from corporeal objects.—God alone who has formed the soul of man within him, can put an end to its existence. But it cannot be supposed without absurdity, that he would furnish it with

such exalted powers of conversing with objects which lie beyond the reach of our bodily senses, and appoint it only to spend a few years amidst a thousand sorrows, which frequently fall with double weight upon the best of men on account of their regard to his laws, and suffer it to drop into non-existence at the dissolution of the body. Add to all this, that the soul is a subject of moral government, and capable of endless improvements in knowledge, holiness and happiness, and that it is furnished with strong appetites and desires after immortality, attended with hopes and fears in another state. And can we imagine that God has made all these in vain, without any thing to answer them in a future world? No, certainly: And revelation confirms the dictates of reason on this subject, and assures us, that when we put off “the earthly house of this tabernacle, we shall have a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” if we are the children of God; and that when we are absent from the body we shall be present with the Lord.

2. The scriptures lead us into another view of death as the dissolution and destruction of the body.

However the immaterial principle of thought and activity within us remains unhurt and unaffected by the stroke of death; yet this wild destroyer of the human race, reduces all that is visible of man to deplorable ruins. Our bodies indeed are curious pieces of divine workmanship, ‘fearfully and wonderfully made,’ which the wisdom of God has formed for an habitation to the soul. Yet still they are but piles of organized clay and

liable to be reduced to their original dust, when God commands the soul to quit her earthly tabernacle.—“Our earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved:”* Which expression of the apostle is an evident allusion to the tabernacle in the wilderness, which was so constructed, that it could be easily taken to pieces, and one board parted from another. Death loosens the joints of the body, unpins the clay tabernacle, and dissolves it into dust. As it is constructed only for a temporary dwelling and not a fixed habitation, it cannot be of long continuance. However it may baffle the assaults of the harbingers of death for a season, yet the seeds of mortality are sown within it, which will e’er long strengthen and bring on its final dissolution. Nor in this effect of death will there be any distinction; the beautiful frame of the body will then be defaced, its animal life shall expire and all its active powers and sensations shall be extinguished. Death stains the pride of the human body and changes its most engaging qualities into deformity. The strongest body drops down in weakness and can rise no more, when the mighty are taken away without hand; the most lively and vigorous lies still in the grave, like a statue of clay. He pays no reverence to figure or dress. He arrests the prince upon the throne as intrepidly as the peasant at his spade; he strips the young and beautiful of all their charms, nor spares the proud and pampered in the day of his power. The finest, fairest, strongest body shall be seized by death, and consigned to the silent habitation of the grave. One dieth in his full strength, being

*2 Cor. v, 1.

wholly at ease and quiet; his breasts are full of milk and his bones are moistened with marrow; and another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. "They shall lie down alike in the dust and the worms shall cover them."* Of that active and sprightly creature, which lately we beheld so full of busy projects, and so industrious in the prosecution of them, when death lays his cold hands upon him, we see nothing remaining but a breathless lump of unanimated clay, destitute of all sense and motion: and instead of that attractive form, which drew the attention and commanded the admiration of every spectator, death substitutes an hideous and ghastly spectacle, which we are obliged to conceal from the eyes of the living, and commit to the grave to be the spoil of worms.

3. To die, is to depart out of this world, and to enter into another state of existence.

Under this figure does the good old Simeon mention his death: "Now Lord, letttest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."† So also the apostle Paul had a desire to depart.‡ Thus we report the death of a friend and a person of our acquaintance; that he is departed this life; that he has left the world and all its busy concerns, and entered upon another state of existence. As soon as the veil of mortal flesh, is rent, which hides the invisible world from our view, we are already in another state. Were

*Job. XXI, 23-27

†Luk. II, 29.

‡Phil, I, 23.

our departed friends allowed to converse with us about the affairs of this world, how should we be surprized at the justice and propriety of their sentiments concerning the pleasures and advantages, the honors and the vanity of earthly things? And what solemn and affecting narratives could they give of the manner of their existence and the subjects that employ their meditations in the world of spirits? But this must not be, we have Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, and they have no more to do with us, and no more to say to us. They have done with markets and sermons, with sales and speculations, with their own houses and the house of God. They have no more intercourse with a disconsolate wife, with weeping children, with a broken hearted parent or the dearest friend who was as their own souls.

To die, is to depart out of this world, and to leave our earthly projects and schemes behind us. Death relieves the poor and indigent from their anxiety and solicitude about what they shall eat and drink and where-with they shall be cloathed. It puts an end to the plowing and sowing of the husbandman, and gives the weary hireling rest from all his labours. In the grave the weary are at rest, and the servant is free from his master. While the busy merchant is laboriously engaged in studying the various arts of trade and commerce, and exchanging the productions of his native country for the commodities of foreign climes, and it may be, is comforting himself with the pleasing prospect of a large estate, or is ready to enter upon a more full enjoyment of past labours; death cuts off his fond expectations,

and hurries him into a world of spirits, where his accumulated treasures can neither follow nor affect him. While the devotees of pleasure are torturing a tired imagination to find out new scenes of dissipation and amusement to murder their precious moments, on which an awful eternity depends, death levels his unerring shaft for their lives, and carries them into the invisible world. While the covetous wordling is restlessly employed in enlarging his treasures, adding house to house and field to field, and contriving how he may be placed alone in the earth; death in a moment puts an end to his busy cares and toils, and instead of his swelling expectations, assigns him the scanty possession of a tomb. In a word, death, without distinction, sweeps off all from the theatre of public action and business, and confines them in the dark and lonely prison of the grave, from whence they shall have no enlargement until the morning of the resurrection.

To die is to depart from all our worldly prosperity and happiness. No state or condition in life is a sufficient security from the assaults of death. The most extensive conquests and the best established kingdoms cannot bribe the inexorable king of terrors to delay his stroke for a moment. He triumphs over the proudest conquerors, and by a single stroke deprives them of all that power, and military prowess, which made them the scourge of mankind, and the terror of the nations around them. He brings down the greatest monarchs from their lofty thrones, and levels their honor with the dust. Nothing of that pomp and splendor, which before attracted the esteem and admiration of mankind, descends

with them to the dark dominions of the grave : no marks of their former dignity and pre-eminence to distinguish the noble from the ignoble dust. Death pays as little regard to riches as to honors and power. Though they should not “ make unto themselves wings and fly away,” yet we must soon be torn from the embraces of our beloved treasures, and “ the places that now know us shall know us no more.” We may enlarge our barns, encrease our stores, and lay up much goods for many years to come and be ready to say to ourselves, “ eat and drink and take thy pleasure,” when death may secretly enter our chamber with that solemn reprimand : “ Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be ?” Nor can the carnal pleasures of the voluptuous sensualist afford any better security against the arrests of death. While he spends his days in the excesses of mirth and riot, and restrains himself from nothing that his heart desires, death with a silent hand, writes *vanity and vexation of spirit* on all his fleeting enjoyments, and hurries him, however reluctant, to the solitary mansions of the dead. Nor can the innocent amusements of life, nor the pleasing conversation of the most beloved relations and friends secure us from departing into that land of darkness and silence, where we shall no more behold man with all the inhabitants of the earth.

To die is not only a departure from all the pleasures and enjoyments of the present state, whether virtuous or vicious, innocent or unlawful ; but it is also to the good man an happy discharge from all the labours of mortality, the sorrows of his pilgrimage, and the strug-

gles of his christian warfare. To him, death brings the sovereign cure for all the maladies of a sickly, crazy constitution, heals the wounds of poverty and affliction, puts an end to the calamities of war, and sheaths the persecutor's bloody sword. "In the grave the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."— There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor; the small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master.

To die, is to depart from all the ordinances of the gospel church, and all the opportunities of growing wise unto salvation. This is our state of probation in which we are favored with many singular advantages, for attaining those measures of grace and knowledge and holiness, which are absolutely necessary for their future happiness. The divine command, to turn aside on the Lord's day from the common business of life, to pay our united homage to the God that made us, the institution of public worship, the preaching of the word, the ordinances of the sanctuary, with all the methods of private devotion, were all designed to train us up for more exalted happiness in the coming world. But death will soon remove us from all those invaluable privileges, all those golden opportunities which are now put into our hands, by our being born in an age of knowledge and a land of light, by our being planted in the courts of our God, and watered with the dews of his heavenly grace; and by our being educated in the church of Christ, where we have "line upon line, and precept upon precept."— Our day of grace cannot be protracted beyond the grave. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salva-

tion." "The grave cannot praise the Lord nor death celebrate him; they that go down to the pit cannot hope for his truth."* Death will seal the lips of our wisest teachers, and stop the ears of the most attentive hearers. That voice, which at once both charmed and instructed, shall be silenced in death, and the ministry of reconciliation appointed by Christ, to beseech and entreat sinners to return to God and their duty by a true repentance, will then be at an end. The overtures of pardon and mercy which are now sounding in our ears, will be made no more, and the calls of God by his word and providence, by his holy spirit and his faithful monitor in our own bosoms, shall follow us no farther than the close of life. For there is no repentance, nor work, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave, to which we are all hastening.

To die, is to depart from all our opportunities of advancing the glory of God, the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom and the happiness of mankind. We have many talents committed to our trust in the present life, and we are accountable to our great Lord and master, for our diligence and fidelity in the improvement of them. Every day opens new scenes, wherein we may be serviceable to our friends and neighbours, to the church of God, and the community in general; and wherein we may abound in those good works, which are pleasing to God and profitable to men. Here we have a thousand opportunities of proclaiming the praises of our God and Redeemer, and of advancing the interests of his king-

dom in the world, by instructing the ignorant and reclaiming transgressors from the error of their ways, by relieving the poor and indigent and protecting the widow and the orphan, by publishing the wonders of redeeming grace, and the amazing dimensions of the love of God, for the support of the trembling christian or the encouragement of the awakened sinner, who is ready to sink into despair. And here we have daily opportunities for the exercise of those social virtues, those acts of charity and justice, of hospitality and benevolence, which add a glory to our christian profession, and render us distinguished blessings in our generation. But death will remove us from all these opportunities of public or private usefulness in the world. He will give us a final discharge from all the duties of our particular stations and employments in life. We have but a few hours to work the works of him that sent us into the world, before the shades of night shall overtake us, in which no man can work; a few days more to labor in the vineyard of our Lord, before death brings us the solemn message from the eternal Judge: "Give an account of your stewardships, for ye may be stewards no longer."*

Lastly; to die is to depart out of this world, and from all its enjoyments, and to enter into an eternal world of retribution, where we shall be treated according to our conduct in life and our prevailing tempers and dispositions when we appear before our judge. Solemn departure indeed, out of changing and successive time, into an unwasting eternity, where the sentence that shall be

*Luk. xvi, 2.

passed upon the disembodied spirit shall never more be reversed! Here we are upon trial as candidates for heavenly preferments, as probationers for exalted stations in the upper world, and our whole behaviour is under our master's eye. But at death this trial is over and in the state, in which we are found at that solemn hour, we must appear before our judge, who will try our tempers and conduct by the unalterable rules of his gospel, and accordingly either receive us to dwell with himself in the Paradise of God, or doom us to everlasting banishment from him into "that lake that burns with fire and brimstone prepared for the devil and his angels."—When millions and millions of ages are past, the happiness of the righteous is but beginning, and the misery of the wicked is as far from coming to a period, as it was at the first moment of their departure out of the world. But more of this under another head. It is time to make some practical improvement of what has been said; by way of

APPLICATION.

1. *Is death then the dissolution of that vital bond, by which our souls and bodies are linked together, and an enlargement of the soul from the incumbrance of its earthly tabernacle?*

Should not every one of us make a solemn pause and consider where we shall be after the worms have destroyed this body; in what company, and in what employment; what views of the present world, and what eternal prospects we shall then entertain? Is it consistent with reason, or can we reconcile it with our professions of christianity, to make many years provi-

sion for the body, when we have no assurance that we shall see another day, and little or none for an immortal soul, that survives the stroke of death? Is it the design of christianity to quicken our care and industry for the present life, and to extinguish in us all concern for futurity? Did our blessed Redeemer, our pattern and our judge act in this manner? No: very far from it. Such a conduct is as contradictory to the genius and design, the spirit and maxims of christianity as light is to darkness, as wisdom to folly. Should we not also consider what are the thoughts and subjects, that most engage our meditations while we are in the body, and what are our moral habits and dispositions? These belong to the soul, are inseparable from it, and will prove the immediate sources of happiness or misery in our disembodied state. Practical habits, whether virtuous or vicious, whether divine or worldly love, meekness or anger, charity or uncharitableness, benevolence or selfishness, pass with the soul into another state, and when its union with the body is broken, it will be too late to be cured of pride and envy, unrighteousness and sensuality, profaneness and impurity. Let us then guard against contracting those unlovely dispositions, or if contracted already, let us speedily apply to the great physician for the removal of them, before death fixes them in the soul.

2. *Is death the dissolution of the clay tabernacle and the destruction of the body? Should not this moderate our anxious solicitude about the accommodations of a mortal body, which must speedily crumble into its original dust?*

Is it not absurd and preposterous to spend so much labour and pains to dress and pamper a piece of corruptible flesh, which must soon lie undistinguished from its kindred dust, which must soon acknowledge "corruption to be its father, and the worms to be its mother and sister?" Does it deserve laborious days and sleepless nights? Does it merit the arts of oppression and cruelty, of lying and deceit? Does it deserve, that the soul should forfeit all its noble and angelic expectations beyond the grave, in order to adorn and accommodate a ruinous house which must soon be deserted, as unfit for the habitation of an heaven-born spirit? Have we no higher ambition than to eat and drink, no nobler end of our creation to answer? Has the infinitely wise Creator made us thinking, rational beings, capable of entertaining the most exalted contemplations, to spend all our thoughts and time in talking of a statue of clay? Nay, rather should we not employ our principal care and pains in cultivating those heavenly and godlike dispositions, that will prepare us for an heavenly habitation, "a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?"

3. *Is death our departure out of this world? How solicitously should we guard against a growing fondness for a world which we must leave, and whose fashion passes away?*

In this view, what little things are gains and losses, grandeur or obscurity, flattery or scorn, a fine or a coarse attire, a joyful or a melancholy meeting, or any thing else that respects only the present life? We should

regard the occurrences and enjoyments of this life, only as the traveller does the accommodations of an inn, which he must leave in an hour or two. Let us therefore consider ourselves as travellers through this valley of tears, who should not be exceedingly depressed or elated with what may befall us on the journey unless it respects our souls and eternity. This will prevent such an attachment to the things of time as will make the thoughts of our separation from the world uneasy and afflictive. A wordly heart is beyond peradventure a very troublesome companion in a dying hour. It not only makes the thoughts of our departure hence terrible, but it also lays a foundation for a durable misery in the separate state. For when the soul, by abandoning itself to sensual and earthly gratifications, vitiates or extinguishes its spiritual appetite for sublime and rational enjoyments; its violent propension to those bodily pleasures, which it can no longer enjoy, must necessarily create in it the torment of eager unsatisfied desires, and melancholy tears of everlasting banishment from all those pure and unmixed delights, which proceed from the throne of God.

‡. *Is death our departure out of this world? How careful should we be to have "our loins girt and our lamps burning," that we be not surprized, unprepared in that solemn hour.*

All our business in life is but a trifle compared with this important work. If this be neglected, better for us never to have been born into the world; better never to have heard the glad tidings of salvation through

a Redeemer; better never to have been possessed of higher capacities than the beasts that perish. These distinguishing advantages can, in that case, answer no other purpose to us, than to sink us under a more aggravated condemnation. Whatever other business we have transacted in life, and transacted with reputation, we shall certainly condemn ourselves for egregious folly and madness, for having neglected our preparation for our last change. Let us then be exhorted to make this our first and great concern in life. Let us begin it early, attend to it with seriousness, and pursue it with unremitting assiduity and diligence, until we have acquired that holy temper and disposition which ensures eternal happiness to the humble christian. Our work is important and our day is short. God only knows how long our seasons of grace shall be continued with us; whether we shall live to see the conclusion of another year, or whether death may not number us with our departed friends before the expiration of another month. It requires labor and pains with the sanctifying influences of the spirit of God, to root out evil habits, to conquer the corruptions of our hearts, to resist temptations, to learn the holy art of living above the world as citizens of the New Jerusalem. It requires application and care to study the nature and perfections of God, to make ourselves acquainted with his laws, to acquire the habits of virtue and grace, to raise our cold and unaffected hearts to God and divine things, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds into the image of Christ, and to have our whole souls fashioned according to the gospel of his grace. We may perhaps wish for more time, when sickness comes and death re-

ceives his commission to execute his last solemn work upon us. But why should we have more, when enough has been already assigned us, and we have trifled with our seasons of grace. Let us then, as we value our immortal souls, as we would be armed against the unknown terrors of a dying hour, endeavour to view this world in the light of eternity, and set such a value upon time as we shall then do, and make such an improvement of it as we shall then wish we had done, which will greatly contribute to our readiness to depart out of the world at the summons of death.

5. *Does death put a period to all our seasons of grace and opportunities of doing good in the world?*

We live in a dying world, the objects of our beneficence and charity are mortal, and death will e'er long remove us from all our opportunities of doing good to the souls or the bodies of men. Now is our season of usefulness, the gospel calls us to embrace and improve it, and God and conscience approve the call. Let us not then act the part of the slothful and unprofitable servant, who hid his Lord's money in a napkin, but rather let us imitate the example of him who went about with unwearied assiduity from place to place, doing good to the souls of men, and who has left it in charge to his followers, that they be rich in good works, ready to communicate, and willing to distribute out of the abundance which he liberally bestows upon them, a portion to his necessitous and suffering children. Let us be exhorted from the consideration of our own mortality

and the mortality of all with whom we are connected, to do good unto all as we have opportunity, but especially to the household of faith; remembering for our encouragement, that the time is fast approaching, when no work will be reviewed with so much pleasure, nor meet with so noble a reward as that which was done for the glory of God, and the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. A comfortable and happy death must be the result of an holy and well spent life. Those are likely to die with the highest triumphs of faith and hope and joy, who can give the best account of their improvement of their talents and trusts: those whose consciences bear the fullest testimony, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity and not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world." Who can say with Hezekiah: "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee with a perfect and upright heart, and done that which is good in thy sight;" or with the apostle Paul: "I have finished my course, I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give me in that day. For blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them."

Let our lives then, which we live in the body be such a laborious service of our God and generation as will give us a comfortable prospect beyond the grave, of entering upon that rest which remains for the people of God. Let us make those good works our principal

study, which are to the praise and glory of God, and which shall follow us into the invisible world, and there be the evidences of our being the disciples of Jesus Christ and consequently of our title to his promised reward. Let us live the life, if we hope to die the death of the righteous. Let us abound in those good fruits whereby our heavenly father is glorified, if we expect that he would administer to us an abundant entrance into his heavenly kingdom. For nothing short of this can give us any solid and scriptural foundation of hope for the time to come. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. If we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." Would to God this were more attentively considered by mankind, so many of whom delude themselves with the presumptuous hopes of reigning with Christ in glory, although they have never enlisted under his banner, nor fought the good fight of faith. Contrary to the express declarations of the gospel, they hope to be admitted into heaven at the close of a wicked life, when they have nothing to plead, but that they have embezzled their master's money and buried his talent in a napkin. O! how melancholy must their disappointment be, when they shall find, that it is their Lord's unalterable resolution, to bring forth such slothful and unfaithful servants to slay them in his presence, cutting them asunder and casting them into outer darkness. If we would then entertain a rational hope in death of passing into life eternal, let us keep the commandments; let us endeavour to be faithful until

death, adorning the doctrines of God our Saviour in all things, that we may obtain a crown of righteousness and life.

THE END.

ERRATA.

At the head of pages 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, for "*Receive not the grace of God in vain,*" read "*We are the temples of God.*"

1. (C) " John Oving

Author of these Sermons

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of Scotland Deceased.